

Chapter III

Sri Aurobindo: Spiritual Anarchism

Sri Aurobindo's socio-political ideas are found in two basic texts: *The Human Cycle*, and *The Ideas of Human Unity*. But what is worthy of noticing is that in spelling out his metaphysics of Existence, the indefinite and illimitable Reality in *The Life Divine*, Aurobindo takes the phenomenon of the state in his stride. For Aurobindo there is no socio-political theory apart from and independent of his integral philosophy of evolution. Evolution for him is the unfoldment of the terrestrial categories of Mind, Life and Mind. With the appearance of Mind evolution has become self-consciousness leaving behind groping under the guidance of Nature. Mind, of course, is not the final term of evolution. Man, as a transitional being, has been destined to pass over to the realm of the supramental. In the passage from Inconscience to Conscience, and then to self-consciousness, man emerges as a mental being. As a mental being, man has to resist, as well as to transform, the pulls of his physical and vital natures. Man's reason is not fully illumined, for his mind, properly so-called is a sense-mind, and as such, his achievements have always fallen short of his aspirations, imagination and destiny, his divine freedom.

Aurobindo's socio-political thought is parasitic upon his metaphysics of evolution. The metaphysics is partly descriptive and in apart, revisionary. It is descriptive of the past achievements of man, and it is revisionary with respect to man's future evolution. Aurobindo's account of the future evolution of man is not an utopia. An utopia is a free floating idea of the imagination. It may be well argued like Plato's *Republic*, or be projected as something desirable as Thomas More's *Utopia*. As Aurobindo puts forward his thesis, it is futuristic, and has a necessity. The necessity is metaphysical, i.e., the Existence, Reality is involved in the terrestrial emergents, and reason itself is an emergent when the mental being of man unfolds itself in history.

The human cycle is a philosophical account of man's social development in accordance with the schema of distinct psychological stages. Aurobindo appropriates the schema of the German sociologist, Lamprecht and uses it to sketch his own socio-political intentions. The stages described through the schema are psychological and they form a cycle. The psychological cycle tells us of the inner meaning of the successive phases or the inner necessity of their succession, the term and end towards which they are moving. The cycle of society moves through, suggestively named, symbolic, typical and conventional, individualist and subjective stages.

Aurobindo admits that the psychology of man and his societies is too complex, and many-sided to satisfy any rigorous and formal analysis. But there have been in history the discoverable elements, main constituents and dominant forces operative in societies of the past, and these may be hoped to throw some light on the thickly veiled secret of man's historic evolution.

Human society in its primitive beginnings or early stages is marked by a strongly symbolic mentality that governed or pervaded its thought, customs and institutions. The symbol was of something which man felt to be present behind himself and his life and activities, the gods of the *Vedas*, for example, the vast and deep unnameable, hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. Man's religious and social institutions, at the symbolic stage of his social development, all the moments and phases of his life were to him symbols in which he sought to express what he knew or guessed of the mystic influences behind his life as shaping and governing or intervening in its movements. Man and the cosmos were both to the primitive (Aurobindo does not use the word in the sense in which it is used in anthropology though there are affinities) social man symbols and expressions of the same hidden reality. The symbolic attitude rendered everything in society a sacrament.

Out of this idea there developed a firm social order basing upon temperament and psychic type. The temperament and psychic types enjoined ethical discipline, social and economic function. The ethical motive and social

discipline governed the society. This stage of social development is named typical, and it created social ideas, and the ideas of social honour, and with the passing of time these ideals become a convention. In the end they remain as a tradition in the thought of the people.

The typical, says Aurobindo, passes into the conventional stage when the external expressions of the social ideals become more important than the ideals themselves. In the evolution of caste in India the outward supports of birth, economic function, religious ritual and family custom began to exaggerate enormously in proportions. The tendency of the conventional age of society was fix, to arrange firmly, to formalize a rigid system of grades and hierarchies, to bind everything social and personal to a traditional and unchangeable form. A survey from the symbolic through the typical to the conventional stages would reveal the fact that gradually the form prevailed and the spirit receded and diminished. When the gulf between the convention and the truth became intolerable there arose the individualistic age. It was the age of protest, of reason and revolt ushering in freedom from dead conventions.

Aurobindo sets a great value on the individual when all the old, general standards had become bankrupt, and could no longer give any inner help, when the conservation of the social mind lived only by the force of custom and attachment to the form, it is the individual who has to become a discoverer of the true law of the world and of his own being.

In Europe the individualistic age was inaugurated by a revolt of reason, which culminated in a triumphal progress of science, Individualism is always a questioning, a denial. According to Aurobindo, the culminating movement of European civilization was the attempt to govern and organize human life by verifiable science, by a law, a truth of things, which all can observe and verify, and to which all may freely, rationally subscribe. This has been the fulfilment and triumph of the individualistic age of human society. Science provided a standard, a norm of knowledge, and a rational basis for life. It outlined a clear

and sovereign means for the progress and perfection of the individual and the race.

But the triumph of the individualistic age spelt also the cause of the death of individualism. The individual discovered universal laws of which the individual is almost a by-product and by which he must necessarily be governed. The attempt to govern the social life of humanity in conscious accordance with the mechanism of the laws of science led logically to the suppression of the very individual freedom which made the discovery of the laws. Aurobindo observes, "In seeking the truth and law of his own being the individual seems to have discovered a truth and law which is not of his own individual being at all, but of the collectively, the pack, the hive, the mass."¹ This is a remarkable insight, which shows how irresistibly the mankind came to be driven to a new ordering of society by a rigid economic or governmental socialism in which the individual, deprived again (earlier as in the conventional stage) of his freedom, in his own interest and that of humanity. In place of the religio-ethical sanction there was now a scientific and rational or naturalistic motive and rule, the scientific, administrative and economic expert. There now stood, not the king, but the Collectivist State. This line of social evolution had been evident in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Communist Russia. Aurobindo calls them "Scientific State" which institutes a new typical order based upon purely economic capacity and function. However, the inhibition of individual liberty into a system of rationalistic conventions gets rapidly petrified. A new individualist age of revolt seeks to break the static order by the principles of philosophical anarchism.

In the mean time a new view of the human being appears on the horizon. Rationalistic physical science overpasses itself, and appears to be overtaken by a flood of psychological and psychic knowledge compelling the new view. The age of Reason is drawing to an end. Novel ideas such as Nietzsche's Will-to-live, Bergson's exaltation of Intuition above intellect have begun pointing to another mental poise, and promise to give the succession of the individualistic

age of society not to a new typical order, but to a subjective age, which will not be in favour of any reordering of society on the lines of a mechanical economism. The individualistic age in Europe discovered the individual, and along with it the democratic conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society to the full life and the full development of which they are individually capable. The idea has come to stay that social development and well being mean the development and well being of all the individuals in the society, and not merely a flourishing of the community in the mass. Individualism has discovered the deeper truth that "The individual is not merely a social unit; his existence, his right and claim to live and grow are not founded solely on his social work and function... he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfill his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence".²

At this stage Aurobindo's metaphysics of the future comes in: the coming of the subjective age. In keeping with the premises of his evolutionary integralism the need of a developing humanity is not return to its old ideas. Its need is to progress to a larger fulfillment, the old is to be taken up on the way, and *transformed* and *exceeded*. The descriptive and the revisionary aspects of Aurobindo's metaphysics are closely linked together. The underlying truth of things is constant and eternal, but its mental figures, its life forms; its physical embodiments call constantly for growth and change. It is worth reminding ourselves of Aurobindo's view of man. Man, he says, is a mental as well as a physical and vital being and even much more essentially mental than physical or vital. There are two aspects: one, man's "subjective secret", and the other, the objective forms of man's psychological demand on life. Man's economic state and social institutions are governed by his psychological demands. His psychology is strongly affected and limited by his physical being and environment, but it is not at its roots determined by them, but constantly reacts and subtly determines their action, effects even their new-shaping. Therefore, to

find the truth of things and the law of his being in relation to that truth man has to go deeper and fathom his subjective secret.

