

A CRITICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE SOCIO-  
PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS OF AUROBINDO'S  
INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY AND MARX'S  
PHILOSOPHICAL COMMUNISM

by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Comparative Philosophy in the Department  
of Science of Religion, University of Durban-  
Westville

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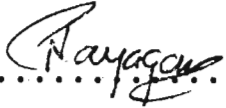
December 1988

T890064

To my parents to whom I owe so much  
with love and gratitude

### Declaration

This dissertation has not been submitted for a degree  
at any other University



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P. Nayagar

## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

My sincere thanks and appreciation to all those, who assisted me during the period of research and preparation of this dissertation.

A special word of thanks to my promoters Professor F. Zangenberg and Dr. T Naidoo for their valued and inspiring philosophical insights, intellectual stimulation and meticulous supervision.

I am greatly indebted to Matri Parsad, (lecturer Sri Aurobindo Studies at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry), for his wisdom and guidance, during our thought-provoking discussions.

I would also like to thank Parue Patil (Registrar, Sri Aurobindo International Centre's of Education, Pondicherry) for the use of the Centres facilities, and Sanjay Bhatt of the Centre's archives for his enthusiasm and unstinting assistance.

To Suzanne Sekhon, I express my heartfelt gratitude for the many long hours of interesting conversation, constant companionship and for making my stay in Pondicherry as pleasant as possible.



My appreciation is also extended to the following:-

The Human Sciences Research Council for their financial assistance.

The Library staff of U.D.W for their co-operation and assistance.

My friends and colleagues Rajie Tudge and Vishanthie Sewpaul for painstakingly proof-reading the manuscript.

Jaya and Ann for typing the manuscript.

Finally, my family and friends for their moral support, and understanding, without which much of my work would have been a drudgery.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Objectives of Study

Before outlining the aims and objectives of this study it must be noted that the scope of such a study is inevitably limited because of the inherent nature of the subject matter. Despite the magnitude of these two philosophers only certain specific areas of their philosophical models are comparable. As such this study examines only those comparable aspects, assessing and evaluating carefully the views of Sri Aurobindo and Marx thereby highlighting their similarities and differences.

However, despite being a comparative study, attention is drawn to the fact that the present work is undertaken primarily from the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo's integral world view, regarded by many as an alternate social philosophy. The comparison with Marx's philosophy, by far the most prominent and influential in the modern world, attempts only to bring into clearer focus the distinctive features of Sri Aurobindo's integral world view.

The most important aim and objective of the present study is to illustrate that the fundamental elements of the socio-philosophical content of Marxism could very well be integrated and assimilated within the broad framework of Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophical system. Sri Aurobindo himself asserts that : "There is very little argument in my philosophy - the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge".<sup>1</sup>

Defending his integral world view Sri Aurobindo explains that, "people do not understand what I write because the mind by itself cannot understand things that are beyond it. It constructs its own idea out of something that it catches or that it has caught and puts that idea as the whole meaning of what has been written. Each mind puts its own ideas in place of the Truth".<sup>2</sup>

Noting that Marxism is but one aspect of Truth, and to all those who fail to comprehend the power of assimilation in Sri Aurobindo's thought system, he writes, : "I do not mind if you find inconsistencies in

my statements. What people call consistency is usually a rigid or narrow minded inability to see more than one side of the truth or more than their own narrow personal view or experience of things. Truth has many aspects and unless you look on all with a calm and equal eye, you will never have the real or the integral knowledge".<sup>3</sup>

In India today equal interest is generated in the philosophies of Marx and Sri Aurobindo. The reason being that all those scholars who examine the philosophical postulates of Marxism cannot ignore the influence and impact of Sri Aurobindo. The interaction of these two philosophical models on certain levels serve only to enhance the stature of Marx's and Sri Aurobindo's own philosophical postulates, making these philosophers equally radical thinkers whose philosophical assertions transcend mere intellectual confines.

Contemporary India is one such example that lends authenticity in practice to the assimilation of fundamental aspects of Marxism into the broad framework of Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy. Perhaps the most interesting and most dynamic developement of the impact of Marxism on India and her cultural heritage is the birth of Marxian Indology and the re-working of Marxism itself into the general framework of Indian philosophy.

We observe with great interest that the Marxist influence is conspicuously confined to the Hindu quarter. Synthesizing aspects of materialism and spiritualism, Hindus do not reject their traditional ways of life whilst expounding Marxist philosophy. It is Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy which gives direction and meaning to all those who subscribe to such a world view in India today. Bridging the gap between Marxism and spiritualism, thereby satisfying man both intellectually and emotionally, Sri Aurobindo's philosophical model as this dissertation aims to illustrate not only remedies inner tension and confusion but lends a deeper sense of truth, justice and peace in concrete social relations.

## 2.2 Methodology

The present work is a study in comparative philosophy. The comparative method serves not only to reinforce one's own philosophical heritage and background but seeks to draw attention to other systems of thought. Working from a specific philosophical standpoint, Sri Aurobindo's philosophical model will be studied in relation to those comparable aspects of Marx's philosophical communism.

For reasons of impartiality and objectivity the present study is undertaken from a standpoint of hermeneutics cum phenomenology. Examining the theoretically



established worldviews of Sri Aurobindo and Marx in a spirit of open-mindedness, ruling out "uncritical dogmatism" and "uncritical self-assertion", "the hermeneutical school is anti-positivist in its bias. Over against the technological mentality of positivism, with its intention to master the world, hermeneutical thinking is filled with respect for the claims of cultural tradition... To hermeneutical thinking the researcher, trying to come to terms with the past, is not a supreme subject, mastering a dead object, lying there. That which he interprets, has a dynamic vitality of its own. It reaches out and challenges the interpreter. The whole hermeneutical undertaking is seen as an extension of communication between people, in which they both speak, and both listen to each other. And even when the people themselves cannot be present, perhaps because they are long dead, they nevertheless "speak" via the cultural products they left behind".<sup>4</sup>

Following the hermeneutical school the phenomenological approach is also adopted. In line with phenomenological methodology, which in an effort to return "to the things themselves" and to "rediscover and re-experience life itself directly underneath the layer of secondary scientific constructions," and to learn to, "see clearly and how to describe accurately what we see, before we start explaining scientifically." <sup>5</sup> The writer was afforded the

privilege of doing research at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India. Such a situation presented the writer with an excellent opportunity to study first hand the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and to observe and highlight the degree of commitment to the interaction between theory and practice within Sri Aurobindo's thought system.

### 1.3 Comparative Philosophy and Integral Philosophy

The range and scope of comparative philosophy is undoubtedly a stimulating and enriching one, highlighting refreshingly new insights in the philosophical world. Initiating philosophical communication, comparative philosophy as an inter-disciplinary venture, undertakes an integral evaluation of parallelisms of thought in the eastern and western traditions for the sole aim of not only assimilating those positive values, ideas and concerns which are absent in one's own culture, but also to render a possible synthesis of these two profound streams of thought.

Previously due to intellectual arrogance and grave delusion and ignorance about cultural supremacy, western thinkers have dismissed lightly the philosophies of the east. With the simultaneous studies of Eastern and Western philosophy one

encounters remarkable similarities between these two powerful traditions. An examination of the great legacy of the influential philosophical writings of brilliant builders of thought, system founders and the initiators of intellectual and social revolutions reveal that despite their almost irreconcilable cultural differences Indian thinkers addressed the same basic philosophical problems and proffered similar solutions to these problems as their Western counterparts.

With the advent of instituting of dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophy, comparative philosophy has been drawn into the mainstream of creative thought generating untold interest. Comparative philosophy has influenced equally in academic circles, western students of Indian thought and Indian students of the Western intellectual tradition, promoting mutual understanding and appreciation thus serving to enrich, both group's own philosophical backgrounds thereby enabling them to deal more effectively with their own peculiar philosophical problems.

At the very outset it must be noted that if philosophy is to include the entire corpus of philosophical writings both eastern and western, and if it is to be defined as a comprehensive science of human thought incorporating a holistic and synoptic conception of reality, then the main aim and emphasis of comparative

philosophy should serve to enunciate imminent similarities rather than to dwell on or highlight insignificant differences. However such an attitude should be exercised with great caution, highlighting the difference in similarity rather than the similarity in difference, thereby avoiding the construction of an artificial philosophy.

Confronting two mighty thought currents Indian thinkers in the modern period have deemed it necessary to understand and assimilate the ideals of the eastern and western traditions, before making any significantly new and positive contribution to world philosophical knowledge. Moving towards the ideal of fundamental unity between the East and West Radhakrishnan states that in the final analysis, "there is the over-all synthetic tradition which is essential to the spirit and method of Indian philosophy".<sup>6</sup>

Maintaining that the reality of truth is devoid of all one-sided emphasis, Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy introduces a new dimension to contemporary Indian thought. Integrating and assimilating the positive aspects within the Indian and Western traditions Sri Aurobindo's integral idealism claims to be an interesting blend bearing both fruitful and wide reaching implications. Illustrating a unique spirit of synthesis Sri Aurobindo's primary concern was an



attempt at establishing a parallel between Indian and Western thought thereby giving full expression to the concept of comparative philosophy.

As a reaction against empty academic philosophizing and driven by a sincere sense of commitment Sri Aurobindo attempts to establish a real assimilation of eastern and western thought. In this regard he wrote, : "I spoke of the acceptance and assimilation from the West of whatever in its knowledge, ideas, powers was assimilable, compatible with her (India's) spirit, reconcilable with her ideals, valuable of external influence and new creation from within is of very considerable importance, it calls for more than a passing mention. Especially it is necessary to form some more precise idea of what we mean by acceptance and of the actual effect of assimilation, for this is a problem of pressing incidence in which we have to get our ideas clear and fix firmly and seeingly on our line of solution".<sup>7</sup>

Adopting a balanced outlook on the reconciliation of eastern and western philosophy Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that, "we have both made mistakes, faltered in the true application of our ideals, been misled into unhealthy exaggerations. Europe has understood the lesson. She is striving to correct herself, but she does not for this reason forswear science, democracy, progress, but propose to complete

and perfect them, to use them better, to give them a sounder direction. She is admitting the light of the East, but on the basis of her own way of thinking and living, opening herself to truth of the spirit, but not abandoning her own truth of life and science and social ideals. We should be as faithful, as free in our dealings with the Indian spirit and modern influences; correct what went wrong with us; apply our spirituality on broader and freer lines, be if possible not less but more spiritual than were our forefathers; admit science, reason, progressiveness, the essential modern ideas, but on the basis of our own way of life and assimilated to our spiritual aim and ideal; open ourselves to the throb of life, the pragmatic activity, the great modern endeavour, but not therefore abandon our fundamental view of God and man and Nature. There is no real quarrel between them; for rather these two things need each other to fill themselves in, to discover all their own implications, to awaken to their own richest and completest significance".<sup>a</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary world view permeates his social and political philosophy and attempts to spiritually transform present socio-political institutions based on coercion and perversity so that they may be founded upon mutuality, equality, justice, spontaneous co-operation and goodwill. Sri Aurobindo adamantly declares that unless socialism undergoes a moral and spiritual transformation the socialist ideal

of the enhancement of economic resources and opportunities for all through the formation of a free association is short-sighted and therefore unworkable. For Sri Aurobindo the ultimate revolution is the complete and total evolution of human consciousness. In asserting that man has reached the point of complete despair, constantly oppressed and exploited by forces from within and without Sri Aurobindo states that, "the problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the self, so that it shall re-embrace, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self discipline and self-development so that the mental and physical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity".<sup>9</sup>

The attainment of a spiritual consciousness is an absolute necessity for the dawning of a truly just world order based on real unity fostering liberty, equality and fraternity. Reflecting upon the present state of things Sri Aurobindo points out that, "mankind

is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital physical claims and urges, a complex political, social administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organized collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and has still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites"<sup>10</sup>

The only solution to the present evolutionary crisis confronting humanity, according to Sri Aurobindo, is one grounded in spiritual essence. Infusing the socio-political order which ensures the material and social wellbeing of man with a spiritual consciousness Sri Aurobindo urges mankind to strive towards realizing the life divine.



Clearly evident in his bid to create a truly higher nobler humanity Sri Aurobindo via his unique synthesizing ability assimilates the valuable social, political and scientific achievements of the west with the sublime and ancient spiritual insights of the East. No less than Marx who postulates the attainment of a classless society in the final phase of communism, Sri Aurobindo also posits a radical socio-political philosophy which gives new direction and meaning to the development of society, culminating in a spiritualized society devoid of all external laws and compulsions. However, whilst the Marxists perceive social evolution as being directly governed by the inexorable forces of history, Sri Aurobindo argues that the course of human history serves only to indicate the gradual unfolding of the Divine Design which brings forth the blossoming of man's innate spiritual propensities heralding thus the establishment of social unity in the world.

Whilst applying spiritual metaphysical truths to concrete social relations Sri Aurobindo opines that "nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding, whether in the power that, moves it or the sense of the aim towards which it moves than its own communal and collective life. Sociology does not help us, for it only gives us the general story of the past and the external conditions under which communities have survived."<sup>11</sup>

Against the back drop of comparative philosophy, one notes that social life of humanity has reached an acutely critical stage of it's development, and a pertinent question arises - which of these two philosophies ie. the philosophical communism of Marx or the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo will appear among other philosophies to be the foundation of a new social order?

Today none can deny the relevance nor the powerful influence that Marxist ideas wield on the contemporary intellectual world. Within the Marxist camp we have two opposing thought currents ie. the humanist interpretation and the scientific interpretation. The scientific interpretation seeks only to examine the distinctive conceptual structure and epistemology upon which Marxist theory is based. On the other hand the humanist interpretation upon which this dissertation focuses places great emphasis on human nature and human needs. Revolving around the conscious actions of individuals and groups the humanist current in Marxist thought enunciates the emancipatory content of Marxism in general.

Viewed against a world saturated with Marxist notions we have Sri Aurobindo's quest for an integral knowledge. This integral knowledge revolutionizes the philosophical world, not only positing the idea of a Divine Life but also deals comprehensively with social

emancipation, a concept dealt with in great detail by materialists like Marx. Attributing his philosophical and socio-political ideas to the practice of yoga Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy illustrates an interesting reconciliation and assimilation of important concepts belonging to philosophy and the social sciences.

At this point it must be noted that Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy claims to go beyond Marxism or as Fromm explains, : "For Marx the aim of socialism was the emancipation of man, and the emancipation of man was the same as his self-realization in the process of productive relatedness and oneness with man and nature."<sup>12</sup>

Quoting Fromm further for reasons of completeness he observes that, "if and when the world returns to the tradition of humanism and overcomes the deterioration of Western culture, both in its Soviet and in its capitalistic form, it will see, indeed that Marx was neither a fanatic nor an opportunist - that he represented the flowering of western humanity, that he was a man with an uncompromising sense of truth, penetrating to the very essence of reality, and never taken in by the deceptive surface; that he was of an unquenchable courage and integrity; of a deep concern for man and his future, unselfish, and with little vanity or lust for power; always alive always

stimulating and bringing to life whatever he touched. He represented the Western tradition in its best features, its faith in reason and in the progress of man. He represented in fact the very concept of man which was at the centre of his thinking. The man who is much, and has little; the man who is rich because he has need for his fellow man."<sup>13</sup>

In attempting to establish a new and just social order both Marx and Sri Aurobindo identify and acknowledge the importance of the role of the proletariat in instituting a higher world order. Championing the cause of the proletariat Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat....with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future... Theorist and trifler I may be called, I again assert as our first and highest duty the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat."<sup>14</sup> The exploited proletariat via the gradual process of conscientization is growing into a self-awareness. A self-awareness which is very soon going to exact its legitimate dues from the exploiting few.

Writing with equal fervour Marx was also convinced that the future of mankind lay solely with the proletariat, a class completely fragmented and dehumanized as a result of capitalist exploitation. The proletariat

existing as unman in the world represents the complete loss of man due to the forces of alienation generated by the present bourgeoisie order. Identifying the proletariat as a truly revolutionary class growing from strength to strength Marx viewed the working classes as vigorously challenging the very existence of capitalist exploitation and oppression. He therefore saw in the proletariat a class fully capable of effectively employing his revolutionary program in order to transform the world. "As philosophy finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapon in philosophy."<sup>15</sup>

Marxist humanism, working from a purely materialist standpoint, examines the concept of emancipation only in relation to social and economic phenomena. For Marx man can only realize himself via the performance of work, producing material goods. Whilst Marx speaks of the whole man, Sri Aurobindo expounds the theory of an integral man. For Sri Aurobindo man is a complex being an integral and organic entity with a wide range of categories which complement each other. Acknowledging that the performance of work is, only one aspect of the various categories which serve to make up his being, Sri Aurobindo claims that self-realization is only possible when man is able to give full expression to all aspects of his being. It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo's Neo-Vedanta urges man to seek after an

integral truth, the complete manifestation of perfection in the individual taking into account the external and the internal world.

Remaining a critic of both capitalism and socialism Sri Aurobindo holds that "socialism may bring in a greater equality and a closer association into human life, but if it is only a material change, it may miss other, needed things and even aggravate the mechanical burden of humanity and crush more heavily towards the earth its spirit."<sup>16</sup>

Reacting to Marx's materialist conception of Socialism, Sri Aurobindo argues that any new social order devoid of spiritual inclination will remain an inadequate solution. Only, spiritual knowledge can foster the preservation of real liberty, equality and fraternity bringing into effect the new or higher society that socialists and communists dream of.

According to Sri Aurobindo the solution to our present socio-political crisis would be the dawning of a spiritualized synthesis of individualism, collectivism and anarchism in a spiritualized society. For Sri Aurobindo, "a spiritual or spiritualized anarchism might appear to come nearer to the real solution or at least touch something of it from afar... But apart from these excesses of a too logical thought and a one-sided impulsion apart from the inability of any "ism" to express the truth of the spirit which exceeds

all such compartments, we seem here to be near to the real way out, to the discovery of the saving motive-force."<sup>17</sup>

Via his integral approach Sri Aurobindo attempts to reconcile the materialist background of Marxism with its spiritual concepts of equality, justice, liberty and fraternity with philosophical idealism and spiritualism. Sri Aurobindo's main contention is that one can be a revolutionary defender of the exploited and the oppressed without negating or refusing to subscribe to spiritualist philosophy. Subscribing to an atheistic world view does not necessarily imply the denial of spiritual values and human personality.

It is interesting to note that Marx's experience with religion was confined to the Semitic traditions only. Having no direct knowledge of Hinduism or Hindu philosophy Marx relied on Hegel's interpretation of Indian civilization which was in itself extremely shallow and sadly lacking. Von Glasenapp says the following of Hegel's knowledge of Indian religion, philosophy and culture,: "He had only a limited number of authoritative sources at his disposal and he was not a person with an open mind, capable of sympathising with all alien ways of thinking with loving understanding, but was an armchair scholar, inclined to abstractions, interpreting the outside world according to his preconceived pattern. It is for this reason

that whatever he was able to say about India turned out to be extremely inadequate, resulting in a distorted picture, in which, in spite of some well observed details, shows, nevertheless, on the whole, that he had ventured upon a task, for the fulfillment of which he had not possessed the pre-requisites."<sup>18</sup>

The main thrust of Marx's criticism of religion is its strong opposition to the growth and development of science. According to Marx, "history of religion is the history of fight against the development of scientific thought. The church persecuted the greatest scientists with blind cruelty, torturing them, burning them at the stake, forbidding or destroying their works. The catholic church, whose instrument was the inquisition was particularly zealous in this respect. For centuries, the church played an extremely reactionary role and fought pitilessly against the scientific conception of the world and against the democratic and socialistic movement."<sup>19</sup>

Whilst such a situation prevailed in the West the position is quite the contrary in India. With regard to the Indian sub-continent science and religion have always co-existed in a perfect harmony; reconciling the material advances of science and the secular world with the Hindu conception of salvation. According to Sri Aurobindo, "science itself is constantly arriving at conclusions which only repeat upon the physical plane,



and in its language truths which ancient India had already affirmed from the standpoint of spiritual knowledge in the tongue of the Veda and Vedanta".<sup>20</sup>

Defining true Indian religion and spirituality in its purest form Sri Aurobindo explains that, "the spiritual aim will recognise that man as he grows in his being must have as much free space as possible for all its members to grow in their own strength, to find out themselves and their potentialities. In their freedom they will err, because experience comes through many errors, but each has itself a divine principle and they will find it out, disengage its presence, significance and law as their experience of themselves deepens and increases. Thus true spirituality will not lay a yoke upon science and philosophy or compel them to square their conclusions with any statement of dogmatic religious or even of assured spiritual truth, as some of the old religions attempted, mainly ignorantly, with an unspiritual obstinacy and arrogance. Each part of man's being has its own dharma which it must follow and will follow in the end, put on it what fetter you please. The Dharma of Science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes.

"Science and philosophy are not bound to square their observations and conclusions with any current ideas of religious dogma or ethical rule or aesthetic prejudice.

In the end, if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and God and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or any narrower aesthetic idea can give us. But meanwhile they must be left free even to deny God and Good and Beauty if they will, if their sincere observation of things so points them. For all these rejections must come round in the end of their circling and return to a larger truth of the things they refuse. Often we find atheism both in individual and society a necessary passage to deeper religious and spiritual truth, one has sometimes to deny God in order to find him; the finding is inevitable at the end of all earnest scepticism and denial."<sup>21</sup>

It is for this reason that the Indian mind never perceived philosophy and science from being separate or apart from religion. True religion allows for the free and full development of science serving only to illuminate it so that it might grow into the light and law of the spirit. Developing neither under suppression nor restriction but by a sincere self-searching both science and religion in India are regarded as "vidya", save by a fine distinction being drawn between "Para Vidya" and "Apara Vidya".

"The peculiar character of our age", according to Sri Aurobindo, "is the divorce that has been pronounced between reason and faith, the logical mind and the intuitive heart. At first, the declaration of war between them was attended by painful struggles, a faith disturbed or a scepticism dissatisfied. But now their divorce has created exaggerated tendencies which impoverish human life by their mutual exclusiveness, on the one side a negative and destructive critical spirit, on the other an imaginative sentiment which opposes pure instinct and a faith founded on dreams to the sterile fanaticism of the intellect. Yet a real divorce is impossible - Science could not move a step without faith and intuition and today it is growing full of dreams. Religion could not stand for a moment if it did not support itself by the intellectual presentation, however inadequate, or profound truths. Today we see it borrowing many of its weapons from the armoury of its opponents. But a right synthesis in virtue of a higher and reconciling truth can alone dissipate their mutual misunderstandings and restore to the race its integral self-development. The synthesis then of religious aspiration and scientific faculty, as a beginning; and in the resultant progress an integrality also of the inner existence."<sup>22</sup>

Faith in religion did not necessarily imply the stunting of social progress and development. History clearly indicates how religion in India was used as a

platform challenging exploitation, oppression and foreign domination, thereby successfully procuring full social and political freedom.

According to Sri Aurobindo the unique character of Indian culture is to transform the whole of life including the socio-political institutions towards spirituality. Religion is the first imperfect form of the spiritual impulse. Hinduism for Sri Aurobindo, represents the highest form of spirituality due to its absence of infallible dogma, no credo distinguishing itself from antagonistic religions, devoid of a highly institutionalized programme and a governing ecclesiastic body and admitting a wide range of diverse and even antagonistic views with its atheism and agnosticism, allowing all kinds of spiritual experiences without one single narrow path to salvation.

Stressing the inner self-development and maintaining that man is the highest reality Sri Aurobindo proclaims that, "the fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and chief aim of the human spirit. No other idol, neither the nation, the state, the family nor anything else ought to take its place, they are only worthy of respect so far as they are images of the human spirit and enshrine

realization of his inner most reality, that which is neither external nor separate from himself, the Brhadaranyaka and the Chandogya Upanisad adequately and clearly illustrate that man himself is Brahman in essence. Brahman therefore being not an external entity.

Like Marx whose humanized materialism can be labelled a theory of self realization and self actualization where man returns unto himself and realizes himself as truly man, Sri Aurobindo who places great emphasis on the spirit, ennobles and uplifts the life of man as being sacred, also views man as realizing himself, his true humanity in the process of self-realization.

Marx and Sri Aurobindo believe in the power of ideas and giving them practical expression were totally committed to the cause of suffering humanity. Marx was not a crude materialist nor was Sri Aurobindo an abstract spiritualist.

Working respectively from a materialist and spiritualist standpoint Marx and Sri Aurobindo equally oppose social injustices in their bid to institute a higher society based on free association and co-operation. However whilst Marx's influence has been primarily external and objective effecting only the socio-political and economic aspects of human existence Sri Aurobindo's integral approach is chiefly inward and

subjective directed at transforming the inner realm of man's being which automatically implies a comprehensive transformation of man's external institutions as well.

Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy can be regarded as a direct outcome of comparative philosophy. Subscribing to a culture which enjoys an organic unity, reconciling science religion and philosophy, and drawing freely from the East and the West Sri Aurobindo's integral approach according to him seeks to supplement all those areas in the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions which seem to be lacking, deficient or absent, thereby serving only to enrich the traditions of the East and the West. Employing also the techniques of comparative philosophy and reflecting upon the two major camps within the philosophical world ie. the materialist and Idealist schools, Sri Aurobindo claims to formulate via his integral approach a philosophical position independent of these two schools.

#### 1.4 The Position of Idealism, Realism and Materialism in Indian Philosophy

The scope of Indian thought is broadly divided into two major philosophical categories ie. Idealism and Realism. Whilst idealism claims that the external world and all true knowledge of it does not exist independently of the mind and that its reality depended

solely on the mind itself, realism maintains that the objective external world is real and exists independently of mind or consciousness. Moreover the perception of an external object is direct and immediate and not via the mediacy of an idea.

With regard to Idealism we observe a further division into subjective idealism and objective idealism. Subjective idealism asserts that our thoughts and passions have existence only in relation to being part and parcel of the perceiving mind. Maintaining that only cognition is real all other phenomena have no existence independent of consciousness. On the other hand objective idealism reveals via, definition that the world, a concrete reality is created by Brahman or is at least a manifestation of Brahman. Man has relevance only in relation to the Absolute Reality and as such all phenomena must be understood in terms of that Absolute principle.

In lieu of the numerous philosophical questions arising there Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that an unconditional extolling of the mind as the creator of forms and things is a narrow view of idealism and is therefore also a delusion. Reflecting on the advances of science Sri Aurobindo states that, "it has to interpret man in terms of the cosmos, not the cosmos in terms of man. The too facile conclusion of the idealist that since things only exist as known to

consciousness, they can exist only by consciousness and must be creations of the mind, has no meaning for it; it first has to inquire what consciousness is, whether it is not a result rather than a cause of Matter, coming into being, as it seems to do, only in the frame of a material inconsistent universe and apparently able to exist only on the condition that has been previously established. Starting from Matter, science has to be at least hypothetically materialistic."<sup>24</sup>

At this juncture it is necessary to point out that the realist school encompasses not only those which expound materialist philosophy but all schools which admit the objective reality of the world. Such a clarification drawing a distinction between subjective and objective idealism would imply that by idealists only subjective idealists were meant.

Following such a classification there are those scholars who depict the history of Indian philosophy as revolving around the materialistic and idealistic schools of thought. Despite the fact that previously there existed the tendency to present the history of Indian philosophy in the most part as an unbroken stream of idealist thought thereby dismissing materialist elements, the conflict of idealism and materialism within Indian philosophical circles has undoubtedly positively stimulated philosophical enquiry.



According to RadhaKrishnan, "materialism is as old as philosophy"<sup>25</sup> itself and elements of the same can be traced right to the Rg Veda. The philosophy of materialism has left beyond all doubt an indelible mark on the Indian mind influencing and directing Indian thought in different periods of history. Examining the Indian systems of thought one finds that the Nyaya - Vaishesika, the two Purva Mimamsa schools; the Samkhya, the Madhva and the Jaina represent the realistic approach. The Nyaya - Vaishesika schools being strictly realistic maintain that perception is absolutely direct, whereas according to the Samkhya view perception functions through the medium of a mental image.

According to Engels, "the great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being. From the very early times when men, still completely ignorant of the structure of their own bodies, under the stimulus of dream apparitions came to believe that their thinking and sensation were not activities of their bodies, but of a distinct soul which inhabits the body and leaves it at death - from this time men have been driven to reflect about the relation between this soul and the outside world.... The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primacy of spirit

to nature..... comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary belong to the various schools of materialism"<sup>26</sup>

Explained simply all those thinkers who uphold the primacy of the Spirit and posit some kind of world creation can be identified as idealists. Identifying the Spirit as the only reality idealist monists maintain that the spirit is the basis of all existence and that the material world is a direct emanation from a higher spiritual source.

On the other hand all those who place the primacy of Matter above spirit are classified as materialists. According to materialist monists all Reality is but Matter. Emphasizing the material unity of the world, matter alone, is real and all else is unreal. The chief and most important attribute of matter an uncreated indestructible, infinite and eternally changing phenomenon is motion.

Attacking vulgar crude mechanical materialism which can also be applied to early Indian materialism Marx wrote:,"The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included, is that the thing [Gegenstand], reality, or of contemplation [Anschauung], but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradiction to materialism, was

developed by idealism - but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such."<sup>27</sup>

Modern scientific materialism is thus far from vulgar materialism. Upholding the sacredness of human personality scientific materialism according to Marx does not view man as being purely an objective reality. Following such a rationalization Marx firmly believes that by instituting positive changes on the external environment man is able to affect certain inward changes. It is for this reason that Marx attempts to eradicate all forms of existing social, economic, and political causes of human suffering and misery. For it is only under favourable socio-political economic conditions that man is able to express his creative genius developing freely and spontaneously. With the development of human personality and the full exercising of human potential free and unhindered, Marx ushers in a new social order, devoid of oppression, exploitation, alienation and class antagonisms.

In line with Marxism Lenin's analysis of vulgar materialism serves only to enhance the cause of scientific materialism. "Philosophical idealism," according to him, "is nonsense only from the standpoint of a crude, simple and metaphysical materialism."<sup>28</sup> Vulgar mechanical materialism is unable to comprehend that knowledge depends on the positive workings of the

mind and of the conditions of knowing the thing in itself. Idealism is a half truth representing a one sided, view of the truth about knowledge and of reality in general.

Reflecting upon the different streams and temperaments of modern Indian thought, Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that, "the greatest of all the philosophical problems which human thought has struggled to solve is the exact nature and relation to us of the conscious Intelligence in the phenomenal existence around. The idealist denies the phenomenal existence, the materialist denies the conscious Intelligence. To the former, phenomenon is a passing shadow on the luminous calm of the single universal Spirit: to the latter, Intelligence is a temporary result of the motions of Matter. The idealist can give no satisfactory explanation of the existence of the shadow; he admits that it is unexplicable, a thing that is and yet is not : the materialist can give no satisfactory explanation of the existence of intelligence; he simply tries to trace the stages of its development and the methods of its workings, and covers over the want of an explanation by the abundant minuteness of his observation. But the soul of Man, looking out and in, is satisfied neither with Sankara nor with Hegel. It sees the universal existence of phenomena, it sees the universal existence of Intelligence. It seeks a term

which will admit both, cover both, identify both its demands, not an elimination of either but a reconciliation."<sup>29</sup>

Though viewed as being predominantly idealistic in its outlook Vedanta is an interesting blend of both Realism and Idealism. Refusing to lose sight of the empirical world which functioned with or without our cognition and postulating a realistic metaphysics, Sri Aurobindo declares that the world which is materially real, having emanated from Brahman, a spiritually real principle, cannot be unreal. Affirming the reality of the world, Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Vedanta, like many other Indian thinkers of the modern period, has infused the ethical content of Vedanta's realistic metaphysics with a social dynamism. Defined as objective idealism Vedanta was drawn against the Sankhya and Vaishesika schools of thought which are primarily materialist in their world views.

J.G. Desai draws attention to the fact that, "mediative intuition is generally opposed to the religion of God. Therefore it is noteworthy that theism has little room in most of India's philosophies. But where theism does occur - barring Vedanta - it is not surprising that God hangs loosely there, the concept being superfluous to the internal consistency of such systems; God's inclusion was necessitated by certain teleological concerns, but mainly by the

ubiquitous prevalence of theistic religion which had its first and greatest impact on Vedanta. In fact, the doctrine of God is necessary to the central thesis of the Visistadvaita and the Dvaita Vedanta. Examples of systems where the inclusion of God is for extraneous reasons are the Yoga and the Nyaya - Vaishesika. Religion is not blind dogma in India. Reason is presupposed in it. Indian religion understood as mystical experience offers a dimension to philosophy; which far from rendering it unphilosophical is said to be rather an excellence of it."<sup>30</sup>

Expressing the real spirit of Vedanta Sri Aurobindo observes that, "we are always divided between two tendencies, one idealistic, and the other realistic. The latter very easily seems to us more real, more solidly founded, more in touch with actualities because it relies upon a reality which is patent, sensible and already accomplished, the idealistic easily seems to us something unreal, fantastic, unsubstantial, nebulous, a thing more of thoughts and words than of live actualities, because it is trying to embody a reality not yet accomplished. To a certain extent we are perhaps right; for the ideal, a stranger among the actualities of our physical existence, is in fact a thing unreal until it has either in some way reconciled itself to the imperfections of our outer life or else has found the greater and purer reality for which it is seeking and imposed it on our outer activities; till

then it hangs between two worlds, and has conquered neither the upper light nor the nether darkness. Submission to the actual by a compromise is easy; discovery of the spiritual truth and the transformation of our actual way of living is difficult; but is precisely this difficult thing that has to be done; if man is to find and fulfil his true nature. Our realism is always the most rightly human thing in us, but as a mental idealism it is a thing ineffective. To be effective it has to convert itself into a spiritual realism which shall lay its hands on the higher reality of the spirit and take up for it this lower reality of our sensational, vital and physical nature."<sup>31</sup>

Drawing from a legacy of numerous metaphysical positions ie. idealism, materialism, realism and spiritualism, indicating the Indian thinkers zealous attempts to arrive at the nature of truth, Sri Aurobindo presents his philosophy of Integral Non-Dualism or Integral Idealism. Integral idealism assuming an independent philosophical position from the other schools of thought seeks to present reality in its individed entirety. The quest for ultimate truth led Sri Aurobindo to believe that the problem of man and the present crisis can be averted only by a true knowledge of reality. Viewed against the dawning of a new awareness in the modern period, with philosophy bridging the gap between theory and praxis, Sri Aurobindo's integral idealism claiming to transform the whole of human existence and human interaction,

infusing Indian society with a new vigour and a direction of change, is regarded by many as a sound basis for a new social order.

Commenting on the morass into which civilization has sunk Sri Aurobindo writes,:"About the present human civilization. It is not this which has to be saved, it is the world that has to be saved and that will surely be done, though it may not be so easily or so soon as some wish or imagine, or in the way that they imagine. The present must surely change, but whether by a destruction or a new construction on the basis of a greater Truth, is the issue..... Neither optimism nor pessimism is the truth : they are only modes of the mind or modes of the temperament."<sup>32</sup> Reflecting on the words of Karl Marx he states that, "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point however, is to change it."



### 1.5 Indology and the Impact of Marxism

The import of Marxism on to the Indian subcontinent rapidly permeated all aspects of Indian life, political, social, economic and ideological. The dawning of Marxism heralded the beginning of a new era in the history of modern Indian thought and in Vedanta in particular and revealed two radical approaches ie. the pro-Marxist and pro-Vedantic. The pro-Marxist camp holds that Vedanta is not just a school of metaphysical idealism but is also the foundation of Hindu theology which is directly responsible for the mental enslavement of the toiling masses.

Maintaining that only a dialectical materialist methodology can yield a scientific assessment of Indian philosophy Marxist indologists claim that a sincere enquiry into the annals of India's ancient history reveals vulgar and primitive elements of materialism yet to evolve gradually towards philosophical communism, a state which Marx prophesied for all of mankind. Examining the socio-historical development of Vedanta, Indian Marxists assert that, "the cosmological -ideological outlook of the early Vedic people was clearly proto-materialistic. The Upanishadic thinkers are dominantly idealist, but still one clearly discerns in their arguments the proto-materialistic roots of their idealist conclusions. The Atman and the Brahman of the

Upanishads are not absolutely divorced from material reality as the Atman and Brahman of Sankaracarya more than thirteen hundred years later. Similarly, the Maya of the Vedic people was not at all the illusion to which it was reduced by Sankaracarya. The Upanishadic thinkers would also not have accepted Sankara's theory of Ajatavada."<sup>33</sup>

Firm believers in the tenets of Vedantic idealism and eminent scholars of Indian philosophy like Ranade and Belvalkar comprehensively trace the development of the primitive materialistic elements in the Vedic period pertaining to the ultimate Reality, into the absolute idealism of Vedanta in its present form and structure.

Aurobindo asks, to a certain extent together with the Indian marxists the same question, "How do we explain the development of Vedanta from its proto-materialist roots to the absurd extreme of the total denial of material reality to which it was carried by Sankaracarya."<sup>34</sup>

Whilst it is true that the Indian Marxists want to move towards the creation of a new society devoid of exploitation, oppression, class and caste prejudices, they at the same time want to reinterpret many old ideas and absorb and preserve all that is noble and humanist in their own philosophical heritage. Emphasizing and highlighting the positive materialist

and atheistic elements in their own cultural heritage, Indian Marxists adamantly declare that the application of Marxist methodology to Indian philosophy serves only to enrich Marxism itself on the Indian sub-continent.

It is for this reason that Indian Marxists, conclude that the study of the history of Indian philosophy is a, "pedagogical, educational one, in so far as it has a culturally enlightening effect. Certainly the uncovering of the law of development in India will enrich the historical materialism and thereby the dialectical (method)."<sup>35</sup>

Believing as they do that Marxism represents the entire range and scope of human activity, encompassing the material and the spiritual realms, Indian Marxists claim that only communist ethics have the capacity to ensure the material, cultural and spiritual advancement of humanity.

"Marxism", it is held, "gives us the tools for the revolutionary reinterpretation of the whole spiritual heritage of mankind. Thus it gives new and creative possibilities to its own premises. Apart from the immediate and well known sources of Marxism, can one find some remote ones in the culture of all peoples? The answer seems to be in the affirmative. What then are these? Broadly speaking, these are humanistic, secular, dialectical and materialistic trends in the

spiritual heritage of every nation, because - historically speaking - these represent the most important values that stood against the forces, of oppression, obscurantism, metaphysics and idealism. For the Marxists, therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to all the above for the creation of a new socialist culture."<sup>36</sup>

Equally subjective the pro-Vedantic faction holds, though not as unreservedly as the pro-Marxist, that Vedanta is an exalted social philosophy and is the panacea for the various problems that afflict modern man. The pro-Vedantic thinkers who are exclusively spiritualistic in their outlook assert that spiritual values are definitely superior to material values and that the pursuit of spiritual values alone can lead to the highest happiness.

An outstanding example of such exclusivity is Hiriyanna, who in his bid to present the thought of India as an unbroken stream of Idealism dismisses the materialistic schools of philosophy as Idealistic as well. According to Hiriyanna, "we may even regard the several phases in the history of the heretical tradition as only so many steps leading to this final development. The Vedanta may accordingly be taken to represent the consummation of Indian thought, and in it we may look for the highest type of the Indian ideal."<sup>37</sup>

Declaring that philosophy in India is fundamentally spiritual and believing in an ideal spiritual reality, with a full flowering of individual potential and faith in human values, it is Radhakrishnan who aptly summarizes the position of the pro-Vedantic thinkers when he stated: "To be inspired in our thought by divine knowledge... to mould our emotions into harmony with divine bliss, to get at the great self of truth, goodness and beauty... to raise our whole being and life to the divine status, is the ultimate purpose and meaning of human living."<sup>38</sup>

Being the loftiest and the most popular branch of Hindu philosophy, Vedantic idealism purports that man is in a state of constant evolution so that he might be transformed and transmitted to a higher level of existence. Man's existence is meaningless and bears no relevance if he does not move towards a realization of the highest perfection.

The belief in the spirituality of the universe which cannot be verified in terms of normal reason or experience dictates that upon perfect realization the human soul attains communion with and is identical to the Absolute Reality. The profound Upanishadic dictum 'Thou art that' conveys a unique proposition that man is not an object nor is he a product of his immediate environment; he is one with Brahman, the Spirit.

So potent was this Upanishadic dictum that the "distinctiveness of Hindu religion was observed even by the ancients. Philostratus puts in the mouth of Appolonius of Tyana these words: "All wish to live in the nearness of God, but only the Hindus bring this to pass."<sup>39</sup>

Though primarily spiritualistic in their outlook, Vedantic thinkers have not failed to give adequate attention to the physical - vital - mental being which they differentiate from the true self of man. Man is a combination of both matter and spirit and it is only when he strives to transcend his physical nature via employing the elements of the spirit will he attain true self-realization. The very attainment of the spiritual principle is man's ultimate destiny.

To many if not all Vedantic thinkers of the modern period Vedanta has both theoretical and practical implications. Positing a realistic outlook of the world brings their line of thinking in consonance with the socio-ethico-political consciousness of the modern world. An affirmation of the reality of the universe automatically implies the reality of the individual and his mastery over the material nature. Thus whilst theoretical Vedanta deals with the study of the nature of the ultimate reality and its relation to man, practical Vedanta seeks to define the norms and values which regulate our social behaviour so that we may

subscribe to the laws of our inner beings in order to link our social life to our ultimate goal on earth. Such an attitude denies all charges of Indian philosophy being life negating and other-worldly in its outlook.

Revolutionizing the socio-philosophical and political arena and infusing Marxism with a characteristic Indian temperament and relevancy, Nehru in the Modern period declared that, : "India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present. Our lives are encumbered with the dead wood of this past; all that is dead and has served its purpose has to go. But this does not mean a break with, or a forgetting of, the vital and life-giving in the past. We can never forget the ideals that have moved our race, the dreams of the Indian people through the ages, the wisdom of the ancients, the buoyant energy and love of life and nature of our forefathers, their spirit of curiosity and mental adventure, the daring of their thought, the splendid achievements in literature, art and culture, their love of truth and beauty and freedom, the basic values that they set up, their understanding of life's mysterious ways, their toleration of ways other than theirs, their capacity to absorb other people and their cultural accomplishments, to synthesise them and develop a varied and mixed culture; nor can we forget the myriad experiences which have built up our ancient race and lie embedded in our subconscious mind."<sup>40</sup>

Following such a viewpoint Nehru saw the advent of Marxism as an enriching guide to action which facilitated a better understanding of social phenomena. To this end he wrote, : "A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind, and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some sequence, and the future lost some of the obscurity... Much in the Marxist philosophical outlook, I would accept without difficulty, its monism and non-duality of mind and matter, the dynamics of matter and the dialectics of continuous change by evolution as well as leap, through action and interaction, cause and effect, thesis, antithesis and synthesis"<sup>41</sup>

Today the entire corpus of modern Indian Vedantic thinking represents a harmonious blend of all the positive elements in the whole range of philosophical thinking of the world; whether ancient or modern; oriental or occidental; materialist or spiritualist. Accordingly pro-Vedantic thinkers in the modern period demand that for philosophy to claim any significance or relevance it must pre-empt a concrete social reality which in turn results in a host of important socio-political implications for the modern world.



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## CHAPTER 2

### THE ORIGIN OF IDEAS

Philosophers, scientists, prophets, mystics and yogis in every age have grappled with the one most discussed, debated and celebrated problem: the eradication of human bondage which has dogged mankind from time immemorial. In their quest to liberate man from his limitations to a state of ultimate perfection, these philosophers and prophets have never failed to draw on a vast storehouse of ancient knowledge and past experiences, accumulated by their predecessors, and handed down from age to age, for the sake of humanity.

Even Sri Krishna (in the Gita) declares, "thus handed down from one to another the royal sages knew it till that yoga was lost to the world through long lapse of time, O Oppressor of the foe (Arjuna)"<sup>1</sup> Sri Krishna does not claim to be propagating any new doctrine or message, but is merely restoring and restarting the ancient tradition, long forgotten in the hoary past. Claiming only to reiterate the teachings of their former masters, Vedantic thinkers state that, "the great teachers do not lay claim to originality but affirm that they are expounding the ancient truth which is the final norm by which all teachings are judged, the eternal source of all religions and philosophies, the

philosophia perennis, the sanatana dharma, what Augustine calls the "wisdom that was not made; but is at this present, as it hath ever been and so shall ever be".<sup>2</sup>

No philosopher or thinker, no matter how brilliant, is absolutely and totally original, as it is virtually impossible not to be influenced by or to isolate oneself from the intellectual and socio-cultural heritage of the past. Taking this into consideration neither Sri Aurobindo nor Marx are original thinkers in the strict sense of the term. However, the manner in which both these philosophers creatively, interpret, select, combine and project their ideas and the ideals prevalent in a particular period in history demonstrates by far a rare and unmatched originality. Not only did Marx and Sri Aurobindo make constructive use of the ideas and concepts of philosophers and thinkers that preceded them and to whom they are obviously greatly indebted, but they display a greater and more comprehensive understanding of these ideas and concepts by extrapolating them to their limits. Apart from being influenced by a reservoir of past thought Marx, and Sri Aurobindo were equally influenced by contemporary society.

## 2.1 Conditions in the Nineteenth Century

Before actually outlining the formative influences on both Marx and Sri Aurobindo, a brief note on the period in which they lived and the forces against which they battled is more than appropriate. The nineteenth

century was an age of great excitement, activity and discovery. It was an age of science, technology, industrialisation, capitalism and imperialism. Undoubtedly all these new and far reaching developments have had a remarkable effect on the onward march of civilisation; leaving no corner of the globe unaffected.

With the great strides being made in the scientific and technological fields, the Industrial Revolution gathered momentum. Production of goods increased tremendously, leading to a greater demand for raw materials and markets. The search for raw materials and markets by the industrial powers had serious ramifications; for this gave birth to imperialism and colonisation. The scramble for the world and hence power had begun, only to be dominated by the White western world.

The nineteenth century was also a period of great hope. The numerous discoveries in the field of science unleashed a flood of creative genius. Science, it was thought, had all the answers, and could explain all kinds of phenomena. Science, reason and logic, it was thought, had manifested for the sole purpose of saving mankind from the suffering it had for so long endured. A result of the technology of mass production, was an era of abundance during which materialism flourished. And with the flourishing of materialism, religious fervour and enthusiasm dwindled drastically.

C.L. Wayper eloquently summed up the salient characteristics of this period when he declared, "the age was one of great physical and technological achievement. Marx is almost lyrical in his enthusiasm for its technical perfection... He writes in Communist Manifesto., '.... subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry, to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground... 'What earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour? It was an age that was becoming increasingly rationalist and materialist, an age which, at once valued technical achievement and confidently anticipated that such achievement would become bigger and better..... It was an age in which the products of technical achievements were very unevenly spread, an age of growing wealth for many and, so it seemed, of increasing, misery for more. It was an age in which religion was no longer exercising its former appeal and the world had grown colder in consequence. It was an age in which civilisation was not as impressive as technical achievement.... An age then, of achievement and suffering, of strident scientific assurance and fading religious faith, of apparent fulfilment and of a great and growing emptiness, an age of which it could be

said, as Milton said of his time: 'The hungry sheep look up and are not fed'..... this was the age in which Marx lived".<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Germany was riddled with problems, to say nothing of Europe. In France and Germany there were widespread revolts against the existing social order, with popular cries for liberty, equality and fraternity. An over enthusiastic Marx harboured hopes that the dawning of democracy in Germany was not very far off. It was in this period of an all enveloping ferment, of confusion, revolt, repression and of eager expectations, of a radically new world that Marx, instilled with an unyielding determination, worked tirelessly to transform society, and the world at large.

Upon his return to India from England in 1893, after having spent his formative years, an important part of his life in the West; Sri Aurobindo also was confronted with an India beset with social, political, economic, and religious ferment and turmoil. Amid this confusion and disunity of the Indian people, came the British, bringing with them their forces of capitalism, thereby openly challenging the prevalent feudal economy, and changing the basis of the Indian economic structure. Having come on the pretext of trade, the British

gradually dominated, subdued and subjugated Indian society by committing all kinds of despicable inhumane atrocities.

Together with imperialist expansion came economic exploitation. The destruction of cottage industries led to large scale unemployment, further causing poverty and starvation to reach alarming proportions.

British intrusion not only affected India's economic system, but had profound effects on her religion, culture, philosophy, and social system as well. The psychological and cultural trauma of British economic exploitation and political domination had undoubtedly serious ramifications. The Indian reaction to the emergent situation took many diverse forms. During the nineteenth century British influence permeated the educated urban middle classes only, who were exposed to Western political and social concepts.

Some Indians representing the traditional intelligence, clung tenaciously to the tenets of orthodoxy, refusing to entertain or fraternise with the intellectual ideals and cultural traditions of the West. On the other hand, Indian intellectuals, exposed to Western education, adopted a totally different stance. Whilst some of them uncritically accepted anything Western, dismissing the Indian tradition as a corpus of obscurantism and superstition others like Ram Mohun Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen; the Tagores, Swami



Vivekananda, Ranade, Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, recognising the weakness of certain aspects of Indian society, attempted to counter them by employing both Western and Indian ideals in their bid to find acceptable solutions to the contemporary predicament.

None of these personalities was satisfied with the prevailing circumstances and refused to shun their heritage but drew their inspiration from the country's glorious past, and tried to revitalize native institutions, as a reaction to the upheavals caused by European incursion. What must be noted and understood, is that the intellectual ferment caused by the meeting, or rather collision, of European and Indian cultures, stimulated Indian society to reassert and revitalize itself.

Panicker has the following to say about the nineteenth century: "The issue raised in this period was the confrontation of the superior, expanding and highly dynamic civilisation, with an old static and as it appeared, decaying culture... Hindu society was thus confronted with a dynamic civilisation, which was convinced not only of its own incomparable moral greatness, economic strength, technological and scientific superiority but was moved by a firm belief that the form of life it represented was the final one to which all others must conform. This was in some way a graver challenge than the two previous ones. If she

failed to meet it, the danger was not that Hinduism might disappear, as in the 14th century, but that Indians, as a people, might for all times, fall back in the race for progress and be reduced to a position of a semi-civilised, ineffective people with no contribution to make to the world. The philosophies of ancient India might be studied by the curious and the scholarly as the ideas of ancient Egyptians are studied today."<sup>4</sup>

However, despite these trying conditions, Indian culture has an amazing vitality which has enabled it to withstand and overcome the shocks of millennia of history. Such a vitality can be attributed to the rational and universal dimensions of her thought, which evaluates man not in terms of the external variables of his creed, race or nationality, but in terms of that which is inalienable in him, the true inner self in all.

The Indian people, instilled with natural feelings of non-co operation never reconciled themselves completely to foreign domination. Whilst still in England, Sri Aurobindo took a keen interest in Indian politics. "At the age of eleven Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. His attention was now drawn to India and this feeling was soon canalised into the idea of the

liberation of his own country."<sup>5</sup> Fired by an intense spirit of patriotic fervour, the Indian's repeatedly and faithfully, despite setbacks and patient submission, demonstrated against British domination and exploitation.

Witnessing India go through a challenging era of national decline on all fronts, Sri Aurobindo resolved to contribute to her national rejuvenation, not only for the sake of India but for the sake of all mankind. After a halting and defensive response to the challenge of the modern world, in the first part of the nineteenth century, India rose to her full spiritual stature, due to the efforts of people like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Lokamanya Tilak, Sri Aurobindo and a host of others, too numerous to mention.

Whilst it is true that Sri Aurobindo could not influence vast masses of people like Gandhi or Tagore could, his vast collection of prolific writing depicts an intense optimism about the future of the human race. Sri Aurobindo's profound philosophical reflections which permeated his actions and his political speeches, and his realistic approach to the problems of life based on peace, spiritual legitimacy, and participation founded on communion, mutuality and fraternity adds an interesting new dimension to modern social thought.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Marx lived in extremely troubled times. Refusing to succumb to their environment they consciously and deliberately exerted their influence on it in order to change it for the better. The depth and vastness of their thought bore a direct impact on contemporary society, and left outstanding legacies which continue to influence human thought and action even today.

## 2.2 Formative Influences on Marx

To come back to the formative influences on both these strong personalities, let us begin with Marx. "Marxism is the tradition and practice founded by Marx. All thinkers in philosophy, science or whatever, work within historically established intellectual and social traditions as Marx and Marxists insist. They may acknowledge their debts by identifying some of their predecessors as superior to others and they may identify themselves by reference to predecessors as Platonists, Aristotelians, Copernicans, Cartesians, Newtonians, Kantians, Hegelians, Freudians or Wittgensteinians. They will certainly accept some theories from the past, such as empiricism, functionalism, behaviourism, quantum mechanics or psycho-analysis".<sup>6</sup>

Before attempting to establish the actual impact of various streams of thought systems on Marx and Marxism, what needs to be mentioned from the very outset is that orthodox communists adhere to the principles of Marxism with a kind of religious fanaticism. Such a dogmatic attitude compounded with the fact that it is impossible to strictly classify Marxism under any particular philosophical system makes it difficult to ascertain with some degree of accuracy the various sources which inspired Marx in formulating his school of thought.

Preceding the impact of the German philosophical tradition, English political economy and French socialism on Marx is the influence of the Jewish tradition. Arnold Toynbee, a renowned historian, illustrates the destructive Jewish strain in Marxism.

According to Toynbee the inevitability of the violent revolution which Marx ever so often speaks about is parallel to the decree of God which is also inevitable in the Jewish tradition. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Marx was driven by an intense quest for righteousness, for Marx, life was a constant battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness with no compromise between the two. The concept of class struggle can be attributed to this element in the Jewish tradition. Marx also rejected all that he considered to be wrong or archaic, including governments, and religious and social systems.

Another reason for the Jewish influence could have been due to the deep psychological scars Marx suffered, having been raised in an anti-Semitic atmosphere. For instance, his father had to change his ancestral faith just so that he could gain employment. "Karl Marx spent his earliest years in a family whose religious division was a witness to the way society's powers over men's livelihoods could play tricks on their self-conceptions, forcing them to deny their convictions. In fact, Heinrich Marx feared the effects anti-Semitic treatment of Jewish fathers might have on their children".<sup>7</sup>

Moving on to the evidently more dominant and popular strains in the sources and component parts of Marxism, it is widely held that Marx's "doctrine emerged as the direct and immediate continuation of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism."<sup>8</sup> Marx's postulation of historical materialism differs greatly from classical mechanistic materialism. The philosophical materialism of Marx depicts a much higher level of developments than the classical mechanistic materialism. Simply because Marx enriched western materialist philosophy with the achievements of German classical philosophy, a tradition which he was exceptionally proud of. Such a development on the part of Marx brought forth the materialism of Feuerbach.

It was Karl Marx who can be credited with highlighting and developing the sociological aspects of philosophical materialism. Marx also extended his cognition of nature to include the 'cognition of human society'. Examining the differences between Marx's materialism and classical materialism one realises that communism does not have its roots in classical materialism. Rather it is more or less the direct outcome of the application of Hegelian dialectics on French materialism - In his "Thesis on Feuerbach" Marx, clearly elucidates the major defects of mechanical materialism.

Correcting mechanical materialism, Marx's main objection is the status of nature, where nature completely enveloped all aspects of man. Whilst, Marx goes as far as acknowledging the fundamental priority of nature, he never loses sight of the dialectic. For him nature will always remain a dialectically developing phenomenon constantly changing and dynamic in its form.

According to Marx man is at the centre of all philosophical endeavours, since he is a productive being. As such Marx's philosophy came to be known as anthropomorphistic idealism. However it is no surprise that Marx was extremely sensitive to the term idealism, stating that German Idealism over-emphasized the role of ideas in human affairs. Despite Marx's strong

leaning on French materialism in his attempts to demolish the Absolute Idealists it would be absolutely unsound to classify Marx strictly under the Idealist umbrella.

He also found it extremely difficult to reconcile himself with absolutely mechanistic modes of materialism. Classical materialism undermines the position of man by reducing all phenomenon to physio-chemical and bio-physiological laws. In the Marxian scheme of things man and the productive principle are given priority. The production of the material means of his existence is innate in man and the material modes of his existence should therefore be used as a basis in understanding his other activities. Marx's materialism with its powerful emphasis on the human factor can very well be dubbed humanised materialism.

By far the most powerful influence on Karl Marx was that of Hegel who inspired the basic framework of Marx's philosophical communism. Seigel very aptly states that, "looming in the background of Marx's life was the giant figure of Hegel. Hegel gave the basis of his method and impressed upon him the importance of dialectics. He showed him that history is not a static product, but is full of movement, through which higher



synthesis is achieved all the while. But unlike Hegel, Marx never believed in an ideological approach, but in the power of economic forces".<sup>9</sup>

Commenting on the Hegelian influence on Marx, Radhakrishnan observes that, "Marx accepts from Hegel, the dialectical method and looks upon cosmic evolution as the unfolding of matter according to the dialectical pattern. His metaphysics is materialistic and his method dialectical".<sup>10</sup> Put more simply Marx merely transformed the Hegelian philosophy of history into a social theory. Hegel's dialectical method and the concept of historical necessity fulfilled society's development towards Marx's inevitable goal of socialism.

Marx himself states that : "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, ie, the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea". With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. The mystifying side of Hegelian dialectic I criticised nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion".<sup>11</sup>

A work which particularly influenced Marx a great deal was Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Mind'. In connection with this work Marx wrote, "... Phenomenology is ... an occult critique - still to itself obscure and mystifying criticism; but was much as it keeps steadily in view man's estrangement, even though man appears only in the shape of mind, there lie concealed in it all the elements of criticism, already prepared and elaborated in a manner often rising far above the Hegelian standpoint."<sup>12</sup>

Discarding the mystifying elements, Marx inverted phenomenology which in turn has led to his philosophic communism. According to Tucker, "Marx translated the Hegelian phenomenology into scientific terms, following a lead given by Feuerbach."<sup>13</sup> The inverting of Hegel was propounded by Feuerbach and merely adopted by Marx who had nothing but admiration to invert Hegel in order to try and uncover the underlying secrets forged in Hegelian philosophy. Marx was undoubtedly greatly indebted to the thinker who accomplished the revolutionary over-throw of Hegel's previously unchallenged system of thought.

Feuerbach's postulation, "transformational criticism" was also adopted by Marx who used this method as a standard for the search after truth in order to liberate man from captivity. Critizing speculative philosophy, Marx adamantly claims that this land of

philosophy will not and can not express even a semblance of truth. Feuerbach's book the "Essence of Christianity" restored to materialism a place of high esteem. Very succinctly identifying the main theme of Feuerbach's book, Engels states that "nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence."<sup>14</sup> Reacting to the main theme in Feuerbach's book Engels emphatically declared, : "The spell was broken, - the 'system' was exploded and cast aside.... Enthusiasm was general, we all become at once Feuerbachians."<sup>15</sup>

Hegel posits the idea that man is the revealed God whilst Feuerbach who inverted Hegel postulates that 'God is the revealed man'. An interesting point to note is that whilst Feuerbach confined his method to a single aspect of Hegel's philosophy, Marx, embracing Feuerbach's methodology applied it most comprehensively to all spheres of Hegelianism.