‘Subjectivism’ is a term of deeper significance in Aurobindo’s discourse; it is invested with serious metaphysical import. Aurobindo suggests that in man’s study of himself and the world the power of the critical and analytical reason is not of much avail, sooner or later he has to come face to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world. Man can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in the soul and acting out of it. Subjectivism is the ideal of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self-awareness. The cycle of society brings home the realization that the utilitarian standard should give way to the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation. There is “veiled law and Will and Power active in the life of the world and the inner and outer life of humanity”.³

Aurobindo reads the history of world as moving from the rationalistic and utilitarian period of human development created by individualism to a subjective age of society. The materialism of the nineteenth century gave place to the vitalism of Nietzsche. His theory of Will to be and Will to power was a pluralistic and pragmatic philosophy. As Aurobindo explains, Nietzsche’s thought was pluralistic in the sense that it had its eye fixed on life rather than on the soul, and pragmatic in interpreting being in the terms of force and action. These tendencies of thought were influential in Europe before the First World War. The message of Nietzsche’s thought implied a reading of and living by the Life-Soul of the universe. It was not mere recoil from intellectualism to life and action. The Nietzschean message was deeply psychological and subjective in its method, and proposed a new intuitionism seeking “through the forms and powers of life for that which is behind life” laying hands “on the sealed doors of the spirit”.⁴

Aurobindo’s reflections on the First World War are significant in this context. The vitalism of the West was unenlightened by a true inner growth of the soul, and made unbridled demand upon life. The falsely enlightened vitalistic

motive-power had engaged intelligence and reasoning and the genius of an accomplished materialistic science as its instrument. The lesson of the war called for a new subjective and psychic dealing of man with his own being. Subjectivism is a road of return to the knowledge that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine. The evocation of the real man within is the right object of all human life. The ancients of the symbolic stage of society sought to express the truth through their symbolism, "First deepening man's inner experience, restoring perhaps on an unprecedented scale insight and self-knowledge to the race, it must end by revolutionizing his social and collective self-expression".⁵

Historically man's ideas concerning the relation of individuals and those of social development have been largely rationalistic and materialistic, only vaguely touched by the deeper subjective tendency. Comparatively, his "collective self-consciousness" in the "organic mass of his life" had been firmly developed. Nation is the name of man's collective self-consciousness.

The individual, for Aurobindo, is a living power of the eternal truth, a self-manifesting spirit. The individual is not merely the ephemeral physical creature, a form of mind and body that aggregates and dissolves, but a being. It strives always and rightly at self-formulation, to discover within the law and power of its own being, and to fulfill it. Likewise, the society, community or nation too is a being, a living power of truth. The primal law and purpose of a society or community or nation is to seek its own fulfilment, to strive rightly to find itself, to realise all its potentialities. "The nation", says Aurobindo, "like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist"⁶

It is more than a parallelism between the individual and collectively as the nation, it is "a real identity of nature", says Aurobindo. As he views it, the nation is a "group soul". His view of the collectively vis-à-vis the individual is not an organismic theory *simpliciter*. The nation is not an association of merely vital

subconscious cells; rather it has a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for its constituents. The group-soul of the nation is objective as and when it centres round its geographical aspect. There may well be a passion for the land in which we dwell, but the land is only the shell of body, a very living shell, though more real body is the men and women who compose the nation-unit. So even the physical being of society is a subjective power, not a mere objective existence. The nation, in its core, is a great corporate soul.

Yet it was the objective view of society that had ruled the historical period in the West. In the East it had not been absolutely engrossing as in the West. The individual was the one and only subjective and psychological force. The nation was always understood in terms of its political status, extent of its borders, its economic well-being and expansion. Political and economic motives have predominated on the surface and history has been a record of their operations and influence. Aurobindo notes that a vague sense of subjectivity was indeed there, but it was an “objective sense of subjectivity”. In this the nation was no exception; in point of fact all communities displayed the characteristics. Aurobindo gives the example of the church, which is an organized religious community. Religion, he says, ought to be subjective. It is a paradox that the church insists on things objective, rites, ceremonies, authority, dogmas and forms of belief, and less on realizing the soul. The whole external religious history of Europe is replete with “religious” wars, persecutions, rivalries between the state and churches and all that is the very negation of the spiritual life.

As a corrective, Aurobindo proposes the phrase, “the nation-soul”, the soul of a nation. He refers to the Swadeshi movement of 1905 in Bengal which pursued a new conception of the nation not merely as a country, but a soul, a psychological and a spiritual being. Nationalism founded subjective view of the collective, issues in the form of the formula “to be ourselves”, rather than to become like others.

To become like others as the motive of the national life opens the way to great dangers and errors. Subjectivism can be true as well as false. The false Subjectivism mistakes the ego for self. It tends to transform the error of individualistic egoism into the momentous error of a great communal egoism. This reminds us of what Rabindranath had cautioned us almost the nationalism in the West. He spoke of nationalism as an international menace, what has come to be known as imperialism in a later day discourse. "Guided by a false subjectivism", Aurobindo comments, "we exhaust ourselves and corrupt ourselves in the dangerous attempt to live the destruction and exploitation of others."⁷ And "if the subjective age of humanity is to produce its best fruits ... the nations should become conscious not only of their own but of each other's souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually by each other".⁸

According to Aurobindo's line of thinking subjectivism is in its very nature an attempt at self-knowledge, and if we live without self-knowledge, men and nations would act and think egoistically. The only life known to them would be a life to self-ignorance, and hence they must live egoistically rather than not at all.

Aurobindo reminds us that only that which lives in its self-existence can endure. The true individual is not the ego, but the divine individuality which is through our evolution preparing to emerge in us. There is the "psychic truth" that the individual is not only himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind. "That which we are has experienced itself through the individual, but also through the universality".⁹ As for the issue concerning the relationship of the individual and society, Aurobindo champions the cause of the individual. "The society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development of self-satisfaction; the individual, so long at least as he chooses to live in the world, has no right to disregard for the sake of his own solitary satisfaction and development his fellow-beings and to live at war with them or seek a selfishly isolated good. And when we say, no right, it is from no social, moral, or

religious standpoint, but from the most positive and simply with a view to the law of existence itself. For neither the society nor the individual can so develop to their fulfilment. Every time the society crushes or effaces the individual, it is inflicting a wound on itself and depriving its own life of priceless sources of stimulation and growth.”¹⁰