An important factor which genuinely impressed and influenced Marx within Feuerbachian philosophy was Feuerbach's conception of man. Feuerbach, who claims that it is in fact man and not God who is a creative being, wrote: "In activity man feels himself free, unlimited, happy, in passivity limited, oppressed, unhappy. Activity is the positive sense of one's personality..., and the happiest the most blissful

activity is that which is productive. Hence this attribute of the species - productive activity - is assigned to God, that is realised and made objective as divine activity. Man realises his creativity in the imagination by projecting God as the supreme creative being without knowing that God is his own externalised humanity".<sup>16</sup>

Such a concept of man has permeated all the writings of Marx and has undoubtedly played a major role in Marx's formulation of his theory of Communism. In doing so Marx was quick to realise, via the inversion of Hegel and the assistance of Feuerbach, the status and position of man in attempting to transcend his finitude and limitations, harbours a deep seated notion to become Absolute. Marx's communism remains an inverted Hegelianism. A sincere attempt by Marx to restate clearly and scientifically what Hegel had already stated in an otherwise confused and mystified form.

Assessing the actual degree of influence of Hegel and Feuerbach on Marx, Marx himself concludes that: "Compared with Hegel, Feuerbach is very poor. All the same, he was epoch making after Hegel because he laid stress on certain points which were disagreeable to the Christian consciousness but important for the progress of criticism and which Hegel had left in mystic semi obscurity".<sup>17</sup> Despite inverting Hegel's philosophy, Marx never lost sight of his contributions to truth and

being a great intellectual force will always be held in high esteem. On the other hand, Marx views Feuerbach as merely an initiator of the clarification of Hegel's philosophy thereby conveying its latent meaning.

The method of inverted Hegelianism was also applied to other aspects of man's practical life; the most important being the realm of political economy. Greatly influenced by Adam Smith's economic theories, Marx saw in Hegelianism a positive doctrine referring to the economic principle. To quote Marx, "Hegels standpoint is that of modern political economy."<sup>18</sup> Marx merely unravelled the economic content in Hegelianism which was otherwise present in a mystified form.

Repudiating Feuerbach's claim that Hegelianism was esoteric psychology, Marx stated that it is esoteric economics. Man's life is one of material production which introduces another problem, ie. the problem of alienation. Hegelianism only speaks of religious alienation. Marx went further, and identified within society economic alienation as well. Modern capitalist society is the focal point of human self-alienation, where man lives in a state of egoism. By way of criticizing the system of liberal production from a Hegelian base, Marx's socialism matured and developed fully as a result of applying Hegelianism to the English economy.

Apart from protesting against the absolute individualism of the nineteenth century which was based on private property and free competition, Marx also reacted against the pessimist school of economists. Invoking Hegel, Marx was successfully able to counteract the arguments of people like Malthus, Adam Smith and Riccardo, who utilised the inexorable laws of economics to justify the pessimistic view of society.

The collapse of the dehumanizing inhumane system of capitalist economy and the dictatorship of the proletariat in the transitory period can very well be regarded as the conclusion of Marx's application of Hegelianism to liberal economy. A clear comprehension of the dialectic of 'Hegels Historical March' was both plausible and powerful enough to predict that the forces of production will unavoidably move towards a complete annihilation of capitalism. Hegelianism was used by Marx to check the abusing of resources in the liberal competitive society. In a planned society, as enshrined in the final phase of communism, there would be no undue waste of resources. Evidently so, the final phase of communism was born out of the direct negative criticism of the English economy. Marx's communism can be regarded as the repository of Hegelian philosophy replete with the entire intellectual and cultural traditions of Germany looming in the background.

Sorokin, assessing Marx's passion to interpret all phenomena in terms of the economic, states that "in the German historical and economic literature of the middle of the 19th century, there was such a vivid interest in economic problems, that an author simply being within the current of the literature could easily come to a stronger appreciation of the economic courses. Marx and Engels were simply within this current and depended on it, in a degree much greater than it was supposed, up to this time. Their originality, as far as their general formulas are concerned, consists only in an exaggeration and generalisation of what other authors said before."<sup>19</sup>

The Darwinian Law of Natural selection also influenced Marx most profoundly. Commenting on the main theme of Darwin's book The Origin of Species, Marx stated that the contending species served as a natural scientific basis for the class-struggle in history. Also expressing a deep sense of admiration for Darwin's theory Engels declared: "Darwin transferred the socio-economic struggle to nature whence it was transferred back again to society (by Marx) To prove the 'eternal laws of society.'"<sup>20</sup>

Not surprising therefore, is the fact that there remains a number of thinkers who find nothing original but a hotch potch of ideas that have permeated Marx's philosophy. John Bowle in his book 'Politics and

opinion in the 19th Century' writes the following about Marx's philosophy,: "These three elements are constant, a revolutionary and optimistic rationalism; the Hegelian view of history crossed with Feuerbach's materialism; and the economic idiom of Ricardo in theory and Sirmoch (a Swiss economist) in social analysis. Yet Marx and Engels, through cosmopolitan linguistics, remained intensely German. Marx's mentality was always that of a revolutionary refugee and their eyes were turned towards their own kind. Nearly all their books were written for German workers in London, and directed at an audience in Germany, where the authors over estimated the chance of revolution.

"Besides these main currents, there is much else in their obscure and voluminous writings. They are naturally coloured by the intellectual fashion of their time. In particular, there is the usual mid-nineteenth century conviction of progress, through suffering, and the belief, already frequently observed, in inevitable and ascertainable historical laws. Comte and Spencer, Burcke and Bagehot and Lecky, all believed in them. Marx and Engels were in this respect in no way original".<sup>21</sup>

Summarising the total complex of Marxism, Sorokin aptly declares that Marxism is a "dumping ground for numberless atomistic socio-cultural phenomena, which



represent the different systems - in fact a congeries or conglomeration of German, French and English heritage".<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3 Nature of Indian Philosophy

Before embarking on the formative influences on Sri Aurobindo, a brief evaluation of the nature of Indian philosophy is necessary.

Apart from being criticised as a philosophy of dogmatism, pessimism and other - worldliness, Indian thought is not regarded as a pure philosophy, implying, therefore, that it is not an absolutely intellectual inquiry or theory. Contrary to this view Indian philosophy is very much historical, epistemological, metaphysical and even scientific in its methodology. Whereas, it is popularly believed that western metaphysics is mostly logical and mechanical, Indian philosophy is based upon a metaphysics of an extremely subjective and introspective nature. Indian thought is thus a blend of both scientific analysis and speculative synthesis.

In support of this claim Sri Aurobindo, having carefully studied Eastern and Western thought systems, emphatically declares that, "Indian philosophy abhors

mere guessing and speculation. That word is constantly applied by European critics to the thoughts and conclusions of the Upanishads, of the philosophies, of Buddhism, but Indian philosophers would reject it altogether as at all a valid description of their method. If our philosophy admits an ultimate unthinkable and unknowable, it does not concern itself with any positive description or analysis of that supreme Mystery - the absurdity the rationalist ascribes to it, it concerns itself with whatever is thinkable and knowable to us at the highest term, as well as on the lower ranges of our experience.

"If it has been able to make its conclusions articles of religious faith, - dogmas, as they are here called, - it is because it has been able to base them on an experience verifiable by any man who will take the necessary means and apply the only possible tests. The Indian mind does not admit that the only possible test of values or of reality is the outward scientific the test of a scrutiny of physical Nature or the everyday normal facts of our surface psychology which is only a small movement upon vast hidden subconscious and superconscious thoughts, 'depths' and ranges".<sup>23</sup>

The Indian situation is undoubtedly a unique one, emerging from its own fertile soil great philosophical systems, Indian seekers of wisdom will always remain for the greater part academic cum mystic philosophers. For despite its richness in reason, Indian philosophy

has always attempted to trespass the boundaries of reason in order to enter into the higher domains of spiritual knowledge. Such a situation flourishes on the Indian sub-continent solely because a philosophy that is not founded on experience, by the total being of man, and one that denies practical life, has neither fascination nor attraction for the Indian mind. As Aurobindo rightly points out, one's existence must be ruled by a kind of balance mechanism between 'this-worldly' and 'other worldly'. Including therefore, both worlds, the spiritual and the material in his philosophical system, Sri Aurobindo refrains from drawing distinctions between the seemingly irreconcilable nature of what he calls the "two ends of existence and all that is between them".<sup>24</sup>

Deliberating, therefore, on practical problems of human existence and suffering, Indian philosophy is not a mere satisfaction of intellectual curiosity or the quest for theoretical truths: rather it urges man to discover the inexhaustible wealth of knowledge that is inherently concealed in this very life. To the ancient Indian philosopher priority was always given to the annihilation of misery and bondage, and the doctrine of moksha or liberation in most systems of Indian philosophy denoting in one sense or another a transcending of this evil and suffering inherent in the world. Implementing the highest and noblest truths into the life of everyday practice was undoubtedly of

absolute importance, and it is no wonder that Indian seekers of wisdom consider philosophy as the relentless seeking after human perfection and realisation.

Rejecting any kind of distinction between theory and practice, Indian philosophy does not merely reflect the social situation, but is in fact a way of life. Attempting to search for and secure peace and human fulfilment from the complexities of life Indian thinkers, despite their preoccupation with the Infinite and the Absolute, never failed to acknowledge the objective empirical world. A notion almost always misinterpreted is that the Hindu ideal in this regard is to transcend, but not to avoid or ignore the social situation. In attaining the ultimate goal of life man transcends but does not, ignore social life for without attaining the highest possible harmony with his society man cannot progress spiritually. In a Hindu context therefore social life and the principle of transcending it is inextricably linked. Thus, Indian philosophy can never be regarded as a "toy, guaranteed to amuse professional thinkers safe behind their college gates".<sup>25</sup>

In this regard Hiriyanna concludes that, "Indian philosophy aims beyond logic. This peculiarity of the viewpoint is to be ascribed to the fact that philosophy in India did not take its rise in wonder or curiosity as it seems to have done in the West; rather it

originated under the pressure of a practical need arising from the presence of moral and physical evil in life. It is the problem of how to remove this evil that troubled the ancient Indian most and moksha (liberation) in all the systems represents a state in which it is, in one sense or another, taken to have been overcome."<sup>26</sup>

The achievement of the ancient Indians in the field of philosophy and religion and their relationship to one another are but extremely imperfectly understood by the western mind due to their own ambiguous nature. As a result of the spiritual urge and intellectual parting company and moving towards a purely intellectual and ratiocinative explanation of all phenomena, the western mind is not only suspicious but also fails to comprehend the mutually interdependent yet separate relationship of religion and philosophy in most Indian systems of thought.

Such a misunderstood situation alludes to the reason Indian philosophy is regarded by some western writers as incomplete systems of thought permeated with faith, ethical doctrines and mythology.<sup>27</sup> Clearly evident is that such a view not only reflects an attitude of prejudice and bias, but also a state of absolute ignorance and gross indifference.

Invoking Sri Aurobindo on this issue, he boldly declares that, "a right judgement of the life - value of Indian philosophy is intimately bound up with a right appreciation of the life-value of Indian religion; religion and philosophy are too intimately one in this culture to be divided from each other. Indian philosophy is not a purely rational gymnastic of speculative logic in the air, an ultra-subtle process of thought spinning and word-spinning like the greater part of philosophy in Europe; it is the organised intellectual theory of the intuitive ordering perception of all that is the soul, the thought, the dynamic truth, the heart of feeling and power of Indian religion. Indian religion is Indian spiritual philosophy put into action and experience".<sup>28</sup>

Explaining further, Aurobindo points out that, "philosophy and religious thought based on spiritual experience must be the beginning and the foundation of any such attempt; for they alone go behind appearances and processes to the truth of things. The attempt to get rid of their supremacy must always be vain. Man will always think and generalise and try to penetrate behind the apparent fact, for that is the imperative law of his awakened consciousness; man will always turn his generalisations into a religion, even though it be only a religion of positivism or of material Law. Philosophy is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things; religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are

essential to each other; a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth, degenerates into superstition and obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamise itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practised. But again neither of these get their supreme value unless raised into the spirit and cast into life".<sup>29</sup>

According to Aurobindo the separation of religion and philosophy remains but a peculiar European tradition. Maintaining that the highest aim of philosophy coincides with the highest aim of the true religion, the seeking after truth, Aurobindo asserts that religion and philosophy enjoy an interpenetrative and inseparable relationship. Religion infuses philosophy with a certain dynamism and philosophy serves to enlighten the scope of religion. The symbiotic relationship between religion and philosophy, which is regarded as the soul of Indian civilization, presents a unique and dynamic view of existence, in its quest for ultimate truth.

Although however, this might be a unique development, Aurobindo readily admits that whilst, "philosophy in India has been the intellectual canaliser of spiritual knowledge and experience.... the philosophical intellect has not as yet decidedly begun the work of

new creation; it has been rather busy with any new statement which would visibly and rapidly enlarge the boundaries of its thought and aspiration." <sup>30</sup>

According to Heinrich Zimmer many western scholars adamantly refused to acknowledge that such a phenomenon as philosophy in the proper sense of the term could in fact exist and exists outside of Europe. To those who subscribed to such a narrow view "Indian philosophy" was usually perceived as a "contradiction in adjectio" equivalent to inept illogical absurdities such as 'wooden steel', or as Hindu logicians would describe preposterous situations, like the 'horns of a hare' or the 'son of a barren woman'. To put it quite plainly 'Indian philosophy' was something that simply did not exist.<sup>31</sup>

However, true to the academic tradition we have yet another emerging trend. Challenging the belief that Indian philosophy is non-existent, Wilhelm Dilthey and other eminent historians moved towards advancing a catholic and more spirited view of the history of ideas and the evolution of the human mind. Although such men expressed the need to prevent or formulate a universal history of human ideas they unfortunately lacked the synthesising integral approach, which Sri Aurobindo, is unsurpassed for, to incorporate or reconcile the philosophies of India and China with that of the West.



Nevertheless, "they argued - as has been generally admitted since - that if a thinker of the order of Hobbes is to be admitted to your list of significant minds, they cannot disregard Confucius on education, state policy, government and ethics. Or if Machiavelli is to be treated as the first modern political thinker, something must be said about the Hindu system represented in the Arthasastra. Similarly, if St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and Pascal are to be called religious philosophers, then the great Hindu divines like Sankara and Ramanuja - who with a fully fledged scholastic technique expounded the philosophic foundations of orthodox Vedantic theology - cannot be left aside. And the moment you recognise Plotinus or Meister Eckhart as a philosopher, Lao-tse cannot be ignored, nor the masters of Hindu and Buddhist yoga. References to China and India, therefore, were added to our western histories of thought, as footnotes, side glances, or preliminary chapters, embellishing the story of "real" philosophy, which began with the Ionian Greeks, Thales Anaximander and Heraclitus in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C."<sup>32</sup>

Despite this kind of rationalisation many western thinkers still remained unconvinced of the existence of a "real" philosophy in the East. As a result of this many of them up until the present century are extremely reluctant to bestow upon Indian thought the exalted and impressive title of 'philosophy'. For 'philosophy' or

'philosophia' (in Greek), they maintained, was a unique discipline of an absolutely exalted nature which originated amongst the Greeks and was perpetuated only by Western Civilization.

Upholding the dictum that philosophy is love of knowledge or wisdom, it is difficult to comprehend why Indian systems of thought are dismissed as less than philosophy. Man, his existential situation, his destiny and his salvation have always been the cardinal concerns of Indian philosophical enquiry. The point of departure of all such enquiry is not the world but man himself.

Literally the word 'philosophy' is a combination of two Greek words ie. 'Philein' which means 'to love' and 'sophia' which means wisdom. Desai makes an interesting observation by drawing parallels between the sanskrit term 'mimamsa' which is adopted by the Vedanta tradition, and the Greek word 'philosophia'. Curiously enough mimamsa is a desiderative noun derived from the root 'man', which means 'to think', 'to consider'. 'to cognize' precisely corresponding in meaning to the Greek word 'philosophia', love of wisdom.<sup>33</sup>

When one examines the long history of philosophy, both in the East and the West, one is immediately confronted with innumerable explanations and definitions. And upon scrutinizing these definitions one realizes that

they are founded solely upon the individual approaches of the thinkers and philosophers of the East and West respectively. To assert therefore that no 'real' philosophy, which preoccupied itself with such fundamental questions like the nature of existence, the real nature of man, the nature of reality etc, existed outside of Europe is undoubtedly a spurious claim. Simply because both traditions agree that philosophy is a pursuit after higher knowledge and wisdom.

For Zimmer who views the situation from a different perspective there can be no debate. To this end he wrote, "there exists and has existed in India what is indeed a real philosophy, as bold and breath-taking an adventure as anything ever hazarded in the Western World. Only it emerges from an Eastern situation and pattern of culture, aims at ends that are comparatively unfamiliar to the modern academic schools, and avails itself of alien methods - the ends or goals being precisely those that inspired Plotinus Scotus Engena and Meister Eckhart, as well as the philosophic flights of such thinkers of the period before Socrates as Parmenides, Empedocles, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus".<sup>34</sup>

Plott also draws attention to the fact that, "in India, China and Greece virtually the same problems were dealt with almost simultaneously : the nature of the world, soul and God; the distinction of matter and mind and/or spirit; the faculties of the soul and the pressing

questions of salvation and immortality; the paradoxes; the beginnings of mathematics; the distinction of Being; becoming and non being; the importance of self-knowledge; the necessity of greater precision discussing the nature of God or ultimate reality; and the setting up of rules of conduct. And the answers in all areas were varied. It will be found that the full range from crass empirical materialism to transcendental idealism and uncompromising monotheism was developed in all three cultures of this period. All the possibilities were opened up, necessitating the later dialectical juxtaposition in order to attempt some synthesis".<sup>35</sup>

Contrary to popular trend, Indian thought should not be judged against or in accordance with western standards. For, as viewed against Greek philosophy, there emerges a brilliantly outstanding example of the uniqueness and the creative originality of the Indian genius which should therefore be viewed entirely in its own right. Granted that the problems of philosophy may have been similar in the East and in the West, one should never lose sight of the fact that the methods of philosophical enquiry and the development of philosophical thought differ greatly.

Analysing fundamental problems of human existence in a comprehensive and thorough-going manner, Indian thought had the advantage of being imbued with a synthetic outlook, manifesting itself as it did in an entire

range of traditionally well reputed disciplines like religion, psychology, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and the positive sciences. This kind of approach is common to both Greek and Indian philosophy.

Unfortunately, Indian philosophy subjected itself to a major disadvantage, of which the philosophy derived from the Greek tradition was comparatively devoid. Such a development can be ascribed to an almost incessantly blinding passion or preoccupation with the destiny of man. In Indian philosophy we see a wholly different dynamic in operation.

The existence of a very fine distinction between experience and knowledge, proved unfavourable to the developments of social conscience as well as of the spirit of scientific enquiry, which is essential to the proper conduct of the affairs of man's day-to-day life and to the socio-economic progress of human society.

Establishing itself, partially if not absolutely, on the relationship between experience and knowledge, Indian seekers of wisdom have defined philosophy as Sattva Darshana. Sattva Darshana then is not only a vision of knowledge but also a direct realization of Truth. Further philosophy being defined as a tattva - Darshana emphasized that philosophy is not a mere quest for wisdom but it is a constant and continuous process of self - identification and self-realization.

However, despite the close intimate and intrinsic relationship that philosophy and religion share, which makes it difficult to isolate one from the other, it would be absolutely erroneous to perceive the entire scope of Indian philosophy as being exclusively or even predominantly religious and spiritualistic. The Carvakas and allied schools of Indian thought, which are characterized by materialistic and naturalistic outlooks, and even some of the prominent orthodox systems of Indian philosophy, which cannot be called either religious or spiritualistic in the conventional sense of the word, stand out, thereby disproving the claim that Indian philosophy is absolutely and totally religious and spiritualistic in its method.

The aims of religion and philosophy are not contradictory, in fact both disciplines reinforce each other. Granted that religion is an inner experience and philosophy rational reflection pointing to the final destiny of man; religious concerns have never failed to subject themselves to rational inspection. Noting that reasoning and speculation about notions of a transcendental nature cannot foster exactness, it is nevertheless an integral part of human nature which calls for the verification of all postulations before acceptance. It is therefore the task of philosophy to guide and aid all those seekers of wisdom and truth.

Accordingly, Karel Werner aptly proclaims that, "there has been an advantage in the development of Indian thought, namely this, that philosophy has never become subservient to religious dogma, and religious thought has never ignored the results of philosophical investigation".<sup>36</sup> This clearly demonstrates that religion, like philosophy, examines all facets of life and is hardly uncritical of itself.

To conclude this brief account of the nature of Indian philosophy Theos Bernard succinctly summarizes the situation in general. According to him, "it must be capable of explaining all things from the Great Absolute to a blade of grass; it must not contradict the facts of experience, conceptual or perceptual. Its hypothesis must satisfy all the demands of our nature; it must account for all types of experience : waking, dreaming, sleeping and those moments which are claimed by the religious ascetic during his deep contemplation. It must be realistic as well as idealistic; it must not be a brutal materialism, worshipping facts and figures and ignoring values, idealising science and denying spirituality. Nor must it be predominantly a philosophy of values which evades and ignores all connection with facts. It must be comprehensive enough to account for every new discovery of science; it must embrace all the concepts of religion and other philosophical systems. All ideas must receive recognition and find their proper place within the

border of its synthesis, every fact of the universe, every aspect of life every content of experience must immediately fall within the scope of its mould. The march of science must justify it at every step.

"It is not enough merely to interpret reality as perceived by the senses; it must explain both sides of reality, the change and the unchangeable, Being and becoming, permanent and impermanent animate and inanimate. The emphasis on one or the other of these two aspects being about many of the radical differences in philosophy. The need is to unite them in a deep abiding harmony. All these conditions have been satisfied by the philosophical systems of India".<sup>37</sup>

An important fact to remember is that despite ideological differences, the essential philosophical unity of the Eastern and Western traditions lies in the fact that both have fully committed themselves to a scientific method, which places emphasis not only on particular notions which are typical of the relevant traditions but also on the question of how those notions have to be epistemologically established and logically verified. This common dialectical framework which allows us to apply the particular term philosophy to both the traditions also allows for the creation of meaningful dialogue between Eastern and Western thought.



However it must be noted that a development unique to the Indian tradition is a conscious attempt by the Indian thinkers to make philosophically established knowledge the key to absolute social redemption. Using philosophy as a sociological key to salvation, philosophical knowledge is obtained via the saturation of the realms of rationality coupled with an enquiry into one's intuition; demonstrating therefore that Indian thought reveals a striking leaning towards sociological causality. With the projection of ethics into ontology the law of retribution and compensation serves to keep in check the cosmic order.

According to Indian tradition, the schools of philosophy are broadly categorized under two main divisions ie. the astika or orthodox schools and the nastika or heterodox schools. These two different schools or systems of Indian philosophy developed side by side and co-existed amicably for many centuries.

The astika schools ie. Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Mimamsa and the Vedanta accept the authority of the Vedas. Interesting to note, however, that although Mimamsa and Samkhya do not acknowledge God as the source of world creation they are nevertheless

classified under the orthodox or astika system of philosophy. This clearly indicating that although they might accept the authority of the Vedas, their analysis and interpretations varied on other points thereby encompassing theistic, monistic, atheistic and dualistic views in its grand scheme.

What Indian philosophers might have lost in variety they certainly gained in intensity. An intensity which despite its earlier stagnation, reinforcing and strengthening the claims of past philosophical knowledge rather than challenging it, later led to the division of some of the ancient systems of thought into refreshingly new sub-systems with genuine and radical differences. Vedanta, an excellent example in itself, brought forth a number of different philosophies challenging and rejecting the claims of each other's logical arguments. Still, perhaps the most strikingly radical challenge to Indian philosophy and its heritage came from the materialist quarter which, with its revolutionary conclusions, upheld the primacy of sense-perception as the source of valid knowledge, and denied the validity of any scriptural authority.

Strangely enough though not one of the Indian systems ever attained the status of an exclusive dogmatic orthodoxy, for the orthodoxy of Hinduism has never been based on any one central teaching or organisation. Despite their differences, these systems are regarded

as complementary aspects or views of the one truth seen from differing points of view. In fact, the contradictions are more apparent than real, and serve to show the limiting nature of any single method of approach. Thus, Indian philosophy, being a blend of both scientific analysis and a speculative synthesis, demonstrates a unity in diversity in as much as it is a rich variety in oneness and unity.

#### 2.4 Formative Influences on Sri Aurobindo

Seen against the background of the nature of Indian thought, let us now commit ourselves not only to an examination of the influence of India's ancient philosophical heritage on Sri Aurobindo, but also to his own position within that philosophical tradition. Sri Aurobindo, whose philosophy is in harmony with Upanishadic thinking implores that, "the real Monism the true Adwaita, is that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect its existence into two incompatible entities, and eternal Truth and an eternal Falsehood, Brahman and not Brahman, Self and non-self, a real self and an unreal, yet perpetual Maya. If it be true that the self alone exists, it must also be true that all is the Self".<sup>38</sup>

The above statement aptly summarizes Sri Aurobindo's entire philosophical position, clearly aligning himself with Advaita Vedanta philosophy which is one of the

most important and the most popular philosophical system in Indian thought. Defining Vedanta, Nakamura states; "Vedanta philosophy means the learning and ideas of the groups of philosophers who not merely revered the sacred Upanishads and engaged themselves in interpreting those holy words, but who also pursued philosophical inquiry into their ideas, and came to formulate a number of systematized schools of thought".<sup>39</sup>

Undoubtedly the Vedanta tradition enjoys an exalted position in the intellectual history of India, passed down uninterrupted from generation to generation it is inseparable from the Asian subcontinent. Exercising an enduring influence on the entire scope of Indian culture, Vedanta, having its origins in the Upanishads and emerging as the principal tradition in the history of Modern Indian philosophy, affects and continues to affect all other systems of Indian thought.

For Aurobindo, "Veda and Vedanta are the inexhaustible foundations of Indian spirituality. With knowledge or without knowledge every creed in India, each school of philosophy, outburst of religious life, great or petty, brilliant or obscure, draws its springs of life from these ancient and ever-flowing waters. Conscious or unwitting each Indian religionist stirs to a vibration that reaches him from those far off ages. Darshana and Tantra and Purana, Shaivism and Vaishnaism, orthodoxy

or heresy are merely so many imperfect understandings of Vedic truth or misunderstandings of each other; they are eager half-illuminated attempts to bring some ray of that great calm and perfect light into our lives and make of the stray beam an illumination on our path or a finger laid on the secret and distant goal of our seeking. Our greatest modern minds are mere tributaries of the old Rishis-Shankara who seems to us a giant had but a fragment of their knowledge. Buddha wandered away on a by-path in their universal Kingdom. These compositions of unknown antiquity are as the many breasts of the Eternal Mother of knowledge from which our succeeding ages have been fed and the imperishable life in us fostered."<sup>40</sup>

In Indian spirituality the one thinker that stands out amongst all others as a pivotal giant is Sankara, who has become almost synonymous with Vedanta. To many scholars of Indian Philosophy Sankara represents the culmination of Vedic synthesis and the referent of later systems. As it is popularly held that the contemporary thought of India is either a sympathetic reinterpretation of Sankara's Advaita or a critical rejection of (the same), it is at this point necessary to briefly review Sankara's Advaita Vedanta.

Sankara's Advaita philosophy can be summarized succinctly in the following few basic concepts. Sankara Vedanta includes many features adopted from

Mahayana Buddhism, especially the doctrine of Sunya vada which stresses the relativity and impermanency, and hence emptiness of every concept. Being a system of strict monism Advaita Vedanta maintains that Pure existence is formless and partless. It is also infinite and indeterminate seeking to find the origins of knowledge via empirical means. Advaitic philosophy holds that particular objects are neither "real" nor "unreal" they are merely indescribable. This philosophy also maintains that the effect is non-different from the cause and that the Absolute existence is of the nature of self-revealing consciousness.

Basing his entire doctrine on the renowned passage "thou art that" (tat twam asi) of the Chandogya Upanishad, Sankara posits the idea that Brahman or Pure Existence has the power of manifesting itself in diverse forms without really undergoing any change or modification. The passage "thou art that" are not subject and object but are identical without difference like the real self or atman. In other words the self, the eternal principle inherent in man and in all sentient beings, is identical to Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, and hence, there can be only one Self. Although its identity has always existed, it has to be realized before a person can be liberated and hereby

released from implication in the transitory and illusory world of Maya and from the notion that one is different to, or separate from Brahman.

The world and its inhabitants are merely an appearance, conjured up by the play or sport of the Divine, and having no more substantiality than a dream. It is Brahman, the Absolute Reality, which influences objects with a kind of materiality, thereby giving them substance via the process of creation which is Maya. However "this power cannot be called Being (sat) for being is only Brahman; nor can it be called non-being (asat) in the strict sense for it any rate produces the appearance of this world. It is in fact a principle of illusion the undefinable cause owing to which there seems to exist a material world comprehending distinct individual existences. Being associated with this principle of illusion, Brahman is enabled to project the appearance of the world in the same way a magician is enabled by his incomprehensible magical power to produce illusory appearances of animate and inanimate beings".<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the universe appears real only on account of the presence of the real and all intelligent Brahman. It is only that which exists eternally in the same state and condition that qualifies to be regarded as real. But such is not the case with this universe. Everything contained in it suffers change at every

moment. Therefore the universe is not real. The universe is not eternal and independent nor is it a part of Brahman. Rather it is a part of Brahman's power thereby making it subject to the Divine Will. Commenting on the creation of the universe which is believed to have resulted from one of Brahman's many sports, devoid of purpose, Sankara writes, "analogously, the activity of the Lord also may be supposed to be mere sport, proceeding from his own nature, without reference to any purpose. For on the ground neither of reason nor of Scripture can we construe any other purpose of the Lord. Nor can his nature be questioned. Although the creation of this world appears to us a weighty and difficult undertaking, it is mere play to the Lord, whose power is unlimited".<sup>42</sup>

Having accepted the truth of the Brahman from the Upanishads Sankara treats the world as Maya which has no existence at the level of Brahman. Hence all the other Vedantins, except Sankara maintain that the object of illusion is a form of the real. Moving beyond the Vedanta of Sankara thereby liberating Indian philosophy of the charge of being life-negating and illusionistic, Sri Aurobindo upholds in contradistinction to the adherents of the Mayavada of Sankara, the reality of this universe.



Pulingandla, interestingly enough, who refutes Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Sankara's Vedanta, implores that nowhere in his philosophy does Sankara state that the universe is unreal and illusory. On the contrary, employing the concept of sublation Sankara elucidates that the world is neither real nor unreal. He further acknowledges the fact that his teachings issue forth from the distinction he draws between lower and higher truths.

According to Pulingandla, Sri Aurobindo's adoption of this dominant western view of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta indicates clearly the influence of the West on him. In his attempt to rationalize Sri Aurobindo's position on Sankara Vedanta, Pulingandla claims that, "it is possible that in his enthusiasm to synthesize Hindu and western modes of thought Sri Aurobindo hastily and mistakenly identifies Sankara's Mayavada with the subjective idealism of Berkeley, which undoubtedly stands in sharp contrast to the realism of the Western philosophical tradition in general".<sup>43</sup>

However in defence of his own position, highlighting the positive significance and value of the cosmic existence, and attacking Sankara's denial of the existence of the material world, Sri Aurobindo states that the defenders of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta, "want to show that Sankara was not so savagely illusionist as he is represented that he gave a certain temporary

reality to the world, admitted Shakti, etc. But these (supposing he made them) are concessions inconsistent with the logic of his own philosophy which is that only the Brahman exists and the rest is ignorance and illusion. The rest has only a temporary and therefore an illusory reality in Maya. He further maintained that Brahman could not be reached by works. If that was not his philosophy, I should like to know what was his philosophy. At any rate that was how his philosophy has been understood by people. Now that the general turn is away from the rigorous illusionism, many of them Adwaitins seem to want to hedge and make Sankara hedge with them".<sup>44</sup>

According to Sri Aurobindo there exists a Realistic Advaita as enshrined in the philosophy of his work 'The Life Divine' as well as an illusionist Advaita as purported by Sankara. Describing Sankara's philosophy as 'qualified Illusionism', Sri Aurobindo substantiates his stance by asserting that Sankara postulates a qualified reality for Maya despite the fact that Maya is regarded as an uncomprehensible unfathomable mystery. Acknowledging that the entire universe is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real, Sri Aurobindo adheres to his own system of Advaitism which is a strict monism rather than qualified illusionism.

"If the one is pre-eminently real, "the others", the many are not unreal. The world is not a figment of the Mind. Unity is the eternal truth of things, diversity a play of the unity. The sense of unity has therefore been termed knowledge, Vidya, the sense of diversity ignorance, Avidya. But diversity is not false except when it is divorced from the sense of its true and eternal unity".<sup>45</sup>

Still dwelling on SanKara's philosophy of Qualified Illusionism which further implies a qualified reality of Maya, Sri Aurobindo points out the two different orders of reality ie. the Brahman of Pure Existence which is absolute and infinite and the Brahman which dwells in Maya which is phenomenal and transcient. To this end Sri Aurobindo writes, "here we get a reality for ourselves and the universe; for the individual self is really Brahman; it is Brahman who within the field of Maya seems phenomenally to be subjected to her as the individual and in the end releases the relative and phenomenal individual into his eternal and true being. In the temporal field of relativities, our experience of the Brahman who has become all beings, the Eternal who has become universal and individual is also valid; it is indeed a middle step of the movement in Maya towards liberation from Maya. The universe too and its experiences are real for the consciousness in Time, and that consciousness is real".<sup>46</sup>

Malkani, an ardent disciple of SanKara Vedanta, strongly rejects Sri Aurobindo's categorization of SanKara being a Qualified Illusionist. According to him Sri Aurobindo failed to grasp the real message of SanKara's Maya - vada. Brahman is the only existing reality since it is beyond contradiction or change. The universe, which is devoid of such characteristics is super-imposed on the Brahman and as such is regarded as an appearance or an illusion.

Such an appearance or illusion according to Malkani does not exist in time, neither at the end nor at the beginning. It only appears to exist in the middle. Further, Malkani proclaims that, "Brahman exists in all the three times - past, present, and future, - and the world only in the middle. Brahman is therefore its essence, or tatva. The world on the other hand, since it comes out of Brahman and disappears into Him, and since it has no independent being is only an illusory appearance and so unreal. Thus for Advaitism Brahman is the only reality, and Brahman does not contain the world in any form or at any time. Even when the world appears, it appears falsely and illusorily, and it is not therefore really contained. Brahman is always pure and unmixed with the world. The world does not really exist in Him even in subtle form".<sup>47</sup>

For SanKara, Brahman is static, passive, non-creative and immutable, and as such he felt compelled to explain the world as either Maya or superimposed on the Brahman. Simply because he could not find any means of reconciling the idea of static consciousness with the projected and manifold universe. On the other hand, whilst tentatively agreeing that this illusion is true, Sri Aurobindo draws attention to the fact that although one might accept the truth upon which the philosophies of the supracosmic Absolute are founded, illusionism despite contesting its ultimate conclusions can still be viewed as a plausible explanation as to how the soul envisages things in a spiritual - pragmatic experience in its bid to become one with the Absolute. However despite this becoming being real, Sri Aurobindo cautions that this too cannot be regarded as a complete philosophy of existence.

Thus, it is clearly evident that Sri Aurobindo understands more comprehensively the Advaitism of Sankara than Malkani and for this reason has transcended the limits of Sankara's philosophy. In doing so Sri Aurobindo observes that the theory of Maya, interpreted as illusion or the unreality of the universe, creates a bigger difficulty than it solves, for it renders the entire problem of cosmic existence forever insoluble, thereby nullifying everything, including ourselves and the universe.

While accepting the initial stages of evolution in SaKara's Maya-vada, Sri Aurobindo rejects the later developments concluding that his method of inspection, beyond the finite mind yields an erroneous analysis of the Absolute Reality. Advaita Vedanta incorrectly holds that God and his powers are unreal; the Absolute alone is real. But the Absolute, devoid of force or power is empty, and as such cannot bring forth or maintain the universe. With force being conceived as unreal within Advaita Vedanta it in turn professes a false power called Maya. However, failing dismally to provide a sound relation between Brahman and Maya, SaKara views divine consciousness and Force as being separate entities thereby presenting us with a negative conception of the Absolute.

For Sri Aurobindo, the Absolute is both static and dynamic, Being and becoming, consciousness and force. Force which is the inherent essence of the Absolute possesses a real and creative power via which the Absolute creates the cosmos. Repudiating SaKara's postulation Sri Aurobindo, aligning himself with the theory most lauded by the ancient Indian mind states that, "Force is inherent in Existence. Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest, it exists none the less and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered. This reply is so

entirely rational and in accordance with the nature of things that we need not hesitate to accept it. For it is impossible, because contradictory of reason, to suppose that Force, is a thing alien to the one and infinite existence and entered into it from outside or was non-existent and arose in it at some point in Time. Even the Illusionist theory must admit that Maya, the power of self - illusion in Brahman, is potentially eternal in eternal Being and then the sole question is it's manifestation or non-manifestation".<sup>48</sup>

Affirming further that evolution is merely a process of the progressive self - manifestation of the Absolute, Sri Aurobindo claims that "the universe is real. If it does not reveal to us in its forms and powers the Reality that it is, if it seems only a persistent and yet changing movement in Space and Time, this must be not because it is unreal or because it is a progressive self expression, a manifestation, an evolving self-employment of That in Time which our consciousness cannot yet see in its total or essential significance".<sup>49</sup>

Whatever evolves out of the Real therefore cannot be unreal. And by virtue of this the force of Maya serves to act only as a veil or shroud concealing the real nature of things, making the inseparable seem separable, the illimitable for the really limited and

the free for the bounded. It is this Maya, the Maya of Ignorance from which we must escape in order to perceive the real riddle of Maya.

There does exist however a great difficulty in trying to comprehend how the Indeterminable can be both Infinite and finite, how the One becomes an infinitely diversified multitude and how the Absolute can be both Impersonal and Personal. On contemplating such issues the mind of logical reason comes away baffled declaring the universe to be an unintelligible illogical medley of phenomena. According to Sri Aurobindo, beneath the seeming chaos of the universe there exists an underlying order and what may seem like magic to our finite reason is the logic of the Infinite.

The reason behind the seemingly meaningless processes is a more sublime and lofty reason and logic which works in many subtle ways comprehending all phenomena that our limited minds are incapable of grasping due to its limited mental capacities.

It is interesting to note that the difficulties of both Advaita Vedanta and Bergsonism can be ascribed to these systems failing to understand the logic of the Maya of Brahman. In order to understand the logic of the Maya of Brahman one first has to try and understand certain basic characteristics of the Absolute Reality. According to Sri Aurobindo the essentially important characteristics of the Absolute Reality are ie.



infinite self-variation, self limitation and self-absorption. It is these characteristics which constitute the logic of the Infinite thereby making it easier for man to comprehend at least partially the workings of the Absolute.

Ascertaining that the Absolute is at once form and formless, finite and infinite, Being in the sense of many, Srivastava rightly observes that, "for Sri Aurobindo, being which cannot become is not the Being of Saccidananda. The Being of Saccidananda is wider and deeper than that, and the logic upon which Sri Aurobindo rests his case is not the finite logic which makes an absolute distinction between Being and Becoming but in which Being and Becoming, can both co-exist without any contradiction. Sri Aurobindo has made very clear that none of our logical categories are applicable in the form in which we use them, to Saccidananda. His Being is certainly one which embraces Becoming. Both are in fact different poises of Saccidananda".<sup>50</sup>

Thus whilst the Absolute is a harmonious unity of the Indeterminable and the determinable it transcends the two, describable neither by negations nor by affirmations. Profusely inherent in Sri Aurobindo's entire philosophical system is a powerful sense of integral unity and oneness.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of the Atman is radically different from that of SanKara's. In Advaita Vedanta the Atman is a passive entity. For Sri Aurobindo the Atman is a dynamic principle which controls and restrains our lower natures, permeating our mind, life and body. Accordingly when the Atman or soul assumes full control of the physical and mental make-up of man he develops a soul-personality. However this is not the highest condition of personality since it has yet to achieve the spiritual and divine states of personality.

Sri Aurobindo also refutes Sankara's conception of salvation. According to SanKara in salvation the soul merges absolutely and totally into the Absolute Reality thereby relinquishing its separate identity. Salvation is a state of absolute freedom from ignorance, bondage and suffering. By conquering ignorance via the knowledge of the real, man is liberated eternally from the cycle of births and deaths.

For Sri Aurobindo on the other hand freedom or salvation does not mean a mere escape from successive births, or cessation of worldly experience. Rather it prescribes a state of divine birth of man into a gnostic or supramental being. Salvation means the gradual transformation of man into God. The realized souls therefore do not merge in the universal Brahman, losing their individuality in it but get transformed into the Divine Being or Superman. Thus for Sri

Aurobindo, salvation is not a state of escape from the world but is a gnostic life on earth. For salvation lies in bondage and in freedom.

Whilst Sankara conceives of individual salvation, which according to Sri Aurobindo is an extremely low ideal, Sri Aurobindo purports an integral salvation. The Divine or Gnostic being according to Sri Aurobindo becomes omniscient and omnipotent. Controlling nature and uplifting the ignorant masses, the divine integral being, attempts ceaselessly to transform the entire cosmos. Thus the goal of evolution is not the salvation of an individual but the divinisation of the entire universe. Unless there is cosmic salvation there would be no freedom from ignorance.

It is no wonder therefore that very often the entire scope of Indian philosophy is generally regarded as being individualistic, concerned mainly with the liberation of the individual. Placing greater if not total emphasis on individual salvation, no system of thought has asserted the idea of cosmic liberation, the liberation of all human beings, let alone Sri Aurobindo's theory of the divinisation of the entire cosmos. The concept of Sarvamukti in Indian thought must most definitely not be confused with Sri Aurobindo's postulation of cosmic divinisation.

However despite Sri Aurobindo's absolute rejection of the world-negating trends of SanKara's Vedanta he remains nevertheless an ardent admirer of the latter's role in the philosophic and cultural evolution of India. Such an opinion can be attributed to the fact that Sankara himself does leave some room for change and multiplicity in his philosophy. This being clearly demonstrated by the emergence of the two most popular interpretations of SanKara's philosophy ie. whilst some neo-vedantins repudiate SanKara's negativistic interpretation of the Vedanta in his commentaries, others attempt to reinterpret SanKara's system in modern times in their bid to show that even the most celebrated commentator on the Vedanta did not entirely deny the reality of the world.

SanKara's Advaita Vedanta, though very popular with every Indian, tends for the most part to transcend their common comprehension and understanding. Sri Aurobindo's own philosophical position viewed in relation to and against one of the most celebrated philosophies to be born of the soil of India not only successfully but effectively highlights and elucidates Sri Aurobindo's philosophical stance within the Indian philosophical tradition.

To a certain extent one can safely conclude that the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy has also influenced Sri Aurobindo. This is clearly evident when one

assesses Sri Aurobindo's conception of the relationship between man and nature, demonstrating striking parallels with the SanKhya concepts of purusha and prakriti. The starting point of SanKhya philosophy is the duality of prakriti and purusha: prakriti being the basis upon which causation is founded.

According to the SanKhya school, matter or prakriti, is eternal and self existing. All things spring forth from prakriti except the soul, which has an independent eternal existence. While in the philosophy of Sankhya prakriti and purusha enjoy a separate existence, Sri Aurobindo interprets them differently. Prakriti is an executive power, blind and mechanical in nature; purusha is the conscious force and without prakriti in itself is static and motionless.

Sri Aurobindo refused to acknowledge any kind of distinction between prakriti and purusha, operating strictly on a monist basis. Further he advocated that this dualism upon which the SanKhyas insist, will work itself out via the process of evolution. Convinced of this Sri Aurobindo writes, "all antinomy of the Purusha and the Prakrti, that curious division and unbalance of the Soul and Nature which afflicts the Ignorance, would be entirely removed; for the nature would be the outflowing of the self-force of the Person and the Person would be the outflowing of the supreme nature, the supramental power of being of the Ishwara".<sup>51</sup>

Transcending dogmatism, Sri Aurobindo whilst not denying totally the truth of the duality of the experience of Soul and Nature, boldly declares that "the experience of their unity has also its validity. If Nature or Energy is able to impose its forms and workings on Being, it can only be because it is Nature or Energy of Being and so the Being can accept them as its own; if the Being can become Lord of Nature, it must be because it is its own Nature which it had passively watched during its work, but can control and master; even in its passivity its consent is necessary to the action of prakriti and this relation shows sufficiently that the two are not alien to each other."<sup>52</sup>

Sri Aurobindo also explains that to affirm that Prakriti and Purusha are the Absolute is a gross misinterpretation of their intrinsic nature; rather, they must be regarded as different aspects or manifestations of the Absolute Reality.

Although Sri Aurobindo and SanKhya agree that evolution is teleological, he rejects the idea of evolution simply because he maintains that it is based on the false and erroneous concept of dualism. Sri Aurobindo also strongly asserts that evolution is a logical movement towards that which is more than dissolution. So much so that he states that evolution is an

uninterrupted movement of the spirit returning to itself, not in dissolution but in triumphant fulfilment.

Let us now commit ourselves to an analysis of the extent to which Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is in harmony with or at variance with Indian thought as a whole. For Sri Aurobindo his philosophy is essentially founded on the Vedas, the major Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. It is these primary sources or scriptures that should be regarded as authoritative scriptures of the Vedantin and to quote an example, not the commentary of SanKara or any other outstanding acharya.

Remaining faithful to the Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo declares that the Vedanta tradition is innately comprehensive and all encompassing, taking into account the fact that Truth, though essentially one, is perceived differently, depending upon the standpoint of the perceiver. As such we have three broad levels of interpretation ie. Advaita propounded by SanKara, Vishishtadvaita by Ramanuja and the Dvaita school of Madhva. According to Sri Aurobindo these monumental Acaryas over exaggerate the significance of all three poises, to the extent that one takes precedence over the other. SanKara emphasises the pure transcendental existence of Brahman which is indeterminate, without attributes, eternal and Absolute; Ramanuja's Brahman is personal and with divine attributes and he comprehends

souls and matter within the unity of the Lord which he regards as related to the Supreme as attributes to a substance. Ramanuja rejects completely the conceptual nature of the world. Madhva maintains that God, soul and the world are basically different from one another and these phenomena have been eternally existent.

Sympathetic to all three schools of thought, Sri Aurobindo postulates an Integral Advaitism thereby conveying that Brahman or the Absolute comprises all three poises of existence. According to him, although unintelligible to the mind, because of its infinite nature, Brahman makes itself intelligible to our consciousness by real and elementary truths of its being. By the same token this Absolute Being is also the omnipresent Reality taking all relative entities in its all encompassing manner. After all, the Upanishads do affirm that all this is Brahman - Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman.

It is for reasons like these that an exhaustive comparison of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy with classical Indian thought, in an attempt to identify the formative influences on Sri Aurobindo, is not an absolute or an appropriate necessity. Such an attitude can be attributed to the fact that although both philosophies are founded on the same sruti, Sri Aurobindo's method of understanding these texts emphasizing and



exaggerating different phenomena and the final conclusions drawn by several other acaryas interpreting the same sruti are totally different with each.

Thus with Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Sruti in favour of the Reality of matter and the material world, life and mind, heralds a clear indication that Indian classical thought parts company at a certain juncture with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, and it is therefore erroneous to conclude that his philosophy is in absolute harmony with the traditional interpretations as postulated by the various acaryas.

Similarly, to use SanKara as a paradigm one can once again safely conclude that SanKara did not invent any new system of thought; "but only the restatement perhaps in a more developed form of a very ancient school of Vedantic interpretation",<sup>53</sup> which undoubtedly preceeded SanKara. According to Sri Aurobindo, "it cannot be supposed that SanKara invented a new philosophy out of his own brain, he believed himself to be establishing against attack the real sense of the Vedantic philosophy founded on the original texts of its canon and supported by the best tradition. Nor does any great thinker really invent a system new-born from his own intellect; what he does is to take up the material available to him in the past history of thought, to choose, select, reject; to present new light on old ideas; to develop latent suggestions, to

bring into prominence what was before less prominent or not so trenchant and definite, to give a fresh striking and illuminating sense to old terms, to combine what was before not at all or else ill combined; in doing so he creates his philosophy, though not new in its materials is new in the whole effect it produces and the more powerful light that in certain directions it conveys to the thinking mind".<sup>54</sup>

This view beautifully illustrates Sri Aurobindo's own stance on the origination and evolution of ideas. That no man, no matter how erudite can sever himself totally from his socio-cultural historical heritage is clearly evident. Interpretation and the socio-cultural heritage therefore is of vital importance, unlocking a greater understanding of the thought systems of thinkers that emerge from age to age in their bid to shape and mould society.

Claiming to interpret the Veda and Vedanta for himself, Sri Aurobindo advises that even the Upanisads and the Gita must not be regarded as the culmination of knowledge, though everything may be there in seed. The past should in no way be regarded as the limit of spiritual experience. To this end Sri Aurobindo wrote.: "As for the past seers, they don't trouble me. If going beyond the experiences of past seers and sages is so shocking, each new seer or sage in turn has done that shocking thing - Buddha, Sankara, Chaitanya, etc.

all did that wicked act. If not what was the necessity of their starting new philosophies, religions, schools of Yoga? If they were merely verifying and meekly repeating the lives and experiences of past seers and sages without bringing the world some new things, why all that stir and bother? Of course, you may say, they were simply explaining the old truth but in the right way - but this would mean that nobody had explained or understood it rightly before - which is again "giving the lie etc". Or you may say that all the new sages... eg. Sankara, Ramanuja, Mahdva were each merely repeating the same blessed thing as all the past seers and sages had repeated with an unwearied monotony before them. Well, well, but why repeat it in such a way that each "gives the lie" to the others? Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all, the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the truth may be an infinite process or at least, if not quite so much, yet with some room for new discovery and new statement, even perhaps new achievement, not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its contents exhausted once for all by the first seer or sage, while the others must religiously crack the same nutshell all over again, each tremblingly fearful not to give the lie to the "past" seers and sages".<sup>55</sup>

Although at a glance it is extremely difficult to isolate contemporary Indian thought from that of classical Indian philosophy, for the simple reason that

the main thread of the basic thought is one long continuous unbroken stream of consciousness, running endlessly through the entire scope of Indian life, upon closer inspection one realizes that this is not the case. That the ancient and contemporary Indian thought structures differ greatly.

Despite being excessively traditional, allowing many of the time honoured ideas, truths and values of the ancient philosophical system to influence significantly the general Indian mind, it would be grossly unfair to strictly classify the contemporary Indian thinker as being mere revivalists. On the contrary, whilst proudly upholding their glorious philosophical inheritance the contemporary Indian thinker is not only progressive, evolutionary and formative but also creative, synthetic and integral in his outlook, attempting most earnestly to carve out new paths and to develop refreshingly new channels of thought.

According to K Damodaran, "modern Indian thought grew out of the naive humanism of our classical philosophers developing through the centuries with many shifts and modifications. Its foundations were laid in antiquity by the blending of the beliefs and urges of the pre-Aryan primitive tribes of India with the culture of the early Aryans reflected in the hymns of the Rig Veda. It developed through age long conflicts between materialism and idealism; between naturalism and

spiritualism, and enriched itself by its assimilation of many new elements, drawn from Islam and Christianity and Western philosophy and modern science".<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps one of the most striking features of modern Indian thought is its amazing synthesizing capacity, enabling the two mighty currents of Eastern and Western thought to successfully and effectively coalesce. This can be attributed to the fact that Indian thinkers maintain that in order to develop philosophy to perfection and fullness, given that every philosophical system has a social philosophy in order for there to be any meaningful worthwhile contribution for the upliftment of mankind, there has to be an assimilation and understanding of Eastern and Western thought.

Outstanding modern Indian thinkers like K.C. Bhattacharya, RadhaKrishnan, Tagore, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, to mention but a few, enunciate this integral synthetic outlook. However, of the entire host of all these great philosophers, Sri Aurobindo represents the epitome of the most powerful and significant trends and in Eastern and Western thought is considered to be the most exalted thinkers. To quote an example of his western influence, "Aurobindo's starting with pure existence, as the first expression of the Absolute, his concrete Absolute, his logic of identity - in - difference would all strongly remind one of Hegels philosophy".<sup>57</sup> The parallels were so

striking that S.K Maitra wrote: "Hegel perhaps comes nearer to him (Aurobindo) than any other philosopher, either in the West or in the East. For it was he who laid before us the secret of the onward march of the Absolute Idea through the realms of Nature and History, treating these not as negations to be annulled or oppositions to be conquered, but as progressive stages in the evolution of the Absolute in Time".<sup>58</sup> Sri Aurobindo's integral Advaitism undoubtedly stimulates new and innovative forms of thinking that can serve as a guide for man in the modern world.

None of Sri Aurobindo's contemporaries were exposed in the manner he was to an absolutely Western upbringing and education. And none studied so faithfully and devotedly the assimilation and interpretation of Indian culture in its entirety. Fostering neither narrowness nor orthodoxy "the material out of which Aurobindo shed to evolve his grand system was in a sense much richer, vaster and more varied than that of any other of his great compatriots. His mastery of Greek and Latin classics not only enabled him to understand and write authoritatively on the ancient poetical and philosophical literature of Europe, but also enabled him to understand by comparison the classical roots of Indian thought, Indian Epics and mythologies, into all of which he dived deep with a receptive mind, and out of which he gathered new and precious ideas. He translated, annotated, reinterpreted and expounded many

of the creative, and non-technical sources of Indian philosophy - the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and the later Epics. He tried to grapple thus with all the basic problems of Indian culture, unravel the mysteries and symbolisms, and explore and integral point of view which would harmonize the divergent trends of Indian thought, and synthesize them also with the valuable elements of Western thought. He builds, with rare confidence, on the convergent spiritual trends, the perennial streams of Western and Indian thought".<sup>59</sup>

Another important feature of contemporary Indian philosophy is its powerful emphasis on this world consciousness, fostering ethics which is concerned primarily with social reform in the here and the now. Philosophy in India therefore does not merely reflect the present reality, but makes a concerted effort to secure human fulfilment and to giving meaning to human existence, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. Indian philosophy for Sri Aurobindo, "has always understood its double function." It has sought the truth, not only as an intellectual pleasure or the natural dharma of the reason, but in order to know how man may live by Truth or strive after it, hence its intimate influence on religion, the social ideas, the daily life of the people, its immense dynamic power on the mind and action of Indian humanity".<sup>60</sup>

The revival of the Gita's teaching of selfless action, surrender, dedicated service and fight against evil, ignorance and injustice has resulted in the release of a continuous fund of religious energy for social work. Whilst these life-affirming humanist values often expressed itself via the modes of religion and idealism, it nevertheless had far reaching positive social consequences. The fact that religious faith can inspire and motivate progressive aims and ideals goes largely unacknowledged. The Bhakti movement in India, though not revolutionary, was progressive. Vedantism too has both spiritual and political aspects. The numerous freedom fighters of India, in attempting to overthrow the political and economic subjugation of India by Britain, mapped out their course of action in accordance with Vedantic principles.

Although Vedanta philosophy is very often criticized as a philosophy with a strong metaphysical leaning it stands supreme as regards social and intellectual influence, especially in the modern period; transcending racial distinction, class status and so forth.

Instituting and implementing practical Vedanta, it was Swami Vivekananda who declared that Socialism was absolutely essential for India's progress and that the labouring oppressed and exploited masses should ascend to power. The future of India lay not with the ruling classes but with the suppressed masses. With regard to socialism as a political system Swami Vivekananda



declared,: "I am a socialist, not because it is a perfect system, but because I believe that half a loaf is better than no bread".<sup>61</sup>

The other condemnation of the pain and suffering caused by exploitation of man by man and the quest to uplift the human condition can be traced right back to the Vedas. The modern re-interpretation and re-evaluation of the older metaphysical concepts had important activist, dynamic sociological implications for contemporary Indian thinkers, who unanimously agree that any philosophy which is not in harmony with the aspirations of the people for positive change ie. economic independence agrarian reforms, industrialisation, freedom from exploitation and oppression, alienation, peace and socialism is undoubtedly sterile in the present context.

According to P T Raju, "economic necessities which are basic, are stronger than spiritual necessities. When the former are not satisfied, man feels their reality more strongly and may ignore spiritual needs. This is an age of economic optimism for India, and Indian philosophy has therefore to cover the values of this world, to which it should give spiritual direction and guidance... Philosophy should be made socially useful, and the strong individualism of our traditional spiritual philosophies has to be modified. The idea that man is a social being has to be seriously incorporated into philosophy".<sup>62</sup>

The influence of the West on Sri Aurobindo and hence the development of modern Indian thought has undoubtedly proven remarkably interesting - "Western dynamism, realism and secularism have proved a corrective to Indian thought, which degenerated during the past few centuries towards quietism, acosmism and defeatism. But even in her recovery from these undesirable tendencies, India has not merely copied the West, but has retained her basic peculiarities. We have, therefore, today different attempts to combine realism with idealism, dynamism with pacifism, secular interest with spiritual ideals, and activity with detachment".<sup>63</sup> Sri Aurobindo fits the above description: for whilst remaining faithful to the Vedanta tradition, he does not merely reiterate what is enshrined in the ancient religious texts nor does he unoriginally represent the doctrines of Hegel, Alexander, Bergson, Burke, Spencer, Mill and many more. Sri Aurobindo has ventured into a refreshingly new field which captivates the intellect. In his bid to develop a perfect social and political philosophy he has been equally influenced by the best of the worlds. However whilst Sri Aurobindo and other contemporary thinkers have always held that realistic and dynamic trends have existed in ancient systems of their own, the problem lying only with searching for and reviving it, Marxian indologists on the other hand maintain that if one delves deep down into the annals of India's

philosophical heritage one would be confronted by strikingly primitive pro Marxist doctrines which drives the Indian subcontinent towards the future that Marx prophesised for all of mankind.

Reverting to the origin of ideas and its evolution, one realizes that all thinkers, including Sri Aurobindo and Marx, are bound and conditioned by the social situations out of which they arise. Remaining products of their own social contexts, both Sri Aurobindo and Marx have their roots deep in the past and interact with the contemporary situation in their bid to effect some kind of positive radical change. In attempting to trace the origins of both the philosophies of Karl Marx and Sri Aurobindo, who evidently drunk long and deep from their respective cultural heritages, one cannot but reflect on the words of Henry James when he wrote: "Ideas are, in truth, forces. Infinite, too, is the power of personality. A union of the two always makes history".

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### CHAPTER 3

#### A SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter attempts firstly to delineate briefly the main conceptual characteristics of Sri Aurobindo's general philosophical system and secondly to outline his social philosophy. Immediate attention is drawn to the fact that Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy cannot be viewed in isolation but forms an integral part of his general philosophical system which not only embraces in its comprehensive scope all aspects of existence but takes full cognisance of their close interrelation and interaction with other spheres of social life. Acknowledging that Aurobindo's philosophy, though metaphysical in origin, has powerful sociological implications he continues to explain that the social existence of man is by no means an independent variable, but is inextricably linked to the total universal existence thereby maintaining a position where it's nature, development, and destiny are controlled by the exact same principles and processes which govern the universal existence absolutely and totally.

With reference to his enquiries into truth, Aurobindo firmly believes that, "truth had to be worked out first of all from the metaphysical point of view; for in philosophy metaphysical truth is the nucleus of the rest, it is the statement of the last and most general truths on which all the others depend or in which they are gathered up".<sup>1</sup> It

is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo's examination of the problems of social philosophy is not undertaken independently but invariably in the larger context of his treatment of the problems of general philosophy. Furthermore since most of his ideas are not strictly secular or self contained aggregates, interested students on any aspect of Aurobindo's thought should be familiar with their general philosophical presuppositions for a fuller and more comprehensive understanding.