True subjectivism teaches that we are a higher self than our ego, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others. Accordingly, the individual does not stand in alienation from the universal, there is a “secret solidarity”. Our real “I” is a Supreme Being – this is lesson of, what Aurobindo has elsewhere called, the real Vedānta. That being is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity, *Vyāsti* as well as *Samasti*. Aurobindo argues that the two truths apply not only to the individual but to the nation. In the closing chapter of *The Life Divine* the point is put with a wider emphasis. “There is a Reality, a truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations ... Humanity is a formation or manifestation of the Reality in the Universe and there is a truth and self of humanity, a human spirit, a destiny of human life. The community is a formation of Reality, a manifestation of spirit of man, and there is a truth, a self, a power of the collective being. The individual is a formation of the Reality, and there is a truth of the individual, an individual self, soul or spirit that expresses itself too in something that goes beyond mind, life and body, something even that goes beyond humanity ... The individual as spirit or being is not confined within his humanity; he has been less than human, he can become more than human. The universe finds itself through him even as he finds himself in the universe ... He is not confined within the community; although he’s mind and life are, in a way, part of the communal mind and life. There is something in him that can go beyond them. The community exists by the individual, for its mind and life and body are constituted by the mind and life and body of its composing individuals ... the individual is not a mere cell of collective existence; he would not cease to exist if separated or expelled from the collective mass. For the collectivity, the

community is not even the whole of humanity and it is not the world; the individual can exist and find himself elsewhere in humanity or by himself in the world. If the community has a life dominating that of the individuals which constitute it still it does not constitute their whole life. If it has its being which it seeks to affirm by the life of the individuals, the individual also has a being of his own which he seeks to affirm in the life of the community. But he is not tied to that, he can affirm himself in another communal life, or, if he is strong enough, in a nomad existence or in an eremite solitude where, if he cannot pursue or achieve a complete material living, he can spiritually exist and find his own reality and indwelling self of being.”¹¹

The rather extensive citation is justifiably important as a testament of spiritual individualism. This has led one Indian philosopher, Daya Krishna to remark that what Karl Marx has done for the collective, Aurobindo does the same for the individual. Of course Aurobindo takes great care in distinguishing his version of individualism from the Nietzschean variety of the creed which was more vital and unilluminated than spiritual.

As a matter of social development of humanity the human collectivity does exist, but it is an inchoate and unorganized existence, though it realizes the purpose of Nature. All self-conscious egos are in a state of war, overt or covert, complete or partial. The survival of the best secures the advance of the race. The collective ego of the nation looks upon the individual as a cell of the collectivity, and makes his life entirely subservient to the life of the nation. He is made efficient by education, discipline, training and subordinated activity, as a part of the machine or a disciplined instrument of the national life. The vague collectivity gradually gets organized, self-conscious and emerges as the State. The collective ego gets concentrated and brings itself to the highest pitch of strength in the State.

The cult of the State is an error, a mistaking of the equi-polarity of the individual and the collective. On the credit side the collective in the form of the State gained an immense collective power, a certain kind of perfection and

scientific adjustment of means to end, and a high general level of economic, intellectual and social efficiency. But on the debit side the State begins to lose “all that deeper life, vision, intuitive power, force of personality, psychical sweetness and largeness which the free individual brings as his gift to the race”¹². The state arrogates to itself a supreme status, the highest realized functioning of human existence, or what Hegel said of Napoleon, when he invaded Germany, “the walking shadow of God upon earth”. The modern cult of the State commends a right to obedience, the unquestioning service and the whole activity of the individual. The service of the state and community appears to assume the absolute rule of morality. No rebel egoism is allowed, for the individual ego must be lost in the ego of the State, or become part of it.

As for the relation between one State and another, to other collective egos, it is a matter of perpetual war of strife between sharply divided egoism each seeking to fulfill itself. Aurobindo writes, “War then is the whole business of the State in relation to other States, a war of arms, a war of commerce, a war of ideas and cultures, a war of collective personalities each seeking to possess the world, or at least to dominate and be first in the world”¹³. Though the observation is based on a study of the post-first world war scenario in Europe, yet there has not occurred any substantial change of atmosphere. To make matter worse the entire concept of public morality has undergone a sea change. As Aurobindo remarks sardonically, there does not seem to be any morality except that of success, and insufficiency, incompetence, and failure are the only immorality. Every method is justified in the military success of the State. Even peace between nations is only a covert state of war. War and commerce are the two determinants of the modern world. War is the means of physical survival and domination, and is the means of economic survival; it is in fact another form of war. War and commerce then are the two aspects of the modern man’s struggle to live, one physical, the other vital. Materialistic science (*apropos* the Materialist’s denial in *The Life Divine*, and that the life and body are the whole

of the existence) has taught us that there is no soul. For Aurobindo both Matter and the Spirit are the two terms of existence.

Aurobindo offers a deep and probing analysis of the two views of life: the objective and the subjective. Following upon the Age of Reason under the aegis of a materialist interpretation of science we have had enough of war and the cult of collective ego in the form of the State. Yet the nîsus of spiritual is at work, and we stand at the threshold of the subjective age.

The subjective view of life begins with individualism. The principle of individualism is the liberty of the human being regarded as a separate existence to develop himself and fulfill his life. This liberty admits no other limit except the obligation to respect the same individual liberty and right in others. The balance of this liberty and this obligation entails in effect a harmony of compromises between right and duties, liberty and law as the scheme of both of the personal life and the society. The life of nation in the age of individualism also made liberty the ideal, and strove, with doubtful success, to affirm a mutual respect of each other's freedom as the conduct of nations to one another. In this idea of life, each nation has the right to manage or mismanage its own affairs freely, not to be interfered with in its rights and liberties as long as it does not interfere with the rights and liberties of other nations. But the egoism of individual and nation does not wish to abide within these bounds, and hence the social law of the nation under the name of the international law was developed (be it League of Nations or the UNO) into an effective force which will restrain the egoism of nations as the social law restrains the egoism of the individual.

The growth of modern science encouraged an idea of exaggerated individualism in the form of vitalistic egoism, an opposite ideal of collectivism. All living is said to be a struggle to take the best advantage of the environment for self-preservation and self-aggrandisement. This aspect of modern knowledge encouraged a gospel of the right for each to live his own life, not merely by utilizing others, but even at the expense of others. Certain forms of anarchism and imperialism have been influenced by this type of ideas. The individual is to

survive by becoming strong, efficient and powerful to dominate his environment and his fellows, and the aim of this egoistic line is to reap his full measure of enjoyment.

Yet this is not the only teaching of the modern science. It also discovered that Nature seeks to preserve the type, not the individual, that the individual life is best secured and made efficient by association with others and subjection to a law of communal self-development rather than by aggressive self-affirmation. In Nature's scale of values, the pack, herd, hive and swarm take precedence over the individual animal or insect and the human group over the individual human being. Modern collectivism derived great impetus from such a lesson of science, and it affirmed the entire subordination of the individual to the community, nation or state. Equally forceful has been the egoistic affirmation of the individual nation as against others or against every group or all the groups of nations which constitute the totality of the human race.

After having traced the two-fold source of the modern political climate Aurobindo points to the conflict between the idea of a nationalist and imperialist egoism and the doctrine of individual and national liberty. Out of the dialectic of the two, he says, there looms the possibility of the birth of the new idea of human universalism or collectivism of the race. This new ideal, he hopes, would overcome both national separatism and liberty. This idea demands of the nation that it shall subordinate its free separateness to the life of a larger collectivity, which may be an imperialist group or a cultural unity, or the total united life of the human race.

It is in this perspective that Aurobindo proposes the principle of subjectivism. He argues that subjectivism and objectivism start from the same data, the individual and the collectivity. Both of these are of complex nature as regards the powers of the mind, life and body, and both seek the law of their fulfillments and harmony. But objective view of life proceeds analytically, takes an external and mechanical view of the entire issue by looking at the world as a thing, an object. Reason, in its objective employment places itself outside

observed process. The laws of the process are considered as mechanical rules or settled forces acting upon the individual or the group. So the state is viewed in modern political thought as an entity in itself as if it were something apart from the community and its individuals. The state is viewed as having the right to impose itself on the individuals and control them in the fulfilment of some idea of right, good or interest. Life is to be managed, harmonized, perfected by an adjustment, a manipulation, machinery through which it passed and by which it is shaped. An individual reason may discover and determine the law, it may be enforced by the individual will, and objectivism regards the law as ever outside oneself, a mechanical power of management, ordering and perfection. This is the conception of perfection according to the objective view of life.

Subjectivism or the subjective view of life, on the other hand, proceeds from within and regards everything from the point of view of a “containing and developing self-consciousness”. The law of life is neither outside nor mechanical, it is within ourselves. In terms of the subjective view of life, life is a self-creating process, passing through sub-conscious, half-conscious, and at last fully conscious of our potentiality. Subjectivism is the principle of the self’s progress in “an increasing self-recognition, self-realisation and a resultant self-shaping manner”¹⁴. Reason and will are only the effective movements of the self. Aurobindo views reason as a process of self-recognition, and will a force for self-affirmation and self-shaping. Reason and will are only a part of the means by which we recognize and realize ourselves.

Subjectivism, as Aurobindo formulates it, takes a large and complex view of human nature, away from the external and objective method. “The whole impulse of subjectivism is to get at the self, to live in the self, to see by the self, to live out truth of the self internally and externally but always from an internal initiation and center”¹⁵.

There remains of course the question concerning the truth of the self, and its real abiding-place. Subjectivism has to deal with the same factors as the objective view of life and existence. There are two possibilities. Either one may

concentrate on individual life and consciousness as the self and regard its power, freedom, satisfaction and joy as the object of living, or may stress on group consciousness, the collective self. One may see man only as an expression of the group-self, and hold that in his individual being man is necessarily incomplete; he becomes complete, only by the larger entity. Therefore, one would wish to subordinate the life of the individual to the power, efficiency, knowledge, happiness and self-fulfillment of the race, the life and growth of the community. In this view a “righteous oppression” on the individual could be claimed, and he may be taught that he has no claim to exist, no right to fulfil himself except in his relation to the collectivity. The collective self-consciousness then begins to invade at every point the life of the individual, refuses to it all privacy and apartness, all independence and self-guidance.

Aurobindo develops the logic of collectivism, as it may develop from the premises of so-called objective view of life. But he goes on to suggest that we may enlarge the idea of the self in the manner in which science sees a universal force of nature, the one reality and of which everything is the process. Accordingly, one may subjectively realize a universal Being or Existence which fulfils itself in the world and the individual and the group (*Vyāsti* and *Samasti*) with an impartial regard for all as equal powers of its manifestation.

Aurobindo appears to favour the view that neither the separate growth of the individual nor the all-absorbing growth of the group can be the ideal. His integral practical view puts forward “an equal, simultaneous, and as far as may be, parallel development of both, in which each helps to fulfil the other.”¹⁶ The integral, political view holds that each being, the individual and the collective, has his own truth of independent self-realisation in the life of others. The individual grows in largeness and power in the harmonious growth of all the individual selves and all the collective selves of one universal being. Properly viewed, these two would not be separate or opposite, but the same impulse of the one common existence. For Aurobindo, the individual and the collective are

“companion movements”, separating only to return upon each other in a richer and larger unity.

What then is the ideal law of social development? Science has informed us about our past physical and vital evolution. But, Aurobindo adds to it man’s future mental and spiritual destiny. In this adventure the role of the individual becomes immensely important.

Much depends on Aurobindo’s metaphysics of man, according to which man is a mental being in Nature, and having arrived in Nature through mind he has to pass over to what is beyond mind – the Self or the Spirit which expresses itself in all Nature. Hence in Aurobindo’s turn of the phrase, the law and nature of human existence is to fulfill himself in God, and to fulfill God in the world. Both himself and the world is the destiny of man and the object of his individual and social existence. A lonely salvation cannot be man’s complete ideal. Given the companion movements of the individual and the collective, each fulfilling itself in the other, it follows that the object of all society should be to provide the conditions of life and growth by which the individual man may travel towards the Divine perfection. The word “Divine” in Aurobindo’s context denotes the deity, not any theological godhead. The evolution proceeds by cycles, and each cycle has its own figure of the Divine in man to express in the general life of mankind the joy, beauty, harmony of the self that has been attained, and pours itself out in terms of its regulative images. Aurobindo mentions two conditions of “healthy progression and successful arrival”¹⁷, namely, freedom and harmony. To him, these two are necessary principles of variation and oneness. What Aurobindo means is the freedom of the individual, and the group, as well as coordinated harmony of the individual’s forces and the efforts of all individuals in the group. To realise and to combine the two - freedom and harmony vis-à-vis the individual and the group - is a difficult task, and yet this had been the effort of mankind throughout history. Aurobindo observes that the effort to realise freedom and harmony “cannot be done brutally, heavily, mechanically in the mass; the group self has no right to regard the individual as if he were only a cell

of his body, a stone of its edifice, a passive instrument of its collective life and growth. Humanity is not so constituted. We miss the divine reality in man and the secret of the human birth if we do not see that each individual man is that Self and sums up all human potentiality in his own being. That potentiality he has to find, develop, and work out from within. No state or legislator or reformer can cut him rigorously into a perfect pattern; no Church or priest can give him a mechanical salvation; no order, no class life or ideals can be allowed to say to him permanently, "In this way of mine and thus for shalt thou act and grow and in no other way and no further shall thy growth be permitted". These things may help him temporarily or they curb and he grows in proportion as he can use them and then exceed them, train and teach his individuality by them, but assert it always in the end in its divine freedom. Always he is the traveller of cycles and his road is forward"¹⁸. The cited passage is an impassioned charter of the freedom of the individual, and puts the individual at the center of the evolutionary map.

What is the content of the freedom Aurobindo has been talking about? How does it stand in relation to the laws, disciplines and ideals to which the individual is subjected when he lives in society? Aurobindo makes it clear that the individual's life and growth are for the sake of the world, but he can help the world by his life and growth only in proportion as he can be more freely and widely his own real self. The individual has to use the ideals, disciplines and systems of cooperation, but can use them well, in their right way and purpose if they are to him means towards something beyond them, and not as burdens or despotic controls to be obeyed as slave or subject. The only purpose of the variety of laws and discipline is to be instruments of the human soul, and "when their use is over they have to be rejected and broken"¹⁹. The individual has to gather in his material from the minds and lives of his fellow men, and make the most of the experience of humanity's ages, be it the religion or politics or the arts, and not to confine himself in a narrow mentality. The liberty claimed by the human mind for the individual is no mere egoistic challenge and revolt, it is the

law of the Self and its unfolding. Aurobindo's position is quite sophisticated. It is neither simple individualism nor it is pure organismic theory of society. Nor is it a halfway house between the two.

The position is made clear if we consider the following: Individual man belongs not only to humanity in general; he belongs also to his race-type, his class-type and his spiritual-type. In so belonging to various types he resembles some and differs from others. According to these affinities the individual tends to group himself in churches, sects, communities, classes, coteries and associations. He helps these groups, and at the same time gets him enriched. He enriches the life of the large economic, social and political group or society to which he belongs. Aurobindo notes that in modern times this society is the nation. But the individual is not limited and cannot be limited by any of these groupings. He is not limited by his nationality. If by a part of himself he belongs to the nation, by another he exceeds it and belongs to humanity. And by the same logic, even there is a part of him not limited by humanity, he belongs by it to God and to the world of all beings. The individual, says Aurobindo, "has indeed the tendency to self-limitation and subjection to his environment and group, but he has also the equally necessary tendency to expansion and transcendence of environment and groupings".²⁰ In associating himself with various groups the individual shares something of the infinity, free variation of the Self manifested in the world.