It is no wonder therefore that many of Sri Aurobindo's themes representing different branches of knowledge are interrelated in an evolutionary sequence. So much so that different areas of history sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, politics, aesthetics and religion, all seemingly diverse fields coalesce, forming a single composition in which all lose their separate identities and form the integral parts of a harmonious whole. This according to Sri Aurobindo can be attained not by force of logical argument... but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge.

It is popularly believed that such a separation or strict compartmentalization of the various disciplines are borne only out of a practical necessity. The human intellect with all its imperfections and inherent limitations is incapable of viewing simultaneously the different aspects of the total reality and is therefore compelled to adopt a piecemeal approach.



It must be noted that according to Sri Aurobindo each order of existence ie. Matter, Life, Mind, Man and Society possess two sides or aspects, the side of phenomena and the side of reality. The phenomena depicts the dynamic and changing outward appearances of things, their actual forms, functions and processes based on their outer manifestations. The reality is a reference to their fundamental permanent essence, their underlying eternal substance of which the phenomena are changing expressions or manifestations. A complete integral knowledge of any order of existence should include the knowledge of both these aspects. But since Sri Aurobindo observes that it is not possible for the human intellect to comprehend both these aspects simultaneously because the enquiry in each has to proceed by a different standard or method, it is forced to separate the two and initiate each enquiry independently of the other.

Again it must be stressed that such a practice operates only for the benefit of the human mind which is incapable of viewing both the aspects in a simultaneous comprehensive vision. However this by no means, means that only one of the two approaches provides us with valid knowledge whilst the other is invalid and inaccurate. In fact both approaches should be treated as complementary attempts and for a complete and comprehensive knowledge both have to be blended, synthesised and integrated. Sri Aurobindo's main objective was to illustrate that the principles and laws which govern the individual existence also regulate the

social existence and that both have a common nature and follow a parallel curve of evolution to reach an identical goal.

When combining the knowledge of the social sciences with that of philosophy in an attempt to successfully and accurately study society, one must not lose sight of the fact that both these fields have to move beyond their present rational and intellectual and positive empirical levels to the spiritual supraphysical heights before they can reveal to us the true and complete knowledge of what Sri Aurobindo refers to as the 'thickly veiled secret' of our social or collective existence.

Aurobindo's philosophic explanation of social life and its development is therefore not founded solely on an intellectual or positivist basis but emanates from his spiritual vision and experience. The presentation of his direct revelation and living realization of truths far beyond the limited range of the human intellect are undoubtedly in intellectual form. But his ideas and thoughts abound with a supernal light indicating a higher realm of consciousness.

It is also my aim to demonstrate that the socio-philosophical content of Marxism, or at any rate its basic fundamental elements could very well be assimilated within the broad framework of Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy. The writer wishes to stress from the very

outset that this study is not a puerile attempt to classify Aurobindo as Marxist or to take him to task for not sufficiently being so. In spite of the materialist philosophy of Marx and the integral, idealistic thought system of Sri Aurobindo being two diametrically opposed philosophical models; leaving no scope for the two streams of thought to verge on the same point; in spite of their interpreting and perceiving the world in entirely different ways, by some strange co-incidence it is absolutely surprising how by sheer power of observation Aurobindo came very close to Marx and vice-versa.

Realising also the merits of a comparative study, in serving to enunciate and bring into clear focus the distinctive features of both Marx's and Aurobindo's philosophy, I have not failed to highlight the sociological points of similarity between the two philosophers notwithstanding their philosophical differences.

Despite the advent of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy, the synthesising of spiritualism and materialism being treated in some quarters with varying degrees of scepticism not warranting any serious attention; the reader is reminded that the basis of this comparative study revolves around the 'autonomy of psychology' as purported by Sri Aurobindo and the 'autonomy of sociology' as postulated by Karl Marx. Reflecting merely an age old, and very much debated intellectual conflict, the Marx-Aurobindo controversy is a sincerely committed attempt on the part of Sri Aurobindo to

show that the entire social structure and development is dependent on and driven by some deeper psychological force originating directly from that supreme Spiritual Being.

On the other hand noting that there is nothing esoteric about Marx's social dynamics, he goes as far as seriously attempting to elucidate the seemingly autonomous psychological phenomena in terms of a complex casual relation between the infrastructural and the superstructural components and processes of society. This clearly indicates that all great thinkers whether ancient or modern, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously influence and affect each other, so that they are neither completely oblivious of nor do they totally disregard thought systems or other thinkers - whatever their views.

Consistent with Sri Aurobindo's philosophical position of Integralism is his theory of Integral sociology. Let us now elucidate the main characteristics of his general philosophical truths, which as we have already mentioned earlier, influence and govern not only individual life and development but also the collective or social life and development.

### 3.1 Basic Philosophical Presuppositions of Aurobindo

Upon examining the general philosophical position of Sri Aurobindo, one encounters a powerful synthesis of the many diverse currents of eastern and western thought. So much so that it becomes extremely

difficult to place him strictly under any particular philosophical school. According to S.K. Maitra, "this meeting is not mere handshaking, but there is a real synthesis of these two types of thought in him. There is even something more, a fulfilment of what each of them aims at but has not been able to realise".<sup>2</sup>

"Sri Aurobindo attempts to consolidate the philosophies of the West with Vedantic philosophy in the East to produce an integral philosophic system. This integralist view disposes the mind toward a synthesis of ideas drawn from various sources, with constant emphasis upon integral understanding Aurobindo's integral philosophy is one which attempts to go beyond East and West in the sense of returning to the resources of consciousness to draw upon the rich storehouse of knowledge existing in consciousness in order to form a higher than has hitherto been realised".<sup>3</sup>

The term Integral Idealism is a relatively new one in the arena of academic philosophy. The common interpretation of idealism is that the ideas alone are real and all other phenomena other than ideas are unreal. This definition renders idealism a monistic principle in philosophy. Idealism is the exact opposite of materialism, another philosophical doctrine which holds that matter is the ultimate reality and all else other than matter is unreal. In spite of idealism

and materialism aiming to explain the same reality their methodology is absolutely divergent, opposed and even antagonistic. Advocating the fundamental unity of all aspects of life ie. the integration of values of life and humanity with those of mystic realization and spiritual self-perfection, the advent of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Idealism, is an excellent enquiry not in terms of mere academic philosophy but from the point of the emancipation of the whole race of mankind as such.

In seeking to meet the challenge of the present age via his masterly synthesising genius, Aurobindo whilst acknowledging that the West was handicapped by its extreme materialism, intellectualism and existential outlook, did not view Indian spirituality dogmatically. For Aurobindo whilst Indian thought is spiritual, it is also individualistic and static. To this end he wrote, "the exaggerated spirituality of the Indian effort has also registered a bankruptcy; we have seen how high individuals can rise by it, but we have seen also how a race can fall which in its eagerness to seek after God ignores His intentions in humanity"<sup>4</sup> Sri Aurobindo envisages the salvation of mankind in a more balanced and integral development of both the individual and the community. Thus what he advocated was a synthesis of both eastern and western attitudes and ideals in order to create a suitable fusion and harmonious balance.

Sri Aurobindo strongly rejected the view that the West was absolutely and totally materialistic whilst the East was purely spiritualistic. Both had elements of materialism as well as spiritualism. Therefore his message to the human race was not to perceive the West as being diametrically opposed to the East.<sup>5</sup> To this end Aurobindo wrote, "it has been customary to dwell on the division and difference these two (East and West) sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other, but for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference".<sup>6</sup> Emphasising his message more strongly he stated, "the safety of Europe has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unilluminated knowledge and soulless organisation. The safety of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental conditions in which that aim has to be worked out".<sup>7</sup> According to Sri Aurobindo this mutual interpenetration of the two great cultures would undoubtedly provide new hope for the future of humanity. A hope which prefers better human life based on a greater knowledge and understanding.<sup>8</sup>

Inherent in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integral development is a sincere searching for a unified common culture for the whole of humanity. Whilst drawing from a wide range of sources both in the East and West Sri Aurobindo's end product is a synthesis of

ideas of diverse dimensions; one which only a great philosophical genius, a true advocate of integralism and reconciliation like Sri Aurobindo could achieve. Charles A Moore states that, "Sri Aurobindo's philosophy provides two great needs of the time, namely, a virtual synthesis of East and West looking towards a philosophy acceptable to all mankind and second a rich full interpretation of Indian thought correcting abuses and aberrations, thus providing a point of view".<sup>9</sup>

In the light of this integral understanding of philosophy Sri Aurobindo did not express the view that history repeated itself and therefore urged mankind to be hopeful of progress towards perfection. History, he claims, is the progressive unfolding of the absolute spirit in and through Time which ensures an absolute unity of mankind by transcending all barriers that separate man from man. Specifically Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of history, "indicates the isolation and significant analysis of the fundamental causal motivation of historical events. St. Augustine, Hegel and Marx are also philosophers of history in this sense. They want to find out the source of the impulsion of historical movements. They may emphasize either God or the absolute idea or the forces of production according to their broad metaphysical and sociological assumptions but the type of work they are doing pertains to the field of historical and cultural



causation"<sup>10</sup>. Whilst modern Western thought has made invaluable contributions to the philosophy of history, the insight provided by the Bible, the Mahabharata and the Puranas about the factors that lead to the rise and fall of nations cannot be ignored.

Sri Aurobindo true to the spirit of his integral philosophy has undoubtedly been influenced by both the Western philosophical writings and the Indian classics in the formulation of his own philosophy of history. For no future could survive without eventual integration. Evident in Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is a conscious attempt to integrate the intellectual and cosmic outlook of the West with the spiritual and individualistic standpoint of the East.

Acknowledging that there exists no contradiction between matter and spirit, Aurobindo believes that spirit has to manifest itself in matter during the process of evolution. "The message of the East to the West is a true message, only by finding himself can man be saved," and "what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul".<sup>11</sup> Similarly "the message the West brings to the East is a true message. Man also is God and it is through his developing manhood that he approaches the God Head; Life also is the Divine, its progressive expansion is the Self-expression of Brahman and to deny life is to diminish the Godhead within us".<sup>12</sup> Thus the ideal

before man is to try and maintain a balance between his inner and outer experiences until he realises his true nature or spirit, becoming divine in perfection. Real and genuine integration is only possible via mutual understanding and assimilation.

According to Sri Aurobindo modern man is unable to attain the fruits of real integration and experiences a state of alienation and estrangement from his existence. And the reason for this can be ascribed to the fact that man's highest aspiration, which is the Absolute, is in direct conflict with his position in the world. Sri Aurobindo declares that, "for all the problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity. To rest content with an unsolved discord is possible for the practical and more animal part of man, but impossible for his fully awakened mind, and usually even his practical parts only escape from the general necessity either by shutting out the problem or by accepting a rough utilisation and unillumined compromise".<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the absence of reconciliation and harmonization of the higher and lower states of being; man is in disharmony with his world and his nature. However with regards to Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy there exists what he terms a 'double

negation '. Simply because this disharmony between man and nature is viewed differently in the East and the West and neither the East nor the West interprets it correctly according to Sri Aurobindo.

The emerging trend in the West is a vehement negation of a materialistic philosophy to recognize the ascetic philosophy, whereas the problem in the East lies in its refusal to acknowledge the material aspect of man. "In Europe and in India respectively, the negation of the materialistic and the refusal of the ascetic have sought to assert themselves as the sole truth and to dominate the conception of Life. In India, if the result has been a great heaping up of the treasures of the Spirit, or of some of them - , it has also been a great bankruptcy of life; in Europe, the fullness of riches and triumphant mastery of this world's powers and possessions have progressed towards an equal bankruptcy in the things of the Spirit".<sup>14</sup>

According to materialist philosophy which places emphasis on objective existence everything including epistemology, is grounded in matter. The subjective aspect of man's existence is completely unacknowledged. The Materialists subordinate the psychological subjective analysis of society with its deep inner movements and evaluations to objective necessity. Objective necessity which incorporates not only the physical geographical conditions of society but also

the different modes of production which leads to a wide range of economic relationships. According to Aurobindo the subjective experience is far more important and is the foundation of existence with the objective reality merely an outward expression reflecting that subjective existence.

Following Aristotle who maintains that the truth of a thing lies somewhere between the extreme views about it, Aurobindo concludes that the materialistic and idealistic theories cannot explain the truth of evolution. For him the truth of evolution lies in the correct assimilation and reconciliation of both the Eastern and Western philosophies into a cosmic spiritual and integral philosophy of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo asserts that the objective materialistic approach focussing solely on physical conditions and economic factors, whilst ignoring the personal subjective experiences is most definitely a one sided assessment of truth. The subjective and the objective aspects of man's existence, explains Aurobindo, cannot be separated nor differentiated. Enjoying an extremely close relationship, he maintains that subjectivity and objectivity cannot exist independently, nor are they independent realities. Being dependent on each other, "they are the Being, through consciousness, looking at itself as subject on the object and the same Being offering itself to its own consciousness as object to

the subject."<sup>15</sup> He who subscribes to this materialistic philosophy finds in the world of matter sensuous thought as the corner-stone of his existence. Sri Aurobindo labels the sensuous attitude towards life an attitude of egocentricity.

Although the attitude of egocentricity has of late been regarded as a valid standard of knowledge due to its extremely personal evaluations, it obviously fosters a false, inaccurate standard of reality and knowledge. For in its extreme, "this claim of the individual to be the judge of everything is an egoistic illusion, a superstition of the physical mind, in the mass a gross and vulgar error".<sup>16</sup>

Therefore relying more so on a physical sense of reality whilst working within the framework of an egocentric model, it is only natural to accept without question that which is physical and objective and doubt that which is a result of subjective experience. Sri Aurobindo argues that our rejection of the subjective experience results from the fact that it is unverifiable in terms of standard scientific method. "It has been implicitly or explicitly held as an axiom that all truth must be referred to the judgement of the personal mind, reason and experience of every man or else it must be verified or at any rate verifiable by a common or universal experience in order to be valid".<sup>17</sup>

Rejecting completely and absolutely such a stance Sri Aurobindo recognises the extreme difficulties one encounters when experimenting with the field of subjectivity for the pursuit of knowledge. But despite the manifold problems we should not be deterred from exploring the deeper depths and the vaster reaches of consciousness and experience.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that the fundamental purpose of cosmic evolutionary progression is in fact the total divine rejuvenation of man through the liberation of the entire being of the individual from the domination of unconscience and the limitations of the dividing, separating, egoistic ignorance of man's alienated existence. Having transcended this egoistic illusion one finds that there exists different orders of reality, apart from just the objective and physical. Our subjective and inner experiences are just as real as any mundane physical occurrence. However if the individual mind can comprehend a certain happening via direct experience, then it is ignorant of what happens in the consciousness of others, except by drawing analogies or inferences with its own experience.

Taking this into account one can only be really real to oneself for the life of others in relation to oneself has only an indirect reality so far as it only impresses on one's physical senses. "This is the limitation of the physical mind of man, and it creates

in him, a habit of believing entirely only in the physical and of doubting or challenging all that does not come into accord with his own experience or his own scope of understanding or square with his own standard or sum of established knowledge".<sup>18</sup>

In the light of his integral philosophy, Aurobindo, whilst realising that another more viable criterion should be employed by the subjective in verifying the physical objective, calls for greater understanding and a sense of judgement. According to Sri Aurobindo there exist two types of materialism ie. - barbarian materialism and scientific materialism. With regard to barbarian materialism it "posits the entire identification of the self with the body and hence preaches the pursuit of a sensational activism. Scientific materialism on the other hand identifies the self with the vital part and mind"<sup>19</sup>. For Sri Aurobindo, whilst materialism points to the truth it cannot explain it truly and fully simply because, "it lacks spiritual dynamism and can only lead to vanity, helplessness and despair. Physical science unaided by higher sources of knowledge can never lead to the integral growth of the whole being of man. No scientist or materialistic thinker can point to mankind its destiny nor the path that leads to its realization and hence sickness and dissatisfaction and disillusionment inevitably follow a long outburst of materialism".<sup>20</sup>

"That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that to is why physical science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race. Our true happiness lies in the true growth of our whole being, in a victory throughout the total range of our existence, in mastery of the inner as well as and more than the outer, the hidden as well as the overt nature; our true completeness comes not by describing wider circles on the plane where we began but by transcendence".<sup>21</sup>

Therefore ascetic philosophy moves towards the transcending of materialism, a primary concern in the East. Ascetism being grounded in mind rather than matter is but one aspect of the existing reality. The emergence of mind marks the advent of another new quality which cannot be exclusively reduced to matter or life. Sri Aurobindo who regards neither matter nor mind as the ground of being states that it is, "clear that a mind of the nature of our surface intelligence can be only a secondary power of existence. For it bears the sample of incapacity and ignorance as a sign that it is derivative and not original creative; we see that it does know or understand the objects it perceives, it has not automatic control of them; it has



to acquire a laboriously built knowledge and controlling power. This initial capacity could not be there if these objects were the mind's own structures, creation of its self-power".<sup>22</sup>

Mind therefore, being a created principle and a secondary power fails to comprehend the ultimate Reality and its workings. Mind, having been derived from the Supermind, bears certain limitations and dualities. In its attempt to know it merely interprets reality for purely practical purposes. "Mind is not a faculty of knowledge nor an instrument of omniscience, it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain in certain forms of a relative thought and for using it towards certain capacities for action".<sup>23</sup>

Taking this into consideration the mind therefore can most definitely not be regarded as the basis but is rather one aspect of reality. However Sri Aurobindo firmly believes that eventual synthesis or integration must come, where the end product of materialism and asceticism, two diametrically opposed polarities, will be reconciled. "The modern West has the material requisites, Communism has the discipline, and the East its ancient wisdom in the training in mystic illumination. Thus it is not necessary to see doom in the future".<sup>24</sup>

Expressing a passion for totality and balance, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy aims at catering for all types and goals of life, stages of growth and the complex nature of man. Still dwelling on the concept of integralism, included in his theory of evolution is Sri Aurobindo's treatise on the reconciliation of spirit and matter. For Sri Aurobindo the continuous upward movement of evolution meant merely the progressive self-manifestation of the spirit in the material universe. The spirit involves itself in matter and matter manifests the spirit from within itself.

The two aspects of the Absolute in Sri Aurobindo's system ie. the manifest and the unmanifest, the open and the concealed represent spirit and matter respectively. The Absolute which manifests itself in different forms of realities transcends its modes and manifestations.

In demolishing the fundamental dualism of matter and spirit in his bid to indicate their non-difference, Sri Aurobindo declares that whilst Matter is Brahman it is undoubtedly the lowest manifestation of the Absolute. The duality between Spirit and Matter is immediately dispelled when one realize's the different grades that the Spirit possesses in its various manifestations. Between the degrees of manifestation between Matter and Spirit are the principles of life, mind and other conscious realities. Matter evolves into life, life

into mind, mind into more sublime levels of consciousness, and finally into the complete and explicit existence of Spirit in its full manifestation. The duality of Matter and Spirit is therefore misconceived.

Thus in Sri Aurobindo's system of Advaita all realities are modes of the Spirit and nothing is conceived to be unreal or illusory. All realities are modes of the existence of the Spirit and all realities are forms of the Divine existence in identity but it is a differentiated unity of the different realities. Spirit is an organic Reality synthesizing a hierarchy of principles.

With regard to Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution it is at once dynamic and all comprehensive. The theories of evolution exalted at this stage both in the East and the West have attempted to propound and highlight the linear process. The materialist theory of evolution is based on mere collocation of material atoms. The organic theories of evolution have attempted to explain the principle of Reality in terms of their organic growth and process. Its starting point is from unicellular organisms proceeding to multi-cellular mechanisms. The creative theory of evolution which is much more improved than the organic theory does not however dwell sufficiently on the creative impulse. The emergent theory of evolution

holds space-time to be the ultimate dynamic Reality out of which there is the successive emergence of higher realities. Evolution within this theory consisting mainly of body, life and mind is linear, graded and hierarchical.

Postulating an integral theory of evolution Sri Aurobindo maintains that the Absolute is the primary principle in evolution, thereby making his philosophy of evolution thoroughly spiritualistic. He introduces a new concept in evolution. There are two processes or movements, the downward and the upward. The upward process is called the Evolution and the downward the Involution. Creation is an act of the involution of the Supermind in Matter, Life and Mind, and evolution is the process of manifestation of higher principles or realities. The higher, spiritual and Divine principles of consciousness get unfolded in the evolutionary process. The ascent of the lower realities and the descent of the higher, the widening of the former and integration of the latter elucidate the process of evolution in a most satisfactory manner. It must be noted that this process of evolution is both linear and horizontal.

Evolution, therefore is the ascent of physical nature, life, mind, spirit, being etc to the Absolute Reality granted that these lower elements of the world of nature are in fact expressions in different degrees of

perfection of the same Absolute Reality . As incomplete expressions of the Absolute Reality, there exists in them a certain drive which motivates them to complete and perfect themselves. Like Hegel, Sri Aurobindo views evolution from the standpoint of the end. But the end as propounded by Hegel is a purely rational one, conceived by thought. For Sri Aurobindo, thought is not the ultimate Reality, but there are numerous shades of reality above thought which have to be encountered before the ultimate reality can be reached. No end without a knowledge of the Absolute is competent to give an adequate account of the nature of evolution. This view of evolution assures man in addition to his own resources, the infinite power of the Absolute in his aspiration to rise higher and higher in the scale of evolution.

Although Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution in the ascending aspect, resembles to some extent the Western theory of emergent evolution, and though he also sometimes uses the words "emerge" and "emergence" their are also wide and varying differences. According to S.K Maitra, Bradley whilst trying to play Hegel against Hegel, "has been instrumental in introducing a principle which offers a direct challenge to the Hegelian philosophy. This is the principle of Emergence. The fight on the philosophical front is no

longer between Mechanical Evolution and Teleological Evolution, but between Continuous Evolution and Emergent Evolution".<sup>25</sup>

Sri Aurobindo advocates the old Indian theory of Satkaryavada, and the Aristotelian theory of causation as the actualization of potentiality. The theory of Satkaryavada posits the idea of a previous or simultaneous existence of material effects even prior to the causal operation. That which was present in the effect was also contained in the cause, for it was possible for only that which was only potential in the cause to become actual in the effect. The evolutionary process is emergent and creative. The higher and spiritual realities emerge in an in-alienable manner. The mind cannot predict the future course of evolution. The emergence of new and higher principles take place in a discontinuous manner. Disagreeing with Hegels postulation of the doctrine of 'continuity' Sri Aurobindo explains that "the human mind, which relies mainly on thought, conceives that to be the highest or the main process of knowledge, but in the spiritual order thought is a secondary and not an indispensable process".<sup>26</sup>

Sri Aurobindo posits instead the emergent and creative theory of evolution as opposed to Hegels continuous, logical and idealistic process of evolution. For Hegel the entire revolutionary process can be pre-conceived.

Denouncing the mystic experiences he believes that the mind is the highest Reality. The intellect is capable of laying down the entire process of evolution. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo states that the mind is incapable of perceiving the entire process of evolution which is discontinuous and creative. In Hegel we find continuity in evolution; the stages of which are determined by his reason. Reality therefore emerges in a logical order, springing one from the other.

Aurobindo maintains that the workings of Divine evolution are not intelligible to the mind. It is only knowledge when one is identified with the Divine. Hegel goes on to affirm that the Divine proceeds in terms of contradictions and developments. Man posits something opposite to his original idea and then synthesizes the two in some other higher reality. However Sri Aurobindo rejects this view of evolution in terms of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. The spiritual evolution cannot be perceived by finite minds. The free movement of the Divine cannot be restricted and guided by the logic of the mind, it is free, unfathomable, emergent and many-sided.

The emergent view indicates therefore that the evolution of the world is only possible via successive emergences of higher and higher consciousness from Him. They are really descents of the Divine consciousness. It is interesting to note that the theory of emergence does not deny totally the doctrine of continuity but

rather assumes a place alongside it thereby providing a complete or integral view of evolution. As a result of this thought is not totally eliminated from the grand scheme of evolution which itself [thought] evolves into higher consciousness. Thus it is based upon the premise that Emergent evolution is responsible for the transformation of lower forms of evolution into absolutely ideal forms. Further with the ultimate descent of the divine coupled with the ascent of man's consciousness to supramental heights, all of nature is wholly transformed.

"To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilight or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfaction besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world, which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realize the immortal life in a body subjected to death and consistent mutation - this is offered to us as the manifestation of GOD in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution".<sup>27</sup>

Bergson's philosophy of evolution also shares common ground with that of Sri Aurobindo's. The evolution of the world can be best seen as a creative process producing divergent forms of beings out of one basic



principle, an original vital impulse. According to Bergson creative Evolution is the most viable theory of the various forms of evolution. He claims that it can, "account for the building up of identical complex organs on independent lines of development. For it is quite conceivable that the same effort to turn the same circumstances to good account might have the same result, especially if the problem, put by the circumstances is such as to admit of only one solution".<sup>28</sup>

When comparing the creative and emergent theories of evolution postulated by Bergson and Aurobindo respectively, the crucial question would be whether anything really innovative or really new can emerge in evolution. Whilst creative evolution does not follow any laws or principles, conforming only to the *elan vital* that life has within itself, Aurobindo's emergent evolution is not life as an ultimate category, but life as a subjective supra - physical instrument of the Spirit which returns to itself under the supreme guidance fostered by the Absolute.

Creative evolution views life-force or the original impetus as the dynamic reality which expands, evolves and creates new ideas. But emergent evolution acknowledges an abstract variable ie. Space Time as the

highest mobile reality from which new realities come into existence via new combinations of elements with the Space-time.

The emergent theory of evolution is not a directionless process but a linear and unfailing emergence of higher principles in serial order. To this end Sri Aurobindo states that, "Each grade of cosmic manifestation, each type of form that can house the dwelling spirit, is turned by rebirth into a means for the individual soul, the psychic entity, to manifest more and more of its concealed, consciousness; each life becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in which shall make eventually Matter itself a means for the full manifestation of the Spirit."<sup>29</sup>

Bergson's creative theory of evolution maintains that anything new arises without guidance or direction from any conscious principle. On the other hand Aurobindo upholds the existence of conscious principle which guides the whole course of evolution towards the Spirit.

Despite these differences however both theories recognize the existence of a mobile and dynamic reality from which emerge new ideas. Also very important both these theories reject teleology and finalism in

evolution. Lastly creative and Emergent evolution acknowledge the birth of new realities in evolution which were previously non-existent.

Reflecting a fairly developed view of emergent evolution is the philosophical system of Samuel Alexander. Alexander's entire philosophic system revolves around one basic element ie. Space-Time, which for him is the only existing reality. For Alexander the entire universe including all physical events, life, mind and even deity emerges out of the matrix of Space-Time.

The doctrine of emergent evolution is a comprehensive system of constructive metaphysics concluded by Alexander, via an empirical enquiry into the nature of human knowledge and that of the different orders of existence, based on modern physics. The process of evolution which proceeds from lower stages upward flourishes and thrives on the lower. Alexander claims that, "each new type of existence when it emerges is expressible completely or without residue in terms of the lower stage and therefore indirectly in terms of all lower stages; mind in terms of living process, life in terms of physico-chemical process, sense quality like colour in terms of matter with movements, matter itself in terms of motion".<sup>30</sup>

By illustrating that all characters of finite existences, variable and invariable can be comprehended in terms of Space-Time Alexander shows that his hypothesis of Space-Time being the matrix of all existence is verified and justified. There is a nirus which evolves the Space-Time. Within this the evolution of matter, life and mind takes place. But the future course of evolution continues and there is incessant, ceaseless and interminable emergence of higher realities from Space-Time. Alexander's theory of evolution is thus linear graded and hierarchical.

The emergent theory of evolution as propounded by Samuel Alexander and Sri Aurobindo bears remarkable similarities. The most important point of convergence in their philosophies is the acceptance of the emergence of higher realities or states of consciousness and proceeding even further admitting within their philosophical systems the emergence of even loftier states of consciousness than initially evolved. Both the philosophers also agree that evolution is hierarchical based on different grades of reality.

However like all great philosophies there exists also areas of differences between their respective theories. The differences stem from their multifarious conceptions of emergent evolution. In Alexander's scheme of emergent evolution the old principles are devoid of change and remain static despite the

emergence of new principles or variables. Maintaining that, that and only that which is involved in Matter can evolve for there to be some kind of emergence, Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary process acknowledges that the descent of the higher is purely for the sake of the ascent of the lower. To this end he writes, "a manifestation of the Supermind and its truth-consciousness is then inevitable, it must happen in this world sooner or later. But it has two aspects a descent from above, an ascent from below, a self revelation of the Spirit; an evolution in Nature. The ascent is necessarily an effort, a working of nature, an urge or *nisus* on her side to raise her lower parts by an evolutionary or revolutionary change, conversion or transformation".<sup>31</sup> The Absolute is inherent even in the lowest forms of matter, pushing it continually forward.

Evolution therefore does not mean for Sri Aurobindo merely an addition of some new principles to the already existing ones, but it means that the old principles, by virtue of the emergence of new ones, radically transform their nature.

Finally, within the realm of his general philosophical outlook let us examine Sri Aurobindo's conception of Reality. Sri Aurobindo's idealism is founded upon that Absolute or Brahman which is the sole reality. The Absolute in itself is indeterminate or ungraspable save

by the immortal principle latent within us. The Absolute viewed as Saccidananda is the triune principle of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. It manifests itself in terms of Atman, Purusa and Isvara.

The Absolute is Conscious - Force or Citsakti which is inherent in Pure Existence. It is consciousness which takes the form of matter, life and mind. Consciousness - Force is the supreme power of Sachindananda, for without it the latter would be reduced to a passive and static existence. It is the Force that is responsible for creating the world, evolving it and manifesting the Divine in it. But the Force is not unconscious or blind energy. It is an entity which takes different forms of realities and causes them to evolve. The creation, manifestation and evolution take place because the Absolute is both Consciousness and Power.

As Saccidananda the Consciousness - Force manifests itself in three forms ie. Maya, Prakriti and Sakti as already mentioned. However interesting to note is that these three forms of Consciousness - Force correspond to the three aspects of Existence ie. Atman, Purusa and Isvara. Thus in this way, the Atma - Maya the Purusa - Prakriti and Isvara - Sakti go together in the Integral Idealism of Sri Aurobindo.

Bliss is the third principle of Saccidananda being responsible for the cause of creation, evolution and manifestation. The Absolute having no purpose in creation except for the sake of Joy or Delight is perfect, therefore having nothing to realise out of creation.

The psychic being or soul is the immortal eternal infinite nucleus of this principle of Bliss. Even pain and evil are regarded as the modes of this manifestation of Bliss. Bliss is all pervasive, pervading even the most inert matter. However the only reason for it not being able to manifest itself is on account of ignorance and inconstancy.

According to Sri Aurobindo the Supermind is the creative aspect of Saccidananda. The creation and manifestation of the Divine, takes place through the Supermind. The Supermind is the guiding truth that has the union with Saccidananda. It has also the power to manifest and create the transcendental and infinite possibilities of Saccidananda. According to Sri Aurobindo, "This all-controlling, all originating, all-consummating Supermind is the Divine Being not indeed in its Absolute self-existence but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds. This is the truth of that which we call God".<sup>32</sup>

For Sri Aurobindo the Supermind is not only the principle of knowledge but is also the principle of will. This will is the Truth consciousness or the real Idea. The will is the intermediary principle between the world and Saccidananda.

Reinterpreting and presenting in dynamically new and creative forms the ancient Vedantic theory of knowledge, Sri Aurobindo identifies and acknowledges different methods of knowledge pertaining to different aspects of experience. In keeping with his integral approach Sri Aurobindo investigates all the possible avenues of consciousness and experience.

Attempting to begin at the source of human knowledge Sri Aurobindo recognizes three different instruments of knowledge ie. the five outer senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch, the sense mind and reason. For Sri Aurobindo who refutes the common conception of the mind being governed by the outer senses affirms that the senses are only specializations of the outward mind. Due to a state of ignorance the mind seeks to differentiate between the self and seeks to differentiate between the self and the external world. Failing to comprehend that in reality these phenomena are non different.



According to Sri Aurobindo it is only via the mind or what he regards as the real senses, which underlies the five outward senses that man can seek to realize his real essence and his true self. Directly perceiving inner states of consciousness, the mind works independently of the five outward senses. Viewed as an instrument of multifarious capacities and untold potentials, the mind's ability to perceive outer objects without using the conventional senses has been adequately proven according to Sri Aurobindo in numerous experiments with hypnosis and other psychological phenomena.

Despite the fact that the powers of the mind exceed that of the senses, Sri Aurobindo is not interested in employing the powers of the mind to fathom out the phenomenal world. He prefers rather to dwell on those truths that lie beyond the grasp of the sense but within the realms of the perception of reason. Enquiring into the nature of reason Sri Aurobindo claims that it serves two functions. On the first level it draws from sense experience all the data about the phenomenal world which it then evaluates, interprets and interrelates with the aim of drawing certain inferences. On the second level reason attempts to transcend all phenomena in its bid to try and explain that reality that lies behind and beyond the appearance of things.

Operating above the finite sphere of sense experience pure reason transports one from the extremely physical kind of knowledge to the sublimely metaphysical. However it must be noted that although the concepts of metaphysics satisfy pure reason, it is not fully accepted by our integral beings. As such all ideas about sensuous objects conjured up by reason via inference are first verified by perception before it is fully accepted.

Commenting on the direct non-sensuous experience about the reality that lies behind phenomenal objects, Sri Aurobindo calls it intuition. Just as one becomes aware of the phenomenal world, by the same token one realizes that one's basic existence is a part of the Reality underlying the world.

Intuition points to the truth but cannot express it fully and truly. It is the faculty of Reason which serves to compute, analyse, organize and systematically express the various messages of intuition. Reason and intuition compliment each other and are therefore inseparable.

For Sri Aurobindo there exists a "fourfold order of knowledge". Such a categorization clearly elucidates how intuition is gradually transformed into separative knowledge. Firstly there is knowledge by identity which is founded upon our immediate awareness of our

existence devoid of any distinction. Secondly there is "Knowledge by intimate direct contact" which calls for distancing oneself from situations and observing from afar. Thirdly, there is "Knowledge by separative direct contact" which is characterized by separating ourselves from the mental plane in order to assume the role of witness to our states. Finally there is the position of a wholly separated knowledge by indirect contact which simply is the observation of external objects via the senses which essentially serve to reunite oneself with the object.

There exists for Sri Aurobindo a dynamic relationship between knowledge by identity and separative knowledge. Such a relationship corroborates the view that the knower and the known, man and the world are but expressions of the same reality. It is clearly evident that Sri Aurobindo's theory of knowledge is an integral one taking into account a wide range of experiences in his quest to arrive at the truth.

Thus in Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy both being and becoming, the one and the many, the finite and the infinite merely represent different poises of the one ultimate absolute Reality. The Absolute Reality within Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integralism is an all comprehensive one, including the truth of all the three aspects of Existence ie, the individual the universal and the transcendent. As a result of this the

conception of Reality according to Integral Idealism is not only indeterministic and non-dualistic but it is at once all-inclusive and all-comprehensive in its make up. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integralism is undoubtedly an Integral Advaitism.

It is popularly held that it is always the metaphysics of Reality which tends to advance the conception of the world. The idealist thinkers postulate their own conception of the world and Reality. For instance Platonic Idealism, being the most popular in western thought, distinguishes the world of reality from the world of ideas. For Plato the world of reality is the world of objects which is non-eternal whereas the world of Ideas which is the archetypal world is eternal. Clearly evident in his theory of the world is the element of dualism. Placing more emphasis and importance on the rational cosmos than the real cosmos, Plato failed to reconcile the dualism between the rational cosmos and the real cosmos.

Following the lines of Platonic Idealism we encounter a similar dualism in the Idealism of Kant. Kant identifies a distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds. The noumena Kant categorises as an objective reality which is unknowable whilst the phenomena which can be known through sense and reason are unreal. Kant maintains that the present world is a world of appearance, known as the phenomenal world

denoting that all knowledge is limited to phenomena. Placing more emphasis on the noumenal reality Kant neglected the phenomenal world.

Whilst the world of phenomena is diverse, the world of noumena is one and unitary. Kant maintains that it is easy to follow and understand the phenomenal world since the phenomena can be intelligible via sense experience. However this is not the case with the Noumenal world since the Noumena depend on Will and Intuition. Kant also imposes a limiting concept upon reason whilst extolling the principle of will.

Maintaining that the categories of knowledge ie. sense, reason and will are in fact manifestations of the same Noumena, Kant ascribes to each one of them an independent status and treats each one of them as separate entities. Such an approach has caused untold confusion in his philosophical system. As a result of this there exists no real or genuine reconciliation between the two contending or divergent concepts. Kant fails therefore to reconcile the two worlds of will and reason in his transcendental idealism.

In Indian philosophy, the Idealism of Sankara is quite analogous to that of Kant. Sankara's Advaita philosophy can be summarized succinctly in the following few basic concepts. Sankara Vedanta includes many features adopted from Mahayana Buddhism, especially the doctrine of sunyavada which stresses the

reality and impermanency, and hence emptiness, of every concept. Being a system of strict monism Advaita Vedanta maintains that Pure Existence is formless and pointless. It is also Infinite and indeterminate. Seeking to find the origins of knowledge via empirical means, Advaitic philosophy holds that particular objects are neither 'real' nor 'unreal', they are merely indescribable. Advaita also holds that the effect is non-different from the cause and that the Absolute existence is of the nature of self-revealing consciousness.

For Sri Aurobindo, Sankara Vedanta postulates that the world and its habitants are merely an appearance, conjured up by the play or sport of the Divine, and having no more substantiality than a dream. On the other hand Sankara maintains that Brahman is the absolute Reality; infusing objects with a kind of materiality thereby giving them substance via the process of creation which is Maya. At this point Sankara admits an inconsistency in his philosophical system. It is not true to say that God and the world are real, neither is it true to affirm that the world is in God from the point of view of Sankara. Thus Sri Aurobindo would conclude that the only alternative left with Sankara was to reject the world and consider it to be the product of Maya or illusion. Rejecting the validity of the phenomenal world Sankara acknowledges only the absoluteness of the noumenal Reality. Sankara

maintains that although Maya is an integral part of Brahman, Brahman remains unaffected by it. For the ignorant Maya was real and only a transcendence of ignorance brought with it a realization that Brahman alone was the only real and ultimate Reality. As a result of this the idealism of Sankara is not only incomplete but also inconsistent according to Sri Aurobindo.

With regard to Sri Aurobindo he accepts both the reality of the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. Enshrined in the philosophy of his work "The Life Divine" there exists a Realistic Advaita as well as an Illusionist Advaita as purported by Sankara. Describing Sankara's philosophy as "Qualified Illusionism" Aurobindo substantiates his stance by asserting that Sankara postulates a qualified reality for Maya despite the fact that Maya is regarded as an incomprehensible unfathomable mystery. Acknowledging that the entire universe is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real, Sri Aurobindo adheres to his own system of Advaitism which is a strict monism rather than qualified illusionism.

"If the one is pre-eminently real, 'the other's the Many, are not unreal. The world, is not a figment of the Mind. Unity is, the eternal truth of things, diversity a play of the Unity. The sense of unity has therefore been termed knowledge, Vidya, the sense of

diversity Ignorance, Avidya. But diversity is not false except when it is divorced from the sense of its true and eternal unity".<sup>33</sup>

Despite being a trenchant critic of Sankara Vedanta Aurobindo writes, : "I trust I shall not be considered as wanting in reverence for the greatest of Indian philosophers, - in my opinion the greatest of all philosophers. In profundity, subtlety and loftiness Sankara has no equal; he is not so supreme in breadth and flexibility of understanding. His was a spirit visited with some marvellous intuitions and realization, but it would be to limit the capacities of the human soul to suppose that his intuitions exclude others equally great or that his realizations are the only or final word of spiritual knowledge."<sup>34</sup>

By postulating an integral view of the World and Reality Sri Aurobindo's philosophy serves to eradicate all the inconsistencies of almost all the idealistic systems and philosophies of both the East and the West right from Plato to SanKara. More important however he has presented the world with an all comprehensive philosophical system, a new speculative synthesis, an inspiring Weltanschauung. Labouring the point of integral living Sri Aurobindo heralds the possibility of synthetic integration of the material and spiritual



values of life, and so to a reconstruction of human life and society on the basis of dynamic 'truth vision'.

### 3.2 Philosophical Aspects of Marxism

A discussion of the basic ideas of Marx's philosophy reveals that Marx's interpretation of social development known as historical materialism revolves around his general philosophic theory known as dialectical materialism. Dialectics is a theory of the most general connections of the universe and it's cognition including the method of thinking which is based on this theory. Individuals charged with the aim of finding a rational orientation in the world with a view to change it must most definitely possess a knowledge of the dialectics of life and thought. For it is dialectical materialism which is the key to an understanding of the past, present and future course of human history and to the understanding and solution of every human problem.

"The creation of dialectical materialism signified the critical overcoming of metaphysical narrowness of the past materialist teachings and idealist dialectics".<sup>35</sup> The origin and development of dialectics is seen historically in a struggle against the metaphysical method, which is characteristically biased and abstract, leaning towards a tendency to absolutize

certain principles within the whole. Metaphysical thought moves towards holding extreme views, thereby exaggerating certain aspect of the object. Such a stance leads directly to either idealism or dogmatism and in the field of practice to the justification of stagnation and reaction. According to the Marxists the only antidote to metaphysics and dogmatism, which is metaphysics in another form, is dialectics, which will not tolerate stagnation and sets no limits to cognition and its scope.

Both Marx and Engels worked tirelessly to critically re-evaluate and overcome idealism and metaphysics which dominated the views of man, his entire psyche and society. It is no wonder therefore that dialectical thought reached its highest peak in the philosophy of Marxism, in which materialist dialectics is expressed in a system of philosophical principles, categories and laws. These categories serve as guiding principles which represent man's understanding of the world and his attitude to it at a given level of cognition and socio-historical practice. It is therefore an advantage to be au fait with the philosophical doctrines of Marx before engaging in a study of his social philosophy enshrined in historical materialism.

Materialism, as ordinarily understood, denotes that matter alone is real and all other phenomena are unreal. Marx however totally rejected such a brand of

materialism claiming that its doctrine is extremely unscientific. In materialism, as commonly understood, Matter is taken to be inert, passive, inactive and devoid of any conscious intelligence and will. It is driven mechanically ie. not by anything within it but by the pressure of external environmental forces. This would thereby imply that evolution is a mechanical process by which material things change or develop under the pressure of external forces.

Clearly elucidating his own position Marx states that his materialism is not mechanical but dialectical. The major philosophical differences lies in the fact that in dialectical materialism evolution occurs by the development of Matter from within itself. Marx firmly maintains that Matter is not passive and inert but active; it moves by an inner necessity of its own nature, there is within it a conscious energy which inevitably drives it towards its destined goal, its perfect state ie. the socialist society.

Marx explains further that Mechanistic Materialism is completely deterministic, leaving no scope for historical process. As a result of this, there was no real reciprocity in the mechanistic and the deterministic universe. Whilst Mechanistic Materialism maintains that man is a static being, Dialectical Materialism advocates that man is an evolving being.

The over-simplified definition of matter as substance made it impossible to apply the category of matter in explaining the life of society. But the dialectical interpretation of matter embraces not only the natural forms of its existence but also the social forms, human society being the highest form of the motion of intellectualised matter. "The dialectical - materialist understanding of matter united the philosophical teachings on the essence of being (ontology) and the theory of knowledge (epistemology). The historical necessity to change the form of materialism and above all, the need for a more profound and extended definition of matter became imperative as a result of the crisis of the philosophical bases of natural science and the rise of "physical idealism".<sup>36</sup> According to Lenin, "matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them".<sup>37</sup> Matter is therefore everything that surrounds us, that exists outside our consciousness, that does not depend on our consciousness, and that is or maybe reflected directly or indirectly in consciousness.

The Marxists are of the opinion that no scientific data can refute or reject dialectical materialism simply because, "the sole "property" of matter with whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound up is

the property of being an objective reality, of existing outside the mind".<sup>38</sup> Accordingly such a philosophical understanding of matter can never become outdated for it is constantly strengthened by the continuous flood of scientific knowledge of manifold forms and properties of matter, concrete physical bodies and the structure of material formations.

According to Marx the actual unity of the world lies in its materiality. There can be nothing in the world that does not fit into the concept of matter and its various properties and relations. This principle of the material unity of the world depicts not an empirical similarity or identity of concrete material systems, elements and laws, but the universality of matter as substance and carrier of the various properties and relations.

Matter is the cause and basis of all the world's diversity. It is a key which unlocks all the secrets of existence thereby making it intelligible. The category of matter is reality boasting a variety of colours and forms. Its cognition begins upon acknowledging the existence of an object without yet knowing its attributes. The dialectical conception of matter challenges any movement towards the absolutising of the specific concrete forms and properties of

matter; guiding and giving direction to science in its quest for the new, as yet unknown forms and properties of the real world.

Motion is the mode of existence of matter. The world is both integrating and disintegrating never really attaining ultimate perfection. Like matter, motion is uncreatable and indestructible and is not inert but active. Motion, generated from within itself generally denotes change irrespective of character, direction and result. This tendency to change is inherent in matter itself and is of its own course.

The motion of a separate body is an absurdity and as such the motion of any thing occurs only in relation to that of another. All moving objects and phenomena are interconnected in terms of space and time. All material bodies possess certain extensions - length, breadth and height - Everything in the world is spatial and temporal. Space and Time are absolute. But since these are forms of matter in motion, they are not indifferent to their content. Both space and time are conditioned by matter, as a form is conditioned by its content, and every level of the motion of matter possesses its space-time structure.

Marxist thinkers laud the dialectical materialist concept of matter for contributing to the advancement of theoretical thinking and for its capacity to

revolutionise and transform society. Zakharov very succinctly sums up the advantages of the dialectical materialist concept of matter. "First, this concept rid philosophical materialism of mechanism and metaphysics and updated it in accordance with the contemporary level, of scientific knowledge and socio-historical practice - second, this concept made it possible to overcome 'physical' idealism, brought natural science out of the theoretical and methodological crises, consolidated the union of philosophy and science and outlined research guidelines and prospects for deeper scientific knowledge. The third, most important aspect - the dialectical materialistic concept of matter made it possible to reveal the materiality of the forms of social life and human activity and the material bases of the human consciousness".<sup>39</sup>

Quite evident is the fact that the term dialectics which originally meant, the art of persuasion by argument with one's philosophical opponent, has come a long way since it's early Greek definition. Later it became the name of a method of developing thought by the reasoning process of reconciling successive contradictions. Still later, it was claimed that not only the development of mind and thought but all development in Nature, man and history follows the course of a dialectical movement of the conflict of

opposites. This is now the popular meaning of the term ie. the process of development by the conflict of opposites.<sup>40</sup>

The word "dialectical", acquired from Hegel's philosophy and viewed from a metaphysical perspective, regards thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis as the main components of dialectical philosophy. As already mentioned earlier Marx was a student of Hegel and was greatly influenced by his dialectical theory of historical evolution, but he rejected, Hegel's idealism which was the central principle of his philosophy of history.

For Hegel the basic reality is the Idea of what he often calls Spirit. Human history is the reflection or expression of a dialectical process in the development of ideas. The ultimate goal of this process is the Idea becoming fully conscious of itself or the realisation of the 'Absolute Idea' otherwise labelled 'World-Spirit', 'Reason', 'Freedom' or 'God'. The Idea or Spirit is the force which inevitably drives the historical evolution by an inner dialectic towards its fullest manifestation in which all contradictions are resolved.

Marx on the other hand held Matter and not the Idea or Spirit to be the ultimate reality. Matter, already discussed earlier, is accorded the highest position in



Marx's philosophy. It is Matter which organises society, directs the mode of production and determines the course of social and political institutions. These social and political institutions in turn influence the ethical, religious and philosophical thought currents.

Having been deeply impressed by Hegels dialectics Marx integrated it with his materialism; thereby converting Hegel's dialectical idealism into dialectical materialism. In doing so Marx rejected or rather inverted the Hegelian dialectics, for he denied the dominant role of ideas in history and declared that it is the material forces, the economic factors which develop by the dialectical process and determine the historical evolution. And they do so by their own inherent reality and not merely as reflections or expressions of ideas, as Hegel maintained. On the contrary, it was the ideas which were the reflections of the material reality. In Capital Marx unreservedly states,; "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, ie, the process of thinking which under the name of 'the Idea' he even transforms into an independent subject is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought".<sup>41</sup> On the whole Marx

was extremely practical and anti-metaphysical substituting his materialism in place of Hegel's idealism in the dialectical principle of evolution. Accordingly Marx wrote, "The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational Kernel within the mystical shell".<sup>42</sup>

This in brief outlines the major philosophical precepts of Marx's philosophic doctrine of dialectical materialism. The reader is made aware however that although Marxian ideology possesses a philosophical basis and presupposition, Marx himself did not dwell on these and avoided trying to justify them with philosophical arguments.

When he did in fact engage himself in philosophical debates it was of a polemical nature. Marx's critique of the German Ideology and the Poverty of Philosophy written to refute the young Hegelians and Proudhon respectively, bears testimony to this. Such debates for Marx served only to expose unsound philosophical ideas upon which opposing social theories were founded upon. It must also be noted that whilst he participated in such debates, he very rarely ventured into any bombastic academic metaphysical notions but

rather confined himself to unconventional views of philosophy taken from the practical communist point of view.

Philosophy is essentially a theory of life and its experiences. As such it is erroneous to draw distinction between theory and practice for it is in reality a theory of practice. It is only through practice that we come to encounter the manifold experiences of life. Philosophy is therefore both speculative as well as practical. True philosophical pursuit does not indulge merely in intellectual abstraction but attempts to apply and link the lofty philosophical ideals with our physical world of finite human beings.

Marx boldly declares that, "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point however is to change it".<sup>43</sup> Marx's clarion call to all philosophers to refrain from merely interpreting Reality but to change it, heralds a new era in the history of philosophy.

There is indeed an essential difference between the contemporary Indian viewpoint and the Marxian outlook of philosophy, the former being a search for real happiness of the spirit hidden in man and the latter, a search for real happiness of the apparent man. But the common denominator between these two approaches is, and

very importantly so, the search for happiness and the upliftment of mankind on the whole. It is common fact that the Indian and Marxian world views differ solely because they analyse and interpret the world and its experiences in different and interesting ways. However whilst both may proffer different solutions, they are equally practical.

Taking into account that Sri Aurobindo also placed great emphasis on the reconciliation between theory and practice, Swami Ranganathananda wrote, "The Marxist distinction between philosophers that merely interpret the world, and those that transform it, has long been known and acted upon in India. In this we were Marxists long before Marxist philosophy was born. The Avatara, according to Indian thought, is the world transformer; in him idea becomes yoked to will, purpose, and endeavour. He does not merely contemplate the world, he works with a view to changing it. The materialistic philosophy and approach of Marxism, with its faith in naked violence and hatred and the spiritual views and approach of Indian thought, with its faith in the innate goodness and educatability of man, differ widely in methods and results, in spite of starting with common objectives".<sup>44</sup>

The Indian systems of thought unlike the Marxists unanimously maintain that the transformation of the world to higher states of existence is only a temporary

phenomenon. This can be attributed to the fact that time corrodes even the most ideal system, and as such avatars or world transformers must manifest themselves periodically on the world scene. The vast difference between the world transforming prophets or avatars and the philosophers that merely interpret the world must also be recorded.

Accordingly Sri Aurobindo proclaims that the, "Avatar may descend as a great spiritual teacher and saviour, the Christ, the Buddha, but always his work leads, after he has finished his earthly manifestation, to a profound and powerful change not only in the ethical, but in the social and outward life and ideals of the race. He may, on the other hand, descend as an incarnation of the divine life, the divine personality and power in its characteristic action, for a mission ostensibly social, ethical and political, as is represented in the story of Rama or Krishna, but always then this descent becomes in the soul of the race a permanent power for the inner living and the spiritual rebirth".<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand the Marxists, believing in the inevitability of progress, posit that the forces of history will move forward developing through a series of contradictions until the entire mankind has become communist. Having then attained world communism the process of dialectical evolution draws to an end. Marx

fails to answer why this new society, having been achieved via numerous conflicts and class wars, is exempt or above the on going dialectical process determined by materialist forces.

Further on the question of history being one of continuous conflict, and class struggle, Sorokin begs to differ by stating that "it is certain that the progress of mankind has been due rather to co-operation and solidarity than to class struggle, antagonism and hatred".<sup>46</sup>

Interesting to note is that Marxist notions or ideas can figure prominently in the world view of someone who nevertheless thinks of himself as essentially not a Marxist. Radhakrishnan aptly sums up his position when he states, "in its concern for the poor and the lowly, in its demand for - more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity, in its insistence on rational equality, it gives us a social message with which all idealists are in agreement. But our sympathy for the social programme does not necessarily commit us to the Marxist philosophy of life; its authentic conception of ultimate reality, its naturalistic view of man and its disregard of the sacredness of personality".<sup>47</sup>

Emphasising his point further, Dr RadhaKrishnan declares that, "the socialist programme of the Marxist is more adequate to the real needs of mankind and to

the exigencies of production by modern technical means. The demand of socialism is a moral demand... This theory appeals by its very simplicity, and its plausibility is increased by the facts that economic phenomena are of great importance in life and history... The emphasis on the importance of economic conditions is correct, the suggestion that they are exclusively determinant of history is incorrect.... If economic forces condition historic evolution it does not follow that other forces do not. The forces of economic necessity and religious idealism may interact and mould the future of history".<sup>48</sup>

Inherent in Marx's conception of Matter from which his theory of materialism springs forth, is a major self contradiction. Marx bestows Matter with an inner self directing; self conscious free will. Thereby allowing it to act independently, inevitably accomplishing its purpose by an intelligent rational process. The contradiction lies in the fact that an entity possessing these abilities cannot comply with the materialistic scientific conception of Matter. According to Scientific Materialism Matter is a passive inert principle unable to develop according to its own free - will and purpose except by inflexible unalterable mechanical process. It would therefore be impossible by its very nature to bring forth any positive progressive movement. For the dialectical

press which possesses self conscious free will driven by an inner force can never be a part of scientific materialism, thus the contradiction.

According to Berdyaev, "matter is endowed by Marxist philosophy with the freedom of spirit with life, activity, logic, freedom and the possibility of independent movement. But if we preserve the right terminology of philosophy we see that matter and material processes cannot be active, that free self-directed movement is not inherent in them, that no dialectical development can be theirs. Matter is inert and passive spirit alone is active, activity presupposes a spiritual principle".<sup>49</sup>

This fundamental contradiction in Marx's philosophic doctrine also has serious ramifications with regard to his socio-economic theory of historical materialism. The contradiction revolves around the question of free will and determinism. On the one hand Marx states that the economic factors govern social development and at the same time he claims that social development is moulded by human free-will. However in spite of this Marx is extremely particular about his dialectical approach being confused with the mechanical approach. Defending both determination and mechanism he laboriously attempts to prove that these two concepts are not diametrically opposed to free will and the creative response of an organism. The implication is



quite plain, scientific determinism and the creative free will of an organism are not incompatible but complimentary.

However in spite of Marx's integral approach such a stance remains but an incongruous mixture of two opposites. The position still remains unassimilated, the material economic forces of production which determine the development of social life act independently of man's will. This economic determination prescribes that man be reduced to a passive entity governed by material forces thereby leaving no room for free expression and development.

Commenting on Marxism, and more specifically the concept of dialectical materialism, Berdyaev explicitly points out that it is "continually slipping from dialectic to popular materialism and from that even to the hated mechanism, and it cannot help it, for dialectical materialism is an untenable position where is bred a perpetual conflict between dialectic and materialism".<sup>50</sup>

Aurobindo, like Marx, can also be regarded as a historical determinist attempting to illustrate via their own interpretation of history that society displays a general pattern characterised by certain predictable rhythms. Whilst Sri Aurobindo accepts the condition of an unfolding of the Divine design in human history, the Marxists reject and dismiss such a



position as mere folly. For human history is created and modified by man himself and no other phenomenon, yet whilst he may try to prove that there is something present in Matter giving it its thrust and life force in his dialectical materialism, Marx absolutely negates the idea that, something present in matter could very well be something spiritual.

As a result of man being directly subject to the material economic forces and indirectly to those of Nature, there already exists a limiting factor. His freedom to alter and adjust the onward march of history and to simply be innovative is always a matter of degree and never absolute. Reviewing the Marxist position against Divine Design, Sri Aurobindo still affirms that there is nothing which might suggest that man is not free to mould his own destiny. Man's place in Nature does not inhibit his quest for loftier ideals and a greater measure of freedom. Wanting to be wholly conscious of his being, implies a spiritual knowledge, possessing as its very essence an intrinsic self-existent consciousness.

But quite evident, as in the case of Marx, man's subjection to the laws of Matter and Life implies only a partial knowledge of his entire being. Agreeing in their own different ways, according to their own

methodological enquiry, Sri Aurobindo and Marx maintain that man is only partially responsible for his socio-historical destiny.

The main criticism of historicism therefore is that it limits individual freedom. If our thoughts and actions are determined by expressions of the universal spirit or economic factors then we cannot claim to be absolutely free. According to the Marxists the metaphysical presuppositions of Sri Aurobindo that there exists an intelligent principle underlying the process of history is superfluous and unscientific. Likewise all those who subscribe to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy express the superficiality of the materialistic conception of history which reveals empirical trends sustained by a deeper teleological movement of Nature.

However both philosophies identify distinct rhythms in history indicating that there are in existence some general laws in history as well. By virtue of the fact that Sri Aurobindo does admit within his philosophical system an intelligent force in history, it is with greater theoretical plausibility that he can speak of rhythms in history. Sri Aurobindo also finds no animosity between the higher natural laws of history and the superficial empirical trends. The Marxists suffer a serious setback in that with their

preoccupation with the empirical they are unable to unlock the inner workings of human history in order to discover its hidden laws.

Marxist philosophy as we have already seen holds Matter to be the fundamental reality denying the existence of the spirit. Sri Aurobindo the prophet of an Integral Idealism attempts to reconcile the two extreme one-sided principal philosophies of the world ie. Idealism and Materialism. According to Sri Aurobindo the one without the other is devoid of a complete absolute truth. For both Spirit and Matter the former representing the inner elevating presence and the latter the outward acting substance energy are absolutely essential for existence.

"The whole of creation amounted therefore to a natural outcome from the mutual relations of Spirit and Matter; these two they regarded as two terms, - call them forces, energies, substances, or what you will - of phenomenal existence, and psychical life only as one result of their interaction. They refused however to accept any dualism in their cosmogony and, as has been pointed out, regarded Spirit and Matter as essentially one; and their difference as no more than an apparent duality in one real entity. This one entity is not analysable or intellectually knowable, yet it is alone the real immutable and sempiternal self of things".<sup>51</sup>

Born out of Ignorance the distinction between Matter and Spirit is one of the primary dualisms. Instead of concentrating on their separate existences which seriously retards any forward movement we should rather realise the indissoluble weld that exists between these two entities. For ultimately they are merely aspects of each other. The realisation of such a goal, via Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of intergralism, will undoubtedly open the doors to a new unitive life, a life of unity, mutuality and harmony for all mankind.