The community, Aurobindo points out, stands as the mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity. The individual has to live in humanity as well as humanity in the individual. Humanity is too large an aggregate to make the mutuality hardly ever intimate. Therefore, the community has to stand for a time to the individual for humanity. This has something of Swami Vivekananda's idea that society is a reflex of the Universal Mother: "Forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Mother-hood".²¹ There is of course a difference: the note of the emphasis on the individual is not as pronounced in Vivekananda as it is in Aurobindo. Aurobindo

mentions the possibility that the community may stand between the individual and humanity in such a fashion as to limit the reach of his universality and wideness of his sympathies. Hence the absolute claim of the community or the society or the nation over the individual is “an aberration of the human reason” just as the claim of the individual to live for himself egoistically is an aberration and “the deformation of a truth”.²²

The position taken by Aurobindo leads him to draw similar conclusions as regards the relation between communities and nations. A nation has the right to be itself and to its just claim. An attempt at domination by other nations or of attack upon its existence is equally a deformation of a truth. Rightfully a nation has the right to exist its existence, to insist on being itself. This right a nation must assert not for its own sake, but the interests of humanity. On the part of the community or a nation the right to be oneself does, limitations, imperfections, in the form and mould of its past or its present achievement, and refuse mental or physical commerce and interchange or spiritual or actual commingling with the rest of the world. For so, says Aurobindo, it can grow or perfect itself. “As the individual lives by the life of other individuals, so does the nation by the life of other nations”.²³ For both the individual and the aggregate, the rule of another nature imposed upon it by force is a menace to their existence, a wound to their being. The free development from within is the best condition for both the individual and the community. This is the common law, for the individual it is to harmonise his life with the life of the social aggregate, and pour himself out for growth and perfection of humanity; for the community or nation it is to perfect its corporate existence by taking advantage of the free development of the individual, and to respect and to aid and be aided by the free development of the other communities and nations, to harmonise its life with that of the human aggregate. For humanity the law is to harmonise its upward evolution, “to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not ideally one divine family”.²⁴ This is an ideal law, while human race is imperfect. Man does not possess himself, but is only seeking to find himself, the law of his own nature,

advancing by a tangle of truth and error, right and wrong, compulsion and revolt and clumsy adjustments. Aurobindo is well aware of the fact that owing to his egoistic nature man cannot even follow the ideal law of his being ideally. But the law has to be held before him, and find out the way by which it can become more and more the moulding principle of his individual and social existence.

It will have been noticed that for Aurobindo the individual is the index and foundation of man's whatever complex and larger unities like society or nation. Hence the development of the free individual is the first condition for the development of the perfect society.

Aurobindo views the political dimension of man's endeavour against the backdrop of human life. Human life is moved by two equally powerful impulses: individualistic self-assertion and collective self-assertion. Life works by strife as well as mutual assistance and united effort. There is both competitive endeavour and co-operative endeavour. It is from this character of the dynamics of life that the whole structure of human society has come into being. Aurobindo points to the difference between the Asiatic and European ideas of society. Life in society consists in three activities: the domestic, the social and the economic. The social life of man entails his customary relations with others in the community both as an individual and as a member of one family among many. Man's economic activities consist in his role as a producer, wealth-getter and consumer, and his potential status and action. Society is the organization of these three things and, fundamentally it is for the practical human being nothing more. Life itself is the only object of living.

Aurobindo observes that in Asia, the social aspect of life was more important than the political as it was in Europe. Asiatic mind valued its social organization, yet valued much more highly the spiritual heroes, the saints, religious founders and thinkers. In *Eastern Religion and Western Thought* Radhakrishnan too has made this point with special emphasis, namely, in India, the Hindus in particular, trace their descent from sages of the past, and the saint is honoured more than the king. There is another sort of difference, noted by

Aurobindo, between the ancient and modern outlook on society. The modern world has prided upon its economic organization, political liberty, order and progress, the mechanism, comfort and ease of its social and domestic life, and science, mostly for its instruments and conveniences, and invocations which help man to master the physical life. In contrast, Greece and Rome regarded life as an occasion for the development of the rational, the ethical, the aesthetic and the spiritual being. Art, poetry and philosophy were cherished as much as or even more than political liberty. Asia made these subordinate and looked upon them as stepping-stones to spiritual consummation. Between the ancient and the modern views of society there has come to a change in the attitude. On this a great deal hangs. For if the practical and vitalistic view of life and society is the right one, if society principally exists for the maintenance, comfort, vital happiness and political and economic efficiency; then the idea that life is seeking for God and for the highest self cannot stand. Aurobindo remarks that modern society acknowledges only two gods: life and practical reason organized under the name of science. The old existing forms of life, the family, the society and the nation are still there, and all these are governed by two impulses, individualistic and collective. The individualistic impulse makes family, social and national life a means for the satisfaction of the vital individual. The society is the field of the individual's expansion, less intimate than the family, but a larger expansion of himself, and the nation the field for the play of a remoter but still larger sense of power and expansion. The society is essentially economic in its aims, and takes up both the individual and the family into a more complex organism and uses them for the collective satisfaction of its vital needs and claims. And this, according to Aurobindo, accounts for the predominantly economic and materialistic character of modern ideas of Socialism. These ideas are the full rationalistic flowering of the instinct of collective life. Society is one competitive unit among many of its kind, its first relation with the others are always potentially hostile. And therefore, a political character is necessarily added to the social life.

This is an important insight of Aurobindo's analysis, and it shows how society comes to assume a political colour and grows eventually into a nation. If the political dimension of our social existence predominates, and the motives of collective existence are valued more than the others, the collective and cooperative idea of society would develop and culminate "in a huge, often monstrous overgrowth of the vitalistic, economic, and political ideal of life, society and civilization".²⁵

As a consequence, the higher parts of man's being that tend to the growth of his divine nature is taken hold of by the gigantic collective instinct of the nation or the state, and dominated and transformed into its own image. This rules out, in Aurobindo's words, "the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth, the perfectibility of society and of man in society".²⁶

But given the evolutionary nissus of Aurobindo's metaphysics, the instinctive and vital movements of life are infrarational, but the "great mass of vital energism" (this is Aurobindo's phrase) contains in itself the imprisoned supra-rational. The mark of supra-rational is the growth of absolute ideas. As Aurobindo conceives it, politics, which is apparently "a game of strife and deceit and charlatanism"²⁷, can be a large field of absolute idealisms. Patriotism, for example, is one such ideals, entailing worship, self-giving, discipline and self-sacrifice. Even the political ideas of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, "apart from the selfishness they serve"²⁸ here had for their soul an ideal "a loss of itself in the idea"²⁹ making men ready to suffer and die for them. Even war and strife have been schools of heroism, and without heroism man cannot grow into the Godhead.