Moving on to the question of cosmological evolution the Marxists and Sri Aurobindo share an extremely interesting and thought provoking position. Quoting Engels, "All that comes into being deserves to perish. Millions of years may elapse, hundreds of thousands of generations be born and die, but inexorably the time will come when the declining warmth of the sun will no longer suffice to melt the ice thrusting forward from the poles; when the human race, crowding more and more about the Equator will finally no longer find, even there enough heat for life, when gradually even the last trace of organic life will vanish, and the earth, an extinct frozen globe like the moon, will circle in deepest darkness and in an ever narrower orbit about the equally extinct sun; and at last far into it. Other planets will have preceded it, others will follow it; instead of the bright, warm solar system with its harmonious arrangement of members only a cold, dead

sphere will still pursue its lonely path throughout universal space. And what will happen to our solar system will happen sooner or later to all the other systems of our island universe, it will happen to all the other innumerable island universes, even to those the light of which will never reach the earth while there is a living human eye to receive it.

And when such a solar system has completed its life-history and succumbs to the fact of all that is finite, death, what then? Will the sun's corpse roll on for all eternity, through infinite space and all the once infinitely differentiated natural forces pass for ever into one single form of motion, attraction or, are there forces in Nature which can reconvert the dead system into its original state of glowing nebula and re-awaken it to a new life? We do not know..... This much is certain, there was a time when the matter of our island universe had transformed into heat such an amount of motion of what kind, we do not yet know, that there could be developed from it the solar systems appertaining to at least twenty million stars, the gradual extinction of which is likewise certain. How did this transformation take place? We know that as little as Father Secchi knows, whether the future caput mortuum' of our solar system will once again be converted into the raw material of new solar systems. But here we must have recourse to a creator, or we are forced to the conclusion that the incandescent raw

materials for the the solar systems of our universe was produced in a natural way by transformations of motion, which are by nature inherent in moving matter and the conditions for which therefore, must also be produced by matter, even if only after millions and millions of years, and more or less by chance, but with the necessity that is also inherent in chance.

For the rest, the eternally repeated succession of worlds in infinite time is only the logical complement to the co-existence of innumerable worlds in infinite space. It is an eternal cycle that matter moves in, a cycle that certainly only completes its orbit in periods of time for which our terrestrial year, is no adequate measure, a cycle in which the time of highest development, the time of organic life and still more that of life, of being conscious of nature and of themselves, in just as narrowly restricted as the space in which life and self-consciousness come into operation... but however often and however relentlessly, this cycle is completed in time, and in space, however many millions of suns and earths may arise and pass away... we have the certainty that matter remains eternally the same in all its transformation and, therefore also that with the same necessity that it will exterminate on the earth its highest creation, the thinking mind, it must somewhere else and at another time again produce it".<sup>52</sup>

The cyclic nature of cosmic evolution, the amazingly long periods between one manifestation and another and the complete dissolution of the universe followed by its subsequent manifestation indicate that Marxist cosmology is very similar to Hindu cosmology. However whilst both the cosmologies might be identical there is one very fundamental difference. Hindu cosmology admits an ultimate spiritual reality which is responsible for making it possible for Nature to be subjected to cosmic movements. The Marxists on the other hand admit no such reality maintaining that the laws inherent in nature itself adequately elucidate every such movement. Adopting such a stance Marx fails to answer how there could be intelligent purposive movements within nature devoid of some higher intelligent conscious force working behind it.

According to popular Hindu belief the Divine or Absolute Reality is responsible for the the grand scheme of things. The Divine at the same time is not some external force but is imminent in Nature. Nature emanates from the Divine with all its multifarious manifestations, only to go back from whence it came after the cycle is dissolved.

Writing on the Gita, Sri Aurobindo states the following pertaining to Hindu Cosmology:

"There is an eternal cycle of alternating periods of cosmic manifestation and non-manifestation, each period called respectively a day and a night of the creator



Brahma, each of equal length in time, the long aeon of his working which endures for a thousand ages, the long aeon of his sleep as another thousand ages. At the coming of the day all manifestations are born into being, out of the unmanifest, at the coming of the night, all vanish or are dissolved in it. Thus all existences alternate helplessly in the cycle of becoming and non-becoming; they come into becoming again and again, "bhutva bhutva" and they go back constantly into the unmanifest. But this unmanifest is not the original divinity of the Being; there is another status of his existence 'bhavo anyah', a super cosmic unmanifest beyond this cosmic non-manifestation, which is eternally self-seated, is not an opposite of this cosmic status of manifestation but far above and unlike it, changeless, eternal, not forced to perish with the perishing of all these existences. He is called the unmanifest immutable, him they speak of as the supreme soul and status and those who attain to him return not; that is my supreme place of being 'paranam dharma'. For, the soul attaining to it has escaped out of the cycle of cosmic manifestation and non-manifestation".<sup>53</sup>

With regard to the concept of Nature Sri Aurobindo firmly believes that Nature has neither direction nor purpose of her own. The purpose, nature realises at different levels of existence, is undoubtedly a reflection of the Absolute. In fact the entire scope

of our existence is an expression of the Absolute purpose. In this regard Sri Aurobindo's concept of Nature comes into direct conflict with the materialist conception of history.

"Mankind has a habit of surviving the worst catastrophies created by its own errors or by the violent turns of Nature, and it must be so if there is any meaning in its existence, if its long history and continuous survival is not an accident of its fortuituously self-organizing chance, which it must be in a purely materialistic view of the nature of the world"<sup>54</sup>. The historical process unfolds naturally and always has a rational component to it. Viewed in relation to the historical process man has completely lost touch with himself and the world around him. The contradictions of his environment are not the punishment of a fall, but the conditions of a progress. Again one encounters Sri Aurobindo extolling the destiny of man in Nature rather than the freedom of man in it.

In line with his dialectical philosophy Marx postulates that the relation between Man and Nature warrants no metaphysical enquiry. Neither man nor nature share completely an interdependent mutual existence. However he does enter into a social relationship with Nature, born out of a practical necessity, controlling and manipulating Nature's natural laws for his own ends. Nature bears no significance to man unless it is

social; and society or rather true society is the genuine union of Man with Nature. Whilst Aristotle maintains that man is social by nature Marx devoutly claims that man is social in nature.

Sri Aurobindo is quite content to allow Nature to be the guide of mankind. Marx, of course, admits no such notions within his philosophical outlook. He is more interested in humanizing nature; for left to its own designs it is of no significance to man. Man and Nature will only enjoy an absolute unity when Nature is finally socialized and humanized.

This can only be achieved under Communism. For, "Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man himself as a social, ie. really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. Communism as a fully developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution."<sup>55</sup>

Having placed both the philosophers in their philosophical contexts, let us now undertake a study of their social philosophies which, as already mentioned, forms an integral part of their general philosophic system.

### 3.3 An Exposition of the Social Philosophy of Aurobindo

Examining Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy, one discovers immediately an amazingly unorthodox social system. Despite arriving at similar conclusions held by other contemporary sociologists, his social philosophy demonstrates a remarkable originality of its own. Sri Aurobindo postulates a psychological approach to sociology. It must be noted however that his concept of psychology is by no means empirical nor based on experiment and observation. Rather it is integral based on intuition, insight and introspection. Unconcerned with that which is observable or presentable to sense-experience and thereby shunning the "objective" approach, Sri Aurobindo would rather dwell on the deeper truths which exist beyond the reach of the senses. The objective approach fosters nothing but empiricism and positivism.

As a result of this Sri Aurobindo advocates a subjective interpretation of history. According to him real subjectivity is and must be spiritual, allowing the mind to work and perpetuate its search for truth.

All this is executed largely independently of that which is sensible and in the sense mind. False subjectivity on the other hand relies on and sustains sense - data. The main elements of Sri Aurobindo's subjective approach focuses upon the individual, the community and mankind.

At present most sociological theories about the position of man in society are arrived at after perceiving man only as a vital, physical intellectual entity. Such a position according to Sri Aurobindo is totally unacceptable; for man must be seen in his entirety. As such, any theory which does not take into account the whole man and his entire range of experiences would therefore be superficial and nowhere near the truth.

This solely external interpretation of man and society places great emphasis on reason, and inherently limiting factor in itself. Reason, being of an extremely mechanical bent is incapable of conveying to us the immense potentiality that lies within us and that which lies ahead of us. It is only when we comprehend the spiritual destiny of man in society and then only, urges Sri Aurobindo, will we have a near plausible explanation of man and society.

The corner-stone of Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy is his subjective interpretation of the nature of society. For Sri Aurobindo a society simply does not mean or denote a group of individuals. On the contrary, society has its own independent real existence separate from that of which it is constituted. Society therefore has a real self of its own, society is real and possesses a truth of its being as much as the individual, humanity and the entire universe is real.

Clearly evident in his social philosophy is the close relationship of the nature of society and the nature of the individual. Society, like the individual, is merely an expression of the cosmic Reality. The fact that "society or nation is, even in its greater complexity, a larger, a composite individual, the collective Man",<sup>56</sup> serves only to emphasise the close relationship between society and individual. Further he states that, "the nation or society, like the individual, has a body and organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist."<sup>57</sup>

At this stage it must be noted that Sri Aurobindo does not regard the group soul as being merely an impersonal force but also as a personal being. A personal being, with whom one can enter into direct communion, makes it

self manifest in the individual society and the universe. It is no wonder that Sri Aurobindo maintains that the soul of each nation - society is a living being, a deity presiding over man's historical development through the ages, guiding and directing it to its ultimate perfection.

To quote India as an example Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being. Such beings are as real and more permanently real than the men they influence, but they belong to a higher plane, are part of the cosmic consciousness and being and act here on earth by shaping the human consciousness on which they exercise their influence".<sup>58</sup> Coupled with the soul of the nation and of the individual is the concept of ego. The soul is a representation of the true inner self of an entity whilst the ego is, a representation of the lower ignorant side of an entity. In view of evolutionary development the communal soul, like the soul of the individual in its early stages, allows itself to be dominated and controlled by the outer ego-self.

Likewise the organised state depicts the conglomeration of not the soul of the nation but of its communal ego and its interests and ambitions. According to Sri Aurobindo, one must not commit the fatal error of

confusing the true soul of the nation with that of its communal ego, as represented by the State. To this end he wrote, "the communal ego is idealised as the souls of the nation, the race, the community; but this is a colossal and may turn out to be a fatal error... this obscure collective being is not the soul or self of the community; it is a life force that rises from the subcontinent and, if denied the light of guidance by the reason, can be driven only by dark massive forces which are powerful but dangerous for the race because they are alien to the conscious evolution of which man is the trustee and bearer".<sup>59</sup>

Thus whilst the state and its ego self are only mechanical contrivances assuming or attaining supremacy in a rational age, the nation will always remain but a manifestation of the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo also investigates the relationship between the Individual and the State. According to Sri Aurobindo the state, "is not an organism, it is a machinery, and it works like a machine without tact, taste, delicacy or intuition. It tries to manufacture but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create"<sup>60</sup> Making a clear distinction between the state and the individual Sri Aurobindo repudiates the claim of the state to control the minds of the people, maintaining that society and state are only instruments to be utilised by the individual for realising God or



the Absolute. And it is only via the perfect development of the individuals that society as a whole can also progress in its quest to attain the Divine.

The problem of social evolution has been dealt with most comprehensively and systematically by Sri Aurobindo. His theory of social evolution, like his more general theory of terrestrial evolution is a spiritual theory and must be clearly distinguished from the scientific theory of social evolution held by modern social thinkers. The unilinear theory with its scientific methodology maintains that social evolution progresses in a straight upward line by slow and deliberate uniform, successive stages from lower to higher forms. One of the basic and most fundamental flaw of this extremely scientific theory is its over emphasis on the objective outer aspects of social evolution. Whilst this theory might bear some semblance of truth, it remains insufficient and inconclusive. Simply because the inner subjective development of society is sadly neglected.

According to Sri Aurobindo social development is an upward evolutionary progress. However it is not as straight forward as this, as Sri Aurobindo explains: "The very idea of progress is an illusion to some minds for they imagine that the race moves constantly in a circle. Or even their view is that greatness more often than not is to be found in the past and that the

line of our environment is a curve of deterioration, a downward lapse. But that is an illusion created when we look too much upon the highlights of the past and the dark spaces of the present and ignore its powers of light and its aspects of happier promise. It is created too by a mistaken deduction from the phenomenon of an uneven progress. For Nature effects her evolution through a rythm of advance and relapse, day and night, waking and sleep; there is a temporary pushing of certain results at the expense of other not less desirable for perfection and to a superficial eye there may seem to be a relapse even in our advance. Progress admittedly does not march on securely in a straight line like a man sure of his familiar way or an army covering an unimpeded terrain or well-mapped unoccupied spaces. Human progress is very much an adventure through the unknown, an unknown full of surprises and baffling obstacles; it stumbles often; it misses its way at many points, it cedes here in order to gain there; it retraces its steps frequently in order to get more widely forward. The present does not always compare favourably with the past; even when it is more advanced in the mass, it may still be inferior in certain directions important to our inner or outer welfare. But earth does move forward after all, *eppur si muove*. Even in failure there is a preparation for success : our nights carry in them the secret of a

greater dawn. This is a frequent experience in our individual progress, but the human collectivity also moves in much the same manner".<sup>61</sup>

Sri Aurobindo traces the entire process of social evolution via a sequence of five stages viz. the symbolic, typal, conventional, individualist or rational and subjective. These five stages pass through another sequence of three stages viz. barbarism, culture and spirituality only to culminate in the final sequence of three stages known as the infrarational, the rational and the suprarational stage.

All these sequences are based upon psychological criteria born directly out of his subjective interpretation of sociology, in which the self or the consciousness is the determining factor. The consciousness evolves via various ascending grades. Eloquenty explaining the final sequence of social evolution, Sri Aurobindo writes, : "There are necessarily three stages of the social evolution or, generally, of the human evolution in both individual and society. Our evolution starts with an infrarational stage in which men have not yet learned to refer their life and action in its principles and its forms to the judgement of the clarified intelligence for they still act principally out of their instincts, impulses, spontaneous ideas, vital

intuitions or else obey a customary response to desire, need and circumstance, - it is these things that are canalised or crystallized in their social institutions. Man proceeds by various stages out of these beginnings towards a rational age in which his intelligent will more or less developed becomes the judge, arbiter and presiding motive of his thought, feeling and action, the moulder, destroyer and re-creator of his leading ideas, aims and intuitions. Finally the human evolution must move through a subjective, towards a suprarational or spiritual age in which he will develop progressively a greater spiritual, supra-intellectual and intuitive, perhaps in the end a more than intuitive, a gnostic consciousness. He will be able to perceive a higher divine end, a divine sanction, a divine light of guidance for all he seeks to be, think feel and do, and all, too, more and more to obey and live in their larger light and power".<sup>62</sup>

The above mentioned three stages of social development and evolution depict the successive levels of social evolution only in their broadest and most general divisions. The reader is reminded that social evolution does not occur strictly in the sequence mentioned and whilst each stage is adequately distinct from the others it is not exclusively separated from them. The overlapping and interfusion among the

different stages of social evolution can be attributed to the nature of the psychological criterion which determines their formation.

To Sri Aurobindo, Man's evolution to a superior status is but a logical, inevitable conclusion. According to Sri Aurobindo the further evolution of man is not a mere illusion or fallacy.

The higher principle of consciousness which is to emerge and establish itself on earth Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind or Gnosis. When the supramental principle fully merges and establishes itself securely in the earth-nature, it will create a new type of being who Sri Aurobindo calls the gnostic being. As more and more of these gnostic beings emerge they will form the much awaited gnostic society living a divine life.

This development heralds a new age in the human cycle i.e. the supramental Age. This Supramental Age is founded upon a radical transformation of man's inner being. For it is only when the inner being or consciousness of man radically changes will there be any concrete positive changes to man's external life. The dawning of the gnostic being will ultimately satiate man's age long quest for perfection - the Kingdom of God upon earth. The establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth depicts not only a new era but also the final phase of evolution in Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy.

### 3.4 Basic Sociological Doctrines of Marxism

Let us now commit ourselves to a study of the materialist interpretation of social development as postulated by Karl Marx. The principle of philosophical materialism plays an important role in shaping and moulding historical and social phenomena with a view to present a scientific explanation of the nature of society, the process of its evolutionary development and its eventual destiny. Analysing general laws of social development from a scientific basis, historical materialism unlocks the workings of the inner logic of the historical process. This, according to the Marxists, enables one to view the logical connection against the concept of time not only between the past and the present but also to foresee future development scientifically.

The theory of economic and social systems are equally important to the materialist understanding of history. The satisfaction of man's material needs is of primary and paramount importance since his very survival depends on it. In order to satisfy these needs he has to engage in some kind of economic activity linked to the production of material goods. Production, according to the Marxists is most definitely the one fundamental principle which governs human activities at all stages of history. However the form production takes is of course not static and may vary from stage

to stage. The mode of economic production at each stage of human history is determined by the technological advancement attained at that stage. The mode of production in turn determines the relations and institutions of production.

According to Marx society is a product of man's interdependent collective actions representing therefore the close relations of individuals with each other. Zotov maintains that the socio-economic system as formulated by Marx and Engels depicts "society as a whole, with all its many facets and wholeness at a definite stage of development; it is a particular social organism existing on the basis of a given mode of production and developing together with it".<sup>63</sup> Man interacts and enters into relations with man on the basis of the development of the productive forces. And it is these multifarious relations which man forges that hold the key to all social phenomena, human aspiration, ideas and laws.

Accordingly Marx wrote in the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes

the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness".<sup>64</sup>

Society, therefore, is not just a group or collection of people but a group of people in their various meaningful associations and relationships. And it is upon these links and relations which constitutes the economic material base, that the whole structure of society is founded. This economic base is known as the substructure of society whilst the entire range and scope of the social edifice built on it represents the superstructure. What becomes fairly clear is that when Marx speaks of the basis of society he means in the totality of the relations of production. For as already established, the mode of production is by no means a divisive force but promotes unity between the productive forces and the relations of production.

The economic basis of society is all-inclusive, encompassing not only ideological relations but social consciousness and relevant organisations and institutions as well. According to Marx, "just as man's knowledge reflects nature (ie, developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man's social knowledge (ie, his various views and doctrines - philosophical, religious, political and so forth) reflects the economic system of society"<sup>65</sup> The



marxists maintain therefore that it is the material objective conditions of social life which determine the psychological subjective consciousness and its various cultural expressions. After all, "the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."<sup>66</sup>

Applying the concept of dialectics to the material development of society, society evolves or develops from within itself because of an inherent necessity by the dialectical process of the conflict of opposites. As such we witness the evolving of human society from primitive communism, through slavery and feudalism right up until capitalism, thereby representing the struggle of economic classes. Under capitalism there are two classes, the capitalists and the working class. Class war between these two is inevitable and inherent. Out of that will emerge a new synthesis ie. communism of which socialism is the first stage.

Class struggle according to Marx is a fundamental and important catalyst for social change. Each new socio-economic system is a rung of societies ascent in the course of historical development, from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex, predictated by the development of production. In the course of capitalist development a stage is reached when the

contradiction between the capitalist and proletariat becomes so sharp that they can no longer co-exist. Both camps need and depend on each other and yet there is a constant struggle between them because of their conflicting interests.

"Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation, but with this too grows the revolt of the working - class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalistic production itself. The monopoly of capital, becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at least reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalistic private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated".<sup>67</sup>

The economic, political and ideological struggle waged by the modern working class attempts to essentially eradicate oppression and exploitation. This battle waged by the working class progresses via successive contradictions until the last perfect stage is reached. It is there at every stage of history; the stages

differ but the process is the same. The present capitalist stage is one more in a recurrent series, but it is also penultimate in the sense that it will bring about the last conflict, the last revolution, after which not only all class-struggle will end but there will be liberation from the law of economic determinism itself.

Modern capitalism, according to Marx, is the penultimate stage in this historical process of evolution by class-conflict. According to Marx, capitalism by its very nature is self-destructive. Speaking on the self-destructive tendencies inherent in the capitalist system Coker aptly summed up the situation when he wrote, "the capitalist system enlarges the number of workers, brings them together into compact groups, makes them class conscious, supplies them with means of inter-communication and co-operation on a world-wide scale, reduces their purchasing power, and by increasingly exploiting them arouses them to organised resistance. Capitalists, acting persistently in pursuit of their own natural needs and in vindication of a system dependent upon the maintenance of profits, are all the time creating conditions which stimulate and strengthen the natural efforts of workers in preparing a system that will fit the needs of a working man's-society"<sup>68</sup>. Marx maintains that after the revolution an equal egalitarian society devoid of class and state is not

automatic. The final perfect ideal state of communism will be preceded by a transitional period which he labels the dictatorship of the proletariat. The aim of such a period is to gradually socialise natural resources and stamp out the last vestiges of capitalism. "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>69</sup>

The dictatorship of the proletariat will be as repressive as was the dictatorship of the proletariat by the capitalist class. But this it is believed is a new kind of dictatorship ie. against the capitalists, landowners and all other exploiting classes. The dictatorship of the proletariat would also seek to abolish and eradicate all traces of class distinction. It would also concentrate on the creative tasks of formulating a new society which will usher in the final ideal communist society in which classes will disappear and the state will wither away.

Of the actual nature of the new society Marx is extremely vague save for the fact that there will be no classes and no state. Marx's rationalisation of such a position is that it is utopian to speculate about the new society. Some insights into the new society we

glean from the following passage in the Communist Manifesto: "When in the course of development, class-distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely, the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with those conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeoisie society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all"<sup>70</sup>. The most fundamental and essential principle of this new social order as propounded by Marx in the "Critique" of the Gotha Programme will be, "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs"<sup>71</sup>

Very important when studying Marxism is that one should never lose sight of the fact that both Marx and Engels formulated and developed their social and economic

theories on the basis of a reservoir of historical evidence and their practical experience of the contemporary industrial conditions and socialist movements.

The main idea of Marx's social philosophy is undoubtedly enshrined in the already quoted following lines from the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. That, "The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life". As clearly evident it is the material or economic factors which dominate man's entire social existence; Marx thereby reduces the complex phenomena of social life to one single principle ie. the economic.

For Sri Aurobindo such a position is totally unacceptable. Society is a complex whole composed of economic, historical, institutional and several other organically interdependent and interacting factors. In accordance with the rationale of evolution different stages of societies development were dominated by different factors. However despite this phenomenon, the influence of any one factor of society irrespective of how dominant it might be is never permanent or exclusive. Sri Aurobindo maintain's that the exclusive, one-sided deterministic theories of society can never lead to the truth, but only misinterpret the facts of history. Sri Aurobindo categorically states

that, "to read an economic cause, conscious or unconscious, into all phenomena of man's history is part of the Bolshevik gospel born of the fallacy of Karl Marx. Man's nature is not so simple and one-chorded as all that - it has many lines and each line produces a need of his Life".<sup>72</sup>

However, despite Sri Aurobindo regarding psychology as the key to an understanding of sociology and history, he does not reject the role of the economic principle in society in toto. For Sri Aurobindo acknowledges the dominance of the economic factor in the modern rational - scientific age, as a stage in social evolution. Sri Aurobindo labels this economic factor which exerts its influence on all spheres of life commercialism. Very important according to Sri Aurobindo is that whilst commercialism dominates the modern period, at other periods in the past other factors played a dominant role and in the future yet other factors will emerge and dominate the many expressions of social life.

Explaining the changing and variable role of the economic factor at different periods of history Sri Aurobindo writes:-

"Commercialism is a modern sociological phenomenon; one might almost say, that it is the whole phenomenon of modern society. The economic part of life is always important to an organised community and even fundamental, but in former times it was simply the

first need, it was not that which occupied the thoughts of man, gave the whole tone to the social life, stood at the head and was clearly recognised as standing at the root of social principles. Ancient man was in the group primarily a political being, in the Aristotelian sense - as soon as he ceased to be primarily religious - and to this preoccupation he added, whenever he was sufficiently at ease, the preoccupation of thought, art and culture. The economic impulses of the group were worked out as a mechanical necessity, a strong desire in the vital being rather than a leading thought in the mind. Nor was the society regarded or studied as an economic organism except in a very superficial aspect. The economic man held an honorable, but still a comparatively low position in the society; he was only the third caste or class, the Vaishya. The lead was in the hands of the intellectual and political classes - the Brahmin, thinker scholar, philosophers and priest, the Kshatriya, ruler and warrior. It was their thoughts and preoccupations that gave the tone to society, determined its conscious drift and action, coloured most powerfully all its motives. Commercial interests entered into the relations of States and into the motives of war and peace; but they entered as subordinate and secondary predisposing causes of amity or hostility and only rarely and as it were accidentally came to be enumerated among the overt and conscious causes of peace, alliance and strife. The political consciousness, the political motive dominated, increase



of wealth was primarily regarded as a means of political power and greatness and opulence of the mobilisable resources of the State than as an end in itself or a first consideration.

Everything now is changed. The phenomenon of modern social development, is the decline of the Brahmin, and Kshatriya, of the Church, the military aristocracy and the aristocracy of letters and culture, and the rise to power or predominance of the commercial and industrial classes, Vaishya and Shudra, Capital and Labour. Together they have swallowed up or cast out their rivals and are now engaged in a fratricidal conflict for sole possession in which the completion of the downward force of social gravitation the ultimate triumph of Labour and the remodelling of all social conceptions and institutions with Labour as the first, the most dignified term which will give its value to all others seem to be the visible writing of Fate. At present however, it is the Vaishya who still predominate and his stamp on the world is commercialism, predominance of the economic man, the universality of the commercial value or the utilitarian and materially efficient and productive value for everything in human life. Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides all others"<sup>73</sup>

The manner in which this modern economic principle completely suppresses and influences all other values and controls every aspect of present day life, is further outlined by Sri Aurobindo. "The modern economic view of life, culture and its products have chiefly a decorative value; they are costly and desirable luxuries, not at all indispensable necessities. Religion is in this view a by product of the human mind with a very restricted utility - if indeed it is not a waster and a hindrance. Education has a recognized importance but its object and form are no longer so much cultural as scientific, utilitarian, and economic, its value the preparation of the efficient individual to take his place in the body of the economic organization. Science is of immense importance not because it discovers the secrets of Nature for the advancement of knowledge, but because it utilizes them for the creation of machinery and develops and organizes the economic resources of the community. The thought power of society almost its soul - power - if it has any longer so unsubstantial and unproductive thing as a soul - is not in its religion or its literature although the former drags on a feeble existence and the later teems and spawns, but in the daily press primarily an instrument of commercialism and governed by the political and commercial spirit and not like literature a direct instrument of culture. Politics, government itself are becoming more and more a machinery for the development

of an industrial society, divided between the service of bourgeois capitalism and the office of a half-involuntary channel for the incoming of economic Socialism. Free thought and culture remain on the surface of this great increasing mass of commercialism and influence and modify it, but are themselves more and more influenced, penetrated, coloured, subjugated by the economic, commercial and industrial view of human life"<sup>74</sup>

Clearly evident from the extracts quoted is that Sri Aurobindo's view of the determining factor of modern society shares common ground with that of Marx. Both philosophers maintain that in the modern period it is the economic principle which, mould and influence all other values of society. But this only holds true for the modern society and not for all stages of society's development according to Sri Aurobindo. For Marx the economic factor is the sole determining principle dominating all stages of society's development. By admitting the dominance of economic factors in certain stages of society's development, Sri Aurobindo does not deny the powerful influence of the economic factor in social development. The economic factors however are only temporary in the modern period for man will soon fashion his social life in accordance to higher spiritual values.

Contrary to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, Marx takes a factor of temporary importance in history and makes it the sole and permanent cause of all historical phenomena. Furthermore Marx maintains that social change is dictated by changes in the modes of production only. Undoubtedly Sri Aurobindo would declare the major part of Marx's theory illogical and historically invalid.

Rejecting the one-sided economic determinism in Marx's theory, Coker states that, "Although economic conditions have their influence, other factors have profound effects in determining the culture, philosophy, and politics of an age. The great social and political transformations of the past did not arise out of conflicts of material interests alone. Men have fought as violently over differences in religious doctrine as over their conflicting economic claims. Racial, cultural and religious factors have competed with, or transformed, or even overcome, economic factors in determining the alliances and enmities between nations. Economic affiliations and antagonisms cannot explain the opposition between West and South Ireland, or the rivalries among the Balkan states, or the support accorded by majorities of wage - earners to their several governments in the World War. Much of a man's political conduct is determined by his nationalist instincts or habits, or by his religious feelings or by his pride of social position, or by his

neighbourhood prejudices, or by his sense of fair play. In all phases of the life of men in society, there is action and reaction: economic conditions produce effects in moral, religious, and political creeds and the forms of social organization, but these latter act upon, even when they are adapting themselves to the economic conditions".<sup>75</sup>

An interesting development among contemporary socialists is that they accept the existence of Mutual interdependence between the economic and the other non-economic social factors. Of course the more orthodox Marxists who adhere to Marxism with a kind of religious fanaticism consider it blasphemous to modify or change anything in Marx's teachings.

With regard to the capitalist system of economy both Marx and Sri Aurobindo are vehemently opposed to it. "The basic economic law of capitalism consists in the production of the surplus value by working people deprived of the means of production, and its subsequent appropriation by the bourgeois owner".<sup>76</sup> Capitalism is the bourgeoisie weapon for the maintenance of the entire system of exploitation.

According to Sri Aurobindo the capitalist system serves only to foster competitive egoism. He undoubtedly disapproves of the steady increase in the formation of capitalist concentrations and monopolistic combines.

As a result of this he wrote, "In commerce also so long as we follow the European spirit and European model, the individual competitive selfishness, the bond of mere interest in the joint-stock Company or that worst and most dangerous development of co-operative capitalism, the giant octopus-like trust and syndicate, we shall never succeed in rebuilding a healthy industrial life".<sup>77</sup>

Clearly evident also is Sri Aurobindo's utter contempt for the capitalist system of the West, stating quite categorically that India should not ape the West in this regard. For it was the very same Capitalism in the guise of imperialistic exploitation which led to British domination of the country.