What does Aurobindo mean by "the Divine"? The Divine in life, he says, is "power possessed of self-mastery"³⁰, and mastery of the world. Hence in the Divine fulfillment there would be "oneness and the ideal of human unity"³¹. Aurobindo envisions and elaborates the notion of human unity in the form of world government in his *The Ideals of Human Unity*. The ideal of human unity may now be dim and far-off, yet the desirability of the possible state of affairs is

not altogether lost. The competitive nation-units appear to feel “the call to cast themselves into a greater unified cooperative life of the human race”³². Aurobindo believes that man is at the cross-roads of a new order and has its metamorphic quality and influence over humanity. It is also Aurobindo’s thesis that the ultimates of life are spiritual and only in the full light of the liberated self and spirit can it achieve them. The full light is not intellect or reason, because mind is only a middle term between inconscience and the supra-mental. Man’s life and existence is ever disturbed by a pull from below and a pull from above. “There is the pressure on human life of an Infinite which will not allow it to rest too long in any formulation.”³³ The political formulations so far have been vitiated by the unresolved tension and dialectic between the polarities of the individual and collective. “A spiritualised society alone can bring about a reign of individual harmony and communal happiness”, or “the government of mankind by the Divine in the hearts and minds of men.”³⁴

So we have followed Aurobindo’s analysis of man’s social evolution. It has, by the very logic of its growth, passed through three successive stages: the individualistic, democratic with liberty for its principle, then socialistic, a governmental communism with equality and the State for its principle, and finally the third, anarchistic in the higher sense of that word. From the stage of individualism to socialism there obtains the rule of reason, and life moves under the reign of theories. Anarchism, as Aurobindo understands it, is either a loose voluntary cooperation or a free communalism with brotherhood or comradeship and not government for its principle. Anarchism is the consummating shape of politics to come. It should be noted that when Aurobindo talks about anarchism, he is to be taken as pointing to a possibility, based upon his thesis concerning the individual. Both democracy and socialism are products of reason. Can reason be the master of our nature in solving the problems of our interrelated and conflicting egoism, and bring about a perfect principle of society? The answer can hardly be an emphatic ‘yes’. Aurobindo’s metaphysics has built-in critique of mind and its operation. According to Aurobindo the office of reason consists

in seeking to understand and interpret life by the symbol of the idea alone. It generalizes the facts of life in terms of its own ideative conceptions, and looks for its largest general applications. The truths of reason are possibilities, they are ideal truths. They cannot be applied immediately in life. It is from this inherent characteristics that Aurobindo avers that the age of reason is always an age of progress.

There arises a universal questioning, for reason accepts no tradition merely for the sake of antiquity. It asks whether the tradition contains at all still any living truth for the governance of life. Reason does not go by any agreement unless the people are right in their agreement. Out of the universal questioning there arises the idea that society can be perfected only by the universal application of rational intelligence to the whole of life, to its principle, details and powers. Obviously, the reason cannot be the reason of a ruling class. Aurobindo has remarked that reason has been misapplied with a view to fettering it into the servitude of the ruling class and justifying the existing order. In the evolutionary state of affairs and presently prevailing infrarationality, ideas become disfigured in practice even if they come from pre-eminent thinkers. They become ineffective and altered into mere form and convention. Hence, reason must be the reason of each and all seeking for a basis of agreement. This is how the principle of individual democracy arises. The reason and will of every individual in the society must be allowed to count equally with the reason and will of every other in deforming its government. It follows then that each individual must be allowed to govern his life according to the dictates of his reason and will so far as that can be done without impinging on the same right in others.

But the ideal of individualistic democracy does not stand securely on metaphysical grounds. As Aurobindo points out, the ordinary man emerging from an infrarational past is naturally unable to form a reasonable judgment. He does not yet use his reason in order to come to an agreement with his fellows, but rather to enforce his opinion by struggle and conflict with the opinion of

others. His reason normally serves for the justification of his impulses, prejudices and interests.

Further, the individualistic democratic ideal brings us to the precarious rule of a dominant class in the name of democracy, over the ignorant and the numerous. And since the ideals of freedom and equality is abroad, the exploited masses are led to assert their right and to turn the democratic falsehood into the real democratic truth. A perpetual strife of parties surfaces itself. The present parliamentary scenario is previsioned by Aurobindo in terms that evoke wonder at his insight: “an impotent and sterilizing chaos of names, labels, programmes, war crises. All lift the banner of conflicting ideas or ideals, but all are really fighting out under that flag a battle of conflicting interests.”³⁵ This state of affair is not at all the perfection which the individualistic reason had contemplated as its ideal.

The transition from democratic individualism to democratic socialism appears as a possibility. Socialism, initially meant as uprising against the rule of the bourgeois and the plutocrat, has worked itself out by a war of classes. Socialism has taken a purely industrial and economic appearance. For Aurobindo, these are the accidents of its birth, but not its true nature. He says that socialism seeks rational ordering of society by getting rid of the unbridled competition which stands on the way of any decent ideal or practice of human living. “Socialism sets out to replace a system of organized economic battle by an organized order and peace.”³⁶

Socialism begins by questioning the democratic basis of individual liberty. Equality is not enough if it is only political. There has to be a perfect social equality, not only equality of opportunity for all but also equality of status for all. Equality is not possible to be there along with personal and/or inherited property. Socialism abolishes the right of personal property; all property is vested with and administered by the community as a whole. But Aurobindo points out that in order to justify this idea, the socialistic principle has to deny the existence of the individual or his right to existence except as a member of the

society and for its own sake. Again, socialism does not trust individual reason, and it is for the reason of the whole community to work out the right and rational adjustment of the individual's life with the life of others.

Democratic socialists have sought to build a half-way house between industrial freedom and the rigours of the collectivist idea. Aurobindo finds democratic socialism wanting in its logic and courage, and mentally poised between two opposing principles of socialistic regimentation and democratic liberty. The collectivist idea contains fallacies inconsistent with the real facts of human life and nature, and is eventually replaced by spiritual anarchism. It is a form of society founding an essential rather than formal liberty and equality upon fraternal comradeship in a free community.

Aurobindo analyses in depth the notion of liberty, and notes that it is individualistic in its origin, not native to the collectivist ideal. It is the individual who demands liberty for himself. The collectivist trend and the State idea are self-compelled to take up the compulsory management and control of the mind, life, will and action of the community until personal liberty is pressed out of existence. Similarly, it is the individual who demands for himself equality with all others. Aurobindo, notes further, that when a class demands equality it is still the individual multiplied claiming for himself and all who are of his own grade, political or economic status, an equal place, privilege or opportunity for those who have acquired or inherited a superiority of status. The social Reason concealed first the claim to liberty but in practice it admitted only equality before the law, which is helpful but not too effective to ensure reasonable freedom for all. When in course of time, the injustices and irrationalities of an unequalled competitive freedom creates enormous gulfs, the social Reason shifts to ground and tries to arrive at a more complete communal justice on the basis of a political, economic, educational and social equality – a plain level on which all can stand together. But in the end, it is after all an artificial liberty riddled with contradiction. Equality, like liberty, may turn out to be an obstacle in the way of

the best management and control of life by the collective reason and will of the community.

Aurobindo then focuses on the last of the democratic trinity, i.e., brotherhood or comradeship. This seems to square better with the spirit of collectivism, when liberty and equality disappear from the human scene. Aurobindo notes the paradox that evens the champions of the new social systems, who discard both liberty and equality as democratic chimeras, appear to encourage the idea of comradeship. But he goes on to remark that comradeship without liberty and equality can be nothing more than the like association of all – individuals, functional classes, guilds, syndicates, soviets or any other units – in common service to the life of the nation under the absolute control of collectivist state. The only liberty left at the end would be the freedom to serve the community under the rigorous direction of the State authority. The only equality would be an association of all alike in a theoretical sense in respect of civic service. And brotherhood would mean comradeship in devoted dedication to the organised social Self, the State. Aurobindo sums up the analysis by the following comment: “The democratic trinity stripped of its godhead would fade out of existence; the collectivist ideal can very well do without them, for none of them belong to its grain and very substance”.³⁷

According to Aurobindo, totalitarianism of some kind is the natural outcome of Socialism, or the collectivist idea and impulse. The essence of Socialism is the governance and strict organization of the total life of the society as a whole and in detail by its own conscious reason and will for the best good and common interest of all, eliminating exploitation by individual or class, removing internal competition. This may be taken as describing “Social Democracy”, as Aurobindo terms it. What is remarkable is that he considers the ideal as possible in a successful collectivist rationalization of society even by incorporating a democratic ideal. The sovietic structure in Russia had a democratic face in spite of the ideal of a proletarian equality for all in a classless society. The irony of the situation was that the spirit of the dictatorship of the

proletariate amounted, in fact, to the dictatorship of the Communist Party in the name or behalf of the proletariat.

In an oblique reference to Marx, Aurobindo assesses Marxism as “a rationalistic system worked out by a logical thinker and discoverer and systematiser of ideas”³⁸ that had been turned into a “collectivist mystique”, “a social cult enforced by the intolerant piety and enthusiasm of a converted people”.³⁹ In Fascist countries, the leaders and prophets teach and enforce their “totalitarian mystique” in the name of the national soul. Aurobindo finds little difference between Fascism and Russian Communism. Their quarrel is a sort of “a blood-feud of Kinsmen”. There is, he speaks of, “the seizure of the life of the community by a dominant individual, leader, Fuhrer, Dux, dictator, head of a small active minority, the Nazi, Fascist or Communist Party, and supported by a militarised partisan force”.⁴⁰

Aurobindo’s insight into the human cycles does not stop short of the totalitarian *mystique*. He looks further for an awaited “explosion from within”,⁴¹ against the total unprecedented compression of the whole communal existence executing the rational and intellectual expansion of the human mind. Reason cannot do its work, act or rule if the mind of man is denied freedom to think or freedom to realise its thought by action in life.

Man’s being is complex. Both the theories of individualism and totalitarianism have been at fault by ignoring the complexity. The right of the individual to egoistic freedom as against the State representing the mind, the will, the good and interest of the whole community is a dangerous fiction. It is dangerous, because it gives undue freedom to man’s infra-rational parts of nature. This needs to be kept under control by the collective reason and will of the State. The State, on its totalitarian turn, throttles whatever freedom of growth the individual rightfully needs and claims to have. The State, says Aurobindo, as the collective being, is a fact. All mankind, he says, may be regarded as a collective being. But this being is a soul and life, not merely a mind and body. In the earlier shapes of the human cycle the subjection of the individual to the

society was not felt, since the individualistic view of the life was not yet born. As State governments develop, there occurs a real suppression or oppression of the minority by the majority or of the majority by the minority, of the individual by the collectivity, finally, of all by the mechanism of the collectivity. Democratic liberty tried to minimize this suppression. It left a free play for the individual and restricted as much as might be the role of the State. Collectivism goes exactly to the opposite extreme. It will not give sufficient elbow-room to the individual free will. But man needs freedom of thought and life and action in order that he may grow, otherwise he will remain fixed where he was, a stunted and static being. If the free play of the intelligent will in life is inhibited by the excessive regulation of the life by the State, then an intolerable contradiction and falsity will be created. In course of time the intellectual and vital dissatisfaction may well take the form of anarchistic thought.

Aurobindo points to the disharmony between the *vyāsti* and *samasti* aspect of the Universal Being, the Reality as manifested in the human cycle. The defect of the socialistic idea of State is a thoroughgoing scientific regulation of life by a thoroughgoing mechanization of life. The tendency to mechanization is the inherent defect of the State idea and its practice. This is Aurobindo's considered view. It is indeed the inherent defect of reason when it turns to govern life and labour by quelling its natural tendencies to put into some kind of rational order. Intellectual anarchistic thought gets immensely increased as the State idea rounds itself into a greater completeness in practice.

Life, metaphysically viewed by Aurobindo, is a mobile, progressive and evolving force. This force is the increasing expression of an Infinite soul in creatures, and, as it progresses, becomes more and more aware of its own subtle variations, needs and diversities. Further, the progress of life involves the development and interlocking of things that seem to be absolute oppositions and contraries. The common project of humanity is to find some principle of unity or some workable lever of reconciliation. This becomes possible, given Aurobindo's evolutionary metaphysics, when the soul discovers itself in its complete spiritual

reality and effects a progressive upward transformation of its life values into those of the spirit. For Aurobindo, the spiritual is the one truth of which all others are veiled aspects, and in which they can find their own right form and true relation to each other. This is a work the reason cannot do. The business of the reason is intermediate. The office of the reason is to observe and understand this life by the intelligence and discover for it the direction in which it is going and the laws of its self-development on the way. The Reason is obliged to adopt temporarily fixed view-points, which are only partially true, to create systems that can hardly stand as the final expression of the integral truth of things. The integral truth of things is truth not of the reason but of the spirit. Since the reason mechanises and crystallises its systems every change in life becomes doubtful, difficult and perilous. Mechanism is a sufficient principle in dealing with physical forces, but it can never truly succeed in dealing with conscious life. The attempts at a rational ordering of life of infra-rational and semi-rational societies have been successful, but at the end of the curve of reason, when individualistic and collectivistic views of life have been brought about by the reason itself, it can no longer be either supreme or sufficient principle.

The question at this moment of crisis is whether anarchistic thought supervening upon the collectivistic can find a successful social principle. It may get rid of mechanism, but on what will it build and with what will it create the one practical means of a rationalizing organization of life?

Aurobindo contends that the collectivist period is at least a necessary stage in social progress. The vice of individualism was that it tended to exaggerate the egoism of the mental and vital being and prevented the recognition of unity with others. Collectivism at least insists upon that unity by subordinating the life of the isolated ego to the life of the greater group-ego, and stamping upon the mentality and life habits of the individual the necessity of unifying his life with the life of others. But when the individual would assert his most from within the collectivistic life, he will have learned to do it not on the basis of his separate egoistic life. This may have been the lesson of collectivism

as a corrective to individualism *simpliciter*. Collectivism too has to learn the lesson of allowing for a free individual development on the basis of unity and a closely harmonised common existence.

Aurobindo argues that in order that collectivism could do so it has to “spiritualise itself and transform the very soul of its inspiring principle: it cannot do it on the basis of the logical reason and a mechanically scientific ordering of life.”⁴²

Aurobindo’s understanding of ‘anarchism’ is different from its historical propounders. Tolstoy and Max Stirner, a contemporary of Karl Marx, are acclaimed as the forerunners of anarchism. The names of Godwin and Bakunin are also mentioned in the context. But among the real founders of anarchism we have Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. On the unanimous verdict of all authors on anarchism Proudhon was the first to coin the word. As early as 1840 he wrote: “Anarchy – the absence of a master, of a sovereign, - such is the form of government to which we are everyday approximating ...”⁴³ Proudhon equates anarchy with liberty or justice.

Aurobindo, of course, remarks that anarchism has not yet found any sure forms, and cannot but develop in proportion as the pressure of society on the individual increases. He says also that there is something in that pressure which unduly oppresses a necessary element of human perfection. Aurobindo distinguishes various shades of anarchism, namely, vitalistic or violent anarchism. These varieties of anarchism seek forcibly to react against the social principle, and claim the right of man to live his own life in the egoistic or crudely vitalistic sense. But there is Aurobindo points out, a higher, an intellectual anarchistic thought which recovers “the real truth of nature and the divine in man.”⁴⁴

“The intellectual anarchism”, as Aurobindo has it, “declares that all government of man by man by the power of compulsion is an evil, a violation, a suppression or deformation of a natural principle of good which otherwise grows and prevails for the perfection of the human race”.⁴⁵ This variety of anarchism

questions the social principle in itself and holds liable for a sort of fall in man from a natural to an unnatural and artificial principle of living. Aurobindo finds intellectual anarchistic view exaggerated and inherently weak. He remarks that man does not actually live as an isolated being, nor he can grow by an isolated freedom. He grows by his relations with others, and his freedom has to exercise itself in a progressive self-harmonising with the freedom of his fellow-beings. Society is a field of relations which affords to the individual his occasion for growing towards a greater perfection. Perfection, for Aurobindo, is a gradual ascent. But it is also true that man's infrarational instincts do not correct themselves voluntarily without the erection of a law for their correction and purification. The principle of social compulsion may not have been always or perhaps ever used quite wisely, yet "it is a law of man's imperfection, imperfect in itself, and must always be imperfect in its methods and result".⁴⁶ Only man has grown out of the causes of the necessity of social compulsion there can be no readiness on man's part for the anarchistic principle of living.