Marx who also condemned the capitalist tendency towards accumulation, concentration and centralization; prophesized together with Sri Aurobindo the nearing collapse of capitalism. Capitalism which exploited oppressed workers to no end was morally discredited. "The existing European system of civilization at least in its figure of capitalistic industrialism has reached its own monstrous limits, broken itself by its own mass and is condemned to perish".<sup>78</sup>

The system to be born out of capitalisms impending decay and destruction is Socialism, only to culminate in Communism. Viewed in the light of Capitalism,

Socialism seems to be the next best alternative. Whilst never quite accepting ideologies absolutely and totally Sri Aurobindo did share a certain degree of optimism with regard to the dawning of socialism and communism in the evolution of social development. To this end Sri Aurobindo wrote, "the issue of the future lies between a labour industrialism not very different except in organization from its predecessor, some greater spirit and form of socialistic or communistic society such as is being attempted in Russia or else the emergence of a new and as yet unforeseen principle."<sup>79</sup>

Despite these very similar views on the downfall of Capitalism, Marx and Sri Aurobindo differ on one very important point. Sri Aurobindo does not advocate violent insurrection or organized proletarian revolution in order to institute the new society. Maintaining that the collapse of capitalism is not inevitable Sri Aurobindo explores the possibility of the world being divided into two camps ie. the capitalists and the communists. Whilst he might be impressed and inspired by the socialist bid to establish a truly egalitarian society, Sri Aurobindo is least impressed with the socialist practice of violence, regimentation, absolutism and underlying totalitarianism.

Remaining a critic of both capitalism and socialism Sri Aurobindo maintains that neither of these systems holds the solution of the world's future. Reviewing Sri Aurobindo's own position on the solution to the world's future one encounters an integral synthesis of individualism, collectivism and anarchism all spiritually charged for the sole purpose of man's moral regeneration. In conclusion both Sri Aurobindo and Marx unanimously agree that, "whether we like it or not, it is in our hindered and ignorant proletariat that one can find the seeds of our hope, the only prop for our future".<sup>80</sup>



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MARX AND AUROBINDO ON THE NATURE OF SOCIETY

The Central theme and primary concern of the philosophies of Marx and Sri Aurobindo has always remained man, the concrete human individual and his various relations in society.

Refusing to compromise the position of man in society Marx wrote, "the premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both these which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way. The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals".<sup>1</sup>

Marx clearly maintained that society is far from being an abstraction, it is a group of individuals who develop concrete human relations with each other and whose views, opinions, attitudes and evaluations are explained as a function of social relations. Man, who is social in nature, is the real maker of history and will therefore remain, according to Marx, the source of all analysis of social origin.

In order to comprehend fully the nature of man as a social phenomenon, the relationship between man and society must first be understood. According to Marx man's first duty is to the social group, to society and humanity. For it is here that people are drawn together via the force of production and common interest so that they might exchange a wide range of political, social, moral, aesthetic, scientific, and cultural values. In this way society plays an important role in moulding and shaping the character and will of man. All man's practical activities are individual expressions of the historically formed social practice of humanity.

As a result of this the level of development of the individual moves in harmony with the level of development of society and vice-versa. However, it is important to note that the individual is not absorbed into society. Retaining his independent individuality, man makes his contribution to the social whole. Just as the individual is motivated by his own actions so too is he regulated by social standards and norms.

In unlocking the mysteries of human nature society clearly demonstrates that the individual is free only if he himself is made the chief goal of society. The main pre-requisite for the liberation of the individual as outlined by Marxist philosophy is the abolition of exploitation of one individual by another and of hunger and poverty; and the

re-assertion of man's sense of dignity. It was of such a society that the Utopian socialists and the founders of scientific socialism dreamed.

Invoking Sri Aurobindo on the nature of society we discover that, "the development of the free individual is, as we have said, the first condition for the development of the perfect society. From the individual, therefore, we have to start; he is our index and our foundation"<sup>2</sup>. Man's individual existence and his multifarious activities are inextricably linked to society. For an individual cannot be human without society and society will be reduced to an empty abstraction without human beings. No man is an island living and acting for himself. The individual's social development is directly attributed to the integral character of his relation to society. Individual growth is governed by and must be viewed against the growth of society. There is undoubtedly a close interdependence between these two concepts, though this has often been ignored or overlooked to the detriment of both the individual and society.

Having established that man is the first self conscious expression of the infinite existence, Sri Aurobindo's entire social outlook revolves around the relationship between the individual and the community. Sri Aurobindo views man in his absolute entirety and does not fail to acknowledge the degree in which the natural environment determines man's social relations. Man realizes and attempts to maintain the intricate balance and essential relation between himself and

community, because he envisages community as a vital instrument used for the sole purpose of securing his own perfection. The entire structure and functions of society reciprocate man's social needs thereby making him aware of his real being, his true nature and his ultimate goal in society.

Sri Aurobindo declares that there is nothing higher than nor superior to man. Man is the highest godhead who is progressively realizing himself and his true humanity in the process of self-realization. Rejecting the idea of a strictly supra-mundane transcendental Being who is veiled in mystery and who serves no practical need, Sri Aurobindo agrees with the self realization theory which proclaims an absolute non difference between man and Brahman. Man realizes his perfect oneness with humanity; he is Brahman in his real essence. Sharing Sri Aurobindo's view, Damodaran after having made an extensive study of the Upanishads also declared that "Brahman is nothing but the human being"<sup>3</sup>.

Postulating a theory of organic unity of mankind Sri Aurobindo's conception of society is an interesting one. He claims that the various parts of society should be viewed as one organic social whole Sri Aurobindo states that via a realization of this organic unity man realizes himself. Upon examining the marxist view of society one encounters a striking similarity to that of the Aurobindonian viewpoint. Positing the idea of an underlying unity of human society, the Marxists view society as the 'self'. Commenting on the



Marxist theory of society, Tucker observes that, "the possessing class and the proletariat class represent one and the same human self-alienation"<sup>4</sup>. Reacting against the atomistic view of society which divorces man from his social essence Marx despite the two antagonistic classes within the self of society, emphatically declares that man and his social activities are essentially one.

Viewing the situation in totality, an emancipated self breeds an emancipated society. The 'self' to which Marx constantly refers is a realization of man's community essence or socialized man. The entire scope of Marx's philosophy revolves around the socialization and self-realization of man and focuses on the distinction between human essence and human existence in order to develop fully human potentials within society.

Explaining further Sri Aurobindo claims that society has a vital foundation possessing within its inner self an all embracing corporate soul. Moving towards an ever growing and developing self consciousness and self realization, "the nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist."<sup>5</sup>

Like Marx, Sri Aurobindo also rejects a mechanistic view of society, holding that the ultimate aim of society is to provide for the social integration and the spiritual

perfection of all its members. Commenting therefore on the development of society Sri Aurobindo maintains that democracy and socialism illustrate a logical development in the self conscious evolution of society. Such a view however is not held without any reservation. Sri Aurobindo qualifies his standpoint by stating that democracy and socialism should most definitely not be regarded as the ultimate and final goal of social perfection. Rather it should be regarded as the first brilliant glimmers in that direction, heralding an era, yet to come. According to Sri Aurobindo the ideal law of social development is the rule of perfect individuality and perfect reciprocity for "self-realization is the sense, secret or overt, of individual and of social development"<sup>6</sup>.

Clearly evident is that the entire scope of Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy rests upon his view of the nature of society and the ultimate goal of its development. Sri Aurobindo's numerous expositions therefore on various aspects of social life merely represent an extension or an unfolding of his central concept of society. Adhering strictly to this concept, it is no wonder that Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy demonstrates and maintains throughout a remarkable sense of organic unity and coherence even in its most complex developments.

#### 4.1 The Relationship Between the State and the Individual

##### 4.1.1 The Aurobindonian Viewpoint

Perhaps one of the most fundamental and the most controversial aspects of sociology is the relation of the individual to society. Social philosophers identify two important trends in human society, one individualistic, which emphasizes the value of the individual at the expense of society and the other collectivist which coming in direct contrast with the former stresses the importance of the society over and above the individual. Interpreting these two trends in interesting and diverse ways, innumerable theories have been propounded which serve to enunciate and extol one aspect or another of this undoubtedly complex relationship.

Before evaluating and assessing Sri Aurobindo's synthetic view which elucidates the nature of the relationship between the state and the individual, it is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo firmly maintained that, "this erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society; but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected"<sup>7</sup>.

Proclaiming that concepts like justice, peace, freedom, equality and harmony emanate from deep within the human soul, Sri Aurobindo in attempting to regenerate man and society takes into consideration the entire scope of man's experiences both past and present. It is only when such noble concepts are firmly established within the hearts and minds of men will it permeate political institutions like the state and its machinery. Realizing the importance of striking a balance between man's inner and outer life, Sri Aurobindo argues that no machinery can perfect man unless he himself undergoes a complete transformation.

Given that an inner positive growth of the spirit in man is a pre-requisite for his complete transformation, by the same token such a development initiates a gradual evolution in the outer forms of socio-political life. It is popularly held within Neo-Vedanta that a group or a group consciousness emerges from man's attempts to expand his soul. The group soul therefore is a mere extension of the human soul. According to Sri Aurobindo man has, from time immemorial, lived in some form of group life for he has always felt a psychological necessity to constitute for himself an organized structure.

Consulting available facts of history one identifies as a salient feature of early social life the precedence enjoyed by the group over the individual. Also interesting to note is the subsequent liberation, of the individual from being subservient to the group. Sri Aurobindo is extremely cautious in commenting on the relationship between the individual and society for he believes that we can never grasp the correct relation between the individual and the group in terms of reason; for there is always the possibility of us identifying the individual totally with his group affiliation or as being quite independent of his group affiliation.

Using the mind of man as a standard Sri Aurobindo attempts to comprehend the process and significance of the evolution of different socio-political aggregates. For Sri Aurobindo man has always been conceived as a part of a hidden and great spiritual truth. As a result of this, man, being viewed as an integral part of the great spiritual reality, contributes more to society than what he reaps from it. Whilst acknowledging the importance of other elements which contribute to the evolution of different human aggregates in

society, Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that they all ultimately succumb to the one infinite undestructible spiritual force.

He maintains that the smaller human aggregates give rise to and facilitate the establishment of the larger human aggregates, Sri Aurobindo posits the idea that the earliest known human aggregate was a free and unsocial state.

Sri Aurobindo describes this free and fluid association as follows: "But there is also the ancient tradition of humanity, which it is never safe to ignore or treat as mere fiction; that the social state was preceded by another, free and unsocial. According to modern scientific ideas, if such a state ever existed, and that is far from certain it must have been not merely unsocial but anti-social; it must have been the condition of man as an isolated animal, living as the beast of prey, before he became in the process of his development an animal of the pack. But the tradition is rather that of a golden age in which he was freely social without society. Bound not by laws or institutions but living by natural instinct or free knowledge, he held the right law of his living in himself and needed neither to prey on his fellows nor to be restrained by the iron yoke of the collectivity. We may say, if we

will, that here poetic or idealistic imagination played, upon a deep-seated race-memory; early civilized man read his growing ideal of a free, unorganized, happy association into his race-memory of an unorganized savage and anti-social existence. But it is also possible that our progress has not been a development in a straight line, but in cycles, and that in those cycles, there have been periods of at least partial realization in which men did become able to live according to the high dream of philosophic anarchism, associated by the inner law of love and light and right being, right thinking, right action and not coerced to unity by kings and parliaments, laws and policings and punishments with all that tyrant unease, petty or great oppression and repression and ugly train of selfishness and corruption which attend the forced government of man by man. It is even possible that our original state was an instinctive animal spontaneity of free and fluid association and that our final ideal state will be an enlightened, intuitive spontaneity of free and fluid association. Our destiny may be the conversion of an original animal association into a community of the gods. Our prayers may be a devious round leading from the easy and spontaneous uniformity and harmony which reflects Nature to the self-possessed unity which reflects the Divine"<sup>s</sup>.

Clearly evident is that this first known human aggregate though primitive in their mode of living realized, or at least to a certain extent, the lofty ideal of philosophic anarchism. Assessing and evaluating this 'free and unsocial' state which later gave rise to an organized social state, Sri Aurobindo states that such a development should neither be regarded as a fall from an original golden age or an advancement from a primitive savage existence. On the contrary such a development should be viewed as a cyclic evolution corresponding to a similar evolution of man's consciousness.

Also important to note is Sri Aurobindo's rejection of explaining human aggregation in terms of objective necessity. Postulating a psychological interpretation of human aggregates he sees in it the development of man's inner subjective power. When one examines the various stages of human evolution and analyses the structure of different human aggregates one realizes that Nature, according to Sri Aurobindo, has been constantly trying to strike a balance between the perfection of the individual and peace and security of the group.



The collectivist tendency stands for authority, law, organization, efficiency and power, and the individualist one for freedom, perfection, variation, justice and creativity. All the past human aggregates, large and small, their formation, evolution and gradual transformation can be ascribed to the interaction of these two basic human and historical forces. Human history bears testimony to the fact however that it has not yet succeeded in evolving a human aggregate in which the collectivist and individualist forces could arrive at a permanent and ideal harmony which is absolutely necessary for perpetual peace and the sustained growth of human society.

Ensuring therefore this growth of human society, man in the course of his self development formed the family which represents the earliest form of recorded group life. The necessity of the family relationship prescribes certain obligations which are sanctioned by some ethical or religious beliefs. The family as a social unit is both biological and sociological based on vital foundations according to Sri Aurobindo. The family in turn gives rise to the tribe or clan due to the vital need of human nature for an associational corporate life.

Plagued by constant warfare and internal discord the tribe felt the need to organize itself into tribal kingdoms which later developed into regional kingdoms. The larger human aggregates assured peaceful progress and sealed a lasting bond of unity in the nation-state. Meeting a real demand of the people the nation according to Sri Aurobindo is immortal as a result of it being founded on a genuine psychological unity. The state therefore which coincides with the development of the clan or tribe in its initial stages of development was always ascribed to a psychological or subjective interpretation.

Shunning the external assessment of human aggregates Sri Aurobindo adamantly declares that, "the external method tries always to mould the psychological condition of men into changed forms and habits under the pressure of circumstances and institutions rather than by the direct creation of a new psychological condition which would, on the contrary, develop freely and flexibly its own appropriate and serviceable social forms"<sup>9</sup>.

Within society, an organized social form, the undeveloped individual harbours hope of progressing under the state idea. As a result the individual is required to submit to the forces of coercion of the organized group life or the state.

Assessing Sri Aurobindo's psychological interpretation he maintains that the group and the individual possess an innate tendency to assert their egoism in diverse and conflicting ways. However, it must be noted that this conflict between the state and the individual serves only to demonstrate nature's method of arriving at an ultimate harmony between these two very important poles of our existence.

Sri Aurobindo's critique of the cult of the state must be understood in relation to his concept of man. According to him man is both individual and social and that these two aspects are indivisible from his being. Every society possesses a soul which secretly works for different institutions and organizations, holding them together and giving them a sense of character.

Man cannot exist in isolation but seeks in society a harmonious fulfilment of all his higher potentialities and powers. It is only when man realizes the spiritual unity or self of society will he experience 'the light of the integral self-existence'. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges a continuous interaction between the state and the individual which he claims serves to enrich the

entire scope of man's experiences. By attempting to uplift his own life, man inevitably transforms humanity in the most creative of ways.

Moving towards universal humanity, the community is viewed as bridging the gap between the individual and humanity. "Still the absolute claim of the community, the society or the nation to make its growth, perfection, greatness, the sole object of human life are to exist for itself alone as against the individual and the rest of humanity, to take arbitrary position of the one and make the hostile assertion of itself against the other, whether defensive or offensive, the law of its action in the world, - and not, as it unfortunately is, a temporary necessity, - this attitude of societies, races, religions, communities, nations, empires is evidently an aberration of the human reason, quite as much as the claim of the individual to live for himself egoistically is an aberration and the deformation of a truth"<sup>10</sup>.

The stormy relationship that the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies share have always dominated the evolution of the individual, the community and the entire human race. Unfortunately the much needed and sought after ideal of their harmony has not yet been realized.

Profering a reason for such a situation Sri Aurobindo maintains that social thinkers addressing this question fail to perceive the underlying essential unity of the individual and the community with humanity as a whole. Thus far humanity has sadly failed to realize its inner consciousness at the level of organized political or social life.

Sri Aurobindo is of the firm belief that in relation to its true self, as well as its outer being, the nature of society is intimately bound to the nature of the individual man. So much so that he claims that, "the society or nation is, even in its greater complexity, a larger, a composite individual, the collective Man"<sup>11</sup>. Such a view is applied not only to the nation society but to all other organized human associations as well.

Examining the modern state as the latest expression of an organized human association, one finds that the individual is gradually and progressively coerced into submitting his will and activities to those of the state. The modern state presenting itself as the ultimate in perfection is rapidly moving towards absolutism or statism which, as we know, is a gross denial of

human freedom, dignity and progress. Individual freedom is viewed only in relation to the general will or collective wisdom of the state.

In this regard Sri Aurobindo draws a distinction between the general will and the class will. According to him it is the class will which governs the functioning of the modern state. It is the class will which represents the community and imposes and justifies certain collective aims and ambitions on the great mass of individuals. It makes no difference whether the class will is representative of the bourgeois or the proletariat for their goals and methods are almost identical. In either case there would be a maintenance and furtherance of the interest of the governing class.

Extremely critical of the idea of the state, Sri Aurobindo regards the state as being a mere machine lacking tact, taste and delicacy. The state is incapable of delving deep down into the inner reaches of human consciousness and therefore fails to perceive or understand the underlying spiritual unity inherent in man and the rest of humanity.

According to Sri Aurobindo the state defeats the very purpose of its own existence by suppressing the creative expressions of man thereby inhibiting his self-development. For it is the individual who provides the dynamics of collective progress, since the state or the collectivity cannot act freely, flexibly or harmoniously.

Evaluating the nature of the state, primarily from the standpoint of the individual or the governed, the state in the final analysis will always remain a machine, having a mechanical character. Despite this mechanical nature and other undesirable aspects of the state, Sri Aurobindo advises however that we should not deny our need for society itself. He further argues that our battle against oppressive regimes or social orders should not blind us to the fact of our fundamental dependence on society.

Investigating the relationship between society and the individual Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that society is more dependent on the individual than the individual on society. The placing of the individual above society is clearly evident when he wrote: "He is not confined within the community although his 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; if that were abolished or disaggregated, though some spirit or power of it might form again in other individuals but the individual is not a mere cell of the 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 who constitute it, still it does not constitute their whole life. If it has its being which it seeks it affirms 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"<sup>12</sup>.

Whilst maintaining that the society depends on the individual for its inner progress and evolution, Sri Aurobindo is willing to accept that they do in



fact share an equally inter-dependent relationship. Explaining the situation more eloquently Sri Aurobindo declares that, "Only as the individuals become more and more conscious can the group-being also become more and more conscious; the growth of the individual is the indispensable means for the inner growth as distinguished from the outer force and expansion of the collective being. This indeed is the dual importance of the individual that it is through him that the cosmic spirit organizes its collective units and makes them self-expressive and progressive and through him that it rises. Nature from the Inconscience to the Superconscience and exalts it to meet the Transcendent. In the mass the collective consciousness is near to the Inconscient; it has a subconscious, an obscure and mute movement which needs the individual to express it, to bring it to light, to organize it and make it effective. The mass consciousness by itself moves by a vogue, half-formed or unformed subliminal and commonly subconscient impulse rising to the surface; it is prone to a blind or half-seeing unanimity which suppresses the individual in the common movement: if it thinks, it is by the motto, the slogan, the watch-word, the common crude or formed idea, the traditional, the accepted customary notion, it acts, when not by instinct or on impulse, then by

the rule of the pack, the herd mentality, the type law. This mass consciousness, life, action, can be extra-ordinarily effective if it can find an individual or a few powerful individuals to embody, express, lead organize it; its sudden crowd-movements can also be irresistible for the moment like the motion of an avalanche or the rush of a tempest. The suppression or entire subordination of the individual in the mass consciousness can give a great practical efficiency to a nation or a community if the subliminal collective being can build a binding tradition or find a group, a class, a head to embody its spirit and direction; the strength of powerful military states, of communities with a tense and austere culture rigidly imposed on its individuals, the success of the great world-conquerors had behind it this secret of Nature. But this is an efficiency of the outer life, and that life is not the highest or last term of our being. There is a mind in us, there is a soul and spirit, and our life has no true value if it has not in it a growing consciousness, a developing mind, and if life and mind are not an expression, an instrument, a means of liberation and fulfillment for the soul, the indwelling spirit.

But the progress of the mind, the growth of the soul, even of the mind and soul of the collectivity, depends on the individual, on his sufficient freedom and independence, on his separate power to express and bring into being what is still unexpressed in the mass, still undeveloped from the subconsciousness or not yet brought out from within or brought down from the Superconsciousness. The collectivity is a mass, a field of formation, the individual is the diviner of truth, the form maker, the creator. In the crowd the individual loses his inner direction and becomes a cell of the mass body moved by the collective will or idea or the mass impulse. He has to stand apart, affirm his separate reality in the whole, his own mind emerging from the common mentality, his own life distinguishing itself in the common life - uniformity even as his body has developed something unique and recognizable in the common physicality. He has, even, in the end to retire into himself in order to find himself, and it is only when he has found himself that he can become spiritually one with all; if he does not achieve this, that oneness in the mind, in the vital, in the physical and has not yet a sufficiently strong individuality, he may be overpowered by the mass consciousness and lose his soul fulfillment, his mind fulfillment, his life fulfillment, become only a cell of the mass body.

The collective being may then become strong and dominant, but it is likely to lose its plasticity, its evolutionary movement: the great evolutionary periods

of humanity have taken place in communities where the individual became active, mentally, vitally or spiritually alive"<sup>13</sup>.

Attempting therefore to strike a balance between individual liberty and state power Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that whilst the individual depends on society for his growth, survival and perfection, the society relies on the individual for its embodied existence, self-expression and inner development. Despite the belief that a reconciliation between different human groups is unattainable Sri Aurobindo prefers to uphold and maintain the intricate balance between the state and the individual.

Given that human nature is constantly evolving and developing, in its bid to realize its higher potentialities it also fosters at the same time a sense of oneness or unity with fellow human beings. This unity is then expressed in the numerous human aggregates that men in society form. A firm advocate and protector of this unity Sri Aurobindo, who regards the state and the individual as inseparable and interdependent

aspects of the one common existence, declares that, "the society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development or 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 goal. 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 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. The individual too cannot flourish by himself; for the universal, the unity and collectivity of his fellow-beings, is his present source and stock; it is the thing whose possibilities he individually expresses, even when he transcends its immediate level, and of which in his phenomenal being he is one result"<sup>14</sup>.

True to the spirit of integration Sri Aurobindo is convinced that society can only progress via synthesis and harmony. The forces of

individualism and collectivism are held in check through successful adjustments and moderating compromises. A society devoid of such an attitude leaves very little room for progress.

To conclude, Sri Aurobindo's view of the relationship between the state and the individual we invoke Sri Aurobindo himself who aptly summarizes his entire position in the following passage: "But also we may enlarge the idea of the self and as objective science sees a universal force of Nature, which is the one reality and of which everything is the process, we may come subjectively to the realization of a universal Being or Existence which fulfills itself in the world and the individual and the group with an impartial regard for all as equal powers of its self-manifestation. This is obviously the self-knowledge which is most likely to be right, since it most comprehensively embraces and accounts for the various aspects of the world-process and the eternal tendencies of humanity. In this view neither the separate growth of the individual nor the all-absorbing growth of the group can be the ideal, but an equal, simultaneous and, as far as may be, parallel development of both, in which each helps to fulfill the other. Each being has his own truth of independent self-realization and his

truth of self-realization in the life of others and should feel, desire, help, participate more and more, as he grows in largeness and power, in the harmonious and natural growth of all the individual selves and all the collective selves of the one universal Being. These two when properly viewed, would not be separate opposite or really conflicting lines of tendency, but the same impulse of the one common existence, companion movements separating only to return upon each other in a richer and larger unity and mutual consequence"<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4.1.2 The Marxian Viewpoint

In the light of Sri Aurobindo's conception of state, let us now commit ourselves to a study of Marx's theory of state. According to Marx, history clearly shows that the evolution of the state is determined by corresponding socio-economic structures. Each society founded on some kind of private ownership and class antagonisms illustrates a corresponding historical type of an antagonistic state i.e., slave-owning, feudal and bourgeois.

Marx's conception of the state cannot be divorced from his preoccupation with the class struggle, for it is this very struggle between the

antagonistic classes of exploiters and the exploited that drives and contributes to society's development. Classes exist in definite historical periods in society due to definite modes of production. The stratification of society into various classes can be attributed to the insignificant affluent minority of the population. This rich minority, in order to preserve its privileged position, by exploiting the vast majority of the population, seeks a special force or instrument of power to maintain its privileged position.

Such an attitude, harboured by the ruling or exploiting class, accounts for the origin of the state. The appearance of antagonistic classes was paralleled by the appearance of the state. Used as an instrument, the state protects and promotes the interests of the exploiting classes at the expense of the exploited. Elaborating on the Marxist theory of the state, Lenin claims that the state, "is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and in so far as class antagonisms objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable"<sup>16</sup>. Viewed as an instrument for the oppression of one class by another Marx concludes that the



ensuing battle between the classes serves only to sustain the state and its machinery.

Such a development within society is envisaged by Marx as epitomizing man's alienated condition. Explaining further he declares that, "by the word 'state' is meant the government, or the state in so far as it forms a special organism separated from society through the division of labour"<sup>17</sup>. According to Marx one must not lose sight of the fact that the state and its machinery are products of society. And as such when the state starts exploiting society, then society must retaliate by revolting against the state. Society will always remain above the government machinery.

Attempting to highlight and to re-establish 'the essence of socialized man' Marx inverts Hegel's philosophy of state via his method of transformational criticism. Contrary to Hegel, Marx maintains that there exists no separation between civil society and the state. The state is just an extension of civil society and should therefore not regard itself as being separate from the people. Civil society encompasses the entire scope of human interaction within a definite stage of the development of productive forces.

Elucidating this idea Marx wrote in the German Ideology: "The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically and without any mystification and speculation the connection of the social and political structures with production. The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, however, of these individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they actually are, i.e., as they act, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will."<sup>18</sup>

In Marx's conception, therefore, as long as individuals maintain and perform state duties and functions they must be viewed in relation to their social quality and not their private quality. The individual is part of society enmeshed in concrete human relations, (particularly in the field of production), and created by these conditions. As a result of the individual's social character being assessed primarily as the entirety of social relations, Marx firmly maintains that the

individual cannot be isolated from his social context. For Marx the individual remains but a function of social relations.

Reacting against individualism which manifests itself in the modern civil society, Marx declares that such a development is a gross negation of man as a social being. Individualism purports that man enters into social-relations for the sole purpose of achieving his own private goals. Furthermore extolling individual existence as the ultimate aim, individualism juxtaposes society to the individual as an external separate entity. The tenets of individualism by its very nature suppresses any move towards the creation of a socialized model of man.

#### 4.1.3 Sri Aurobindo and Marx on Individualism

Despite being fully aware of the socialistic tendency which promises full development and well-being for all individuals in society, Sri Aurobindo's response to individualism is an interesting one. According to him, "there is this deeper truth which individualism has discovered 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 not merely a member of a human pack, hive or anthill; 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. He demands freedom, space, initiative for his soul, for his nature, for that puissant and tremendous thing which society so much distrusts and has laboured in the past either to suppress altogether or to relegate to the purely spiritual field, an individual thought, will and conscience."<sup>19</sup>

Such an attitude towards individualism led many scholars to conclude that freedom of the individual was a myth and above all else Marxism stood for the complete neglect of the individual and his problems. Rationalizing his own position of placing the collectivity above the individual, Marx maintains that it was only a precautionary measure. According to him, he was reacting against an individualism that progressively reduces man to self-defeating hedonism. The wider significance of Marx's analysis of individualism has undoubtedly eluded many.

Whilst Marx concedes to the fact that there exists an area of human activity that belongs exclusively to the individual, he affirms that such a notion serves only to foster antagonism between individuals thereby sowing the seeds of disunity between them. In his bid to remedy the situation, Marx introduces a regulatory element within the realms of individualism. According to Marx the only way that man can overcome such a situation is by performing and perceiving all human activity as socially orientated. Man must grow into an awareness of his dependency upon his fellow men.

Marx explains further that society and the individual are not two separate entities, rather they represent different poises of human existence. His attempts to bridge the gap between the individual and society also resolves the cleavage between being and consciousness, as noted in the following passage: "What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of 'Society' as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. His life, even if it may not appear in the direct form of a communal life carried out together with others - is therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. Man's individual and species life are not different, however much - and this is inevitable - the mode of existence of the individual is a more

particular, or more general mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more particular or more general individual life. In his consciousness of species man confirms his real, social life and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms itself in species-consciousness and is for itself in its generality as a thinking being.

Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual, (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much the totality - the ideal totality - the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social, existence, and as a totality of human life-activity.

Thinking and being are thus no doubt distinct, but at the same time they are in unity with each other."<sup>20</sup>

Still dwelling on the intricate relation between the individual and society, Marx is convinced that the emancipation of the individual will also determine the emancipation of society and

vice-versa, since society does not exist as an entity separate from the individual. Socialism, for Marx, is the key towards bridging the gap between the individual and society.

As already noticed Marx like Sri Aurobindo also postulates a synthetic integral view of society: that man and society are in fact non-different from each other. Although worked out from two diverse and opposing standpoints, as already mentioned earlier, they nevertheless arrive at the same conclusion.

Noting the irreconcilable contradiction between the idealist and materialist persuasions of Marxism, Marx is conscious of the fact that he himself might have conveyed the impression that society takes precedence over the individual. Clearing up his own position, Marx is of the opinion that the conflict between the individual and society is an imaginary one which warrants neither philosophical nor sociological enquiry.

His postulation