Aurobindo adds further to the above observation that "the more the outer law is replaced by an inner law, the nearer man will draw to his true and natural perfection. And the perfect State must be one in which government compulsion is abolished and man is able to live with fellow-man by free agreement and cooperation".⁴⁷

But the question of questions is: How and by what means man is to be made ready for the great and difficult consummation? Intellectual anarchism relies on two powers in the human being: (a) enlightenment of his reason and (b) the enlightened mind of man will claim freedom for itself as well as equally recognize the same right in others. A "just equation" of the two might not be enough, and a third power is needed, namely, (c) a natural human sympathy. Aurobindo observes that the principle of fraternity is the most neglected term of the famous revolutionary formula of the French Revolution. "A free equality founded upon spontaneous cooperation, not on governmental force and social compulsion, is the highest anarchistic ideal".⁴⁸ Aurobindo proposes to call the

described state of affair “Cooperative Communism” or “Communalism”(it is a pity that the term has lost its etymological meaning in which Aurobindo uses it). It is of course difficult to see how a stateless Communism can operate on the large and complex scale of the modern life. It is not clear also how even a free Communalism could be established or maintained without some kind of governmental force and social compulsion. Nor is it clear how it could fail or fall away in the end. Aurobindo makes further an important point that the logical mind in building its social idea takes no sufficient account of the infrarational element in man, the vital egoism to which the active and effective part of his nature is found. This part of man defects in the end all the calculations of the idealizing reason. If and when the ego-force in man is overshadowed or depressed, too much rationalized or denied an outlet, then the life of man becomes artificial, and uncreative. On the other side, if it is not suppressed, it tends in the end to assert itself, and derange the plans of the rational side of man. So the question remains: How can man live securely in his best human self as a perfected rational and sympathetic being, balanced and well-ordered in all parts? This would be his consummation, his summit of possibility. Aurobindo reminds us that man’s nature is transitional, the rational man is only a middle term of Nature’s evolution. A rational satisfaction, Aurobindo tells us, in terms of his metaphysical presuppositions, “cannot give him [man] safety from the pull from below nor deliver him from the attraction from above”.⁴⁹ If it were not so, then intellectual anarchism might be more feasible as well as a theory of what human life might be in its reasonable perfection.

A spiritual anarchism might appear to come nearer to the real solution, or at least, as Aurobindo suggests, touch something of it from afar. He does not let us forget the fact that no “ism” is able to express the truth of the spirit which exceeds all such compartments. The solution lies not in the reason, but in the soul of man.

Apropos Aurobindo's metaphysics, the spiritual is greater than the rational enlightenment, and it is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. The spiritual can illumine the self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. "A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution."⁵⁰

The brotherhood is not possible for the natural heart of man, for it is baffled and deflected by opposite reasoning and discordant instincts. It is in the soul, then, the brotherhood must find its roots, the love is founded upon a deeper truth of our being. The brotherhood is a spiritual comradeship which is the expression of an inner realization of oneness.

Does not this futuristic account put off the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date? Aurobindo himself raises the question. His answer to it is based upon his analysis of the psychology at work behind the different social theories. He makes it abundantly perspicuous that no theory invented by reason (i.e., individualism, collectivism and intellectual anarchism – all products of the age of reason) can perfect either the individual or the collective man. This has been historically evident. Hence an inner change is needed in human nature. The change may be difficult, but nonetheless worth trying for. Spinoza in the last Scholium of his *Ethics* says that the way he had shown might seem very arduous, yet it can be discovered. "And indeed it must be arduous, since it is found so rarely. For how could it happen that, if salvation were ready at hand and could be found without great labour, it is neglected by almost all? But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare."⁵¹ Aurobindo, too, speaks in the similar vein. The sceptic may disbelieve what he sets for the future, and says, "This is not certain; but in any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind."⁵² Aurobindo's point is that the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal, and a form of life nearer to the divine is to be formed in keeping with the logic of evolution of the involved

categories of the Reality. The spiritual anarchism remains a possibility given the premises of Aurobindo's philosophy.

Aurobindo, then, could be taken as thinking of the possibility of a society founded upon spirituality. The normal human society starts from the gregarious instinct modified by antagonism of interests, clash of egos. Society tries to accommodate converging interests and a treaty of peace between discords. The contracts in course of time become customs of the aggregate life, and develop into social law. In short, normal human society operates through its mechanism of law, custom and contract. Again, the normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being. The life, the mind and the body are the three terms of man's normal social existence. What is significant is that Aurobindo holds the view that society tends to die by its own development. There is some radical defect in its system, which is a proof that its idea of man and its method do not correspond to all the reality of the human being and to the aim of life which that reality imposes. There is also a radical defect somewhere in the process of human civilization. Our civilized development of life ends in an exhaustion of vitality and a refusal of Nature to lend her support to man's advances. There has been a proliferation of needs, aided by more and more science, more and more mechanical devices and a more scientific organization of life. The engine is there almost to replace life, as though man can be saved by machinery. Aurobindo suggests that with some chance of knocking at the right door there could be a real self-finding and self-renewal. Only in the new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity the real truth of man might be found. "A large liberty will be the law of a spiritual society and the increase of freedom a sign of growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualization".⁵³ Aurobindo does not prescribe a post mortem salvation. The ascent of man into heaven is not the key, but rather his ascent here into the spirit and the descent also of the spirit into his normal humanity and transformation of this earthly nature.

Notes and References

1. *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1949, p.22.
2. *Ibid.*, p.26.
3. *Ibid.*, p.32.
4. *Ibid.*, p.33.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.37-38.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.
7. *Ibid.*, p.53.
8. *Ibid.*, p.45.
9. *Ibid.*, p.54.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *The Life Divine*, The Greystone Press, New York, 1949, pp.29-30.
12. *Ibid.*, p.57.
13. *Ibid.*, p.58.
14. *Ibid.*, p.69.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p.71.
17. *Ibid.*, p.80.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p.81.
21. *Selections from Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1987, p.493.
22. *The Human Cycle*, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83.
23. *ibid.*, p.83.
24. *Ibid.*, p.84.
25. *Ibid.*, p.200.
26. *Ibid.*, p.202.
27. *Ibid.*, p.205.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, p.206.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, p.205.
34. *Ibid.*, p.227.
35. *Ibid.*, p.245.
36. *Ibid.*, p.248.
37. *Ibid.*, p.254.
38. *Ibid.*, p.255
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p.256.
41. *Ibid.*, p.257.
42. *Ibid.*, p.268.
43. *What is Property? An Enquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, trans., Benjamin R. Tucker, Princeton, 1876, p. 227.
44. *Human Cycle*, *Ibid.*, p.268.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, p.270.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, p.271.
49. *Ibid.*, p.272.
50. *Ibid.*, p.273.
51. *Ethics*, trans., G.H.R.Parkinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.316.
52. *Ibid.*, p.274.
53. *The Life Divine*, *op.cit.*, p.274.
54. *Ibid.*, p.283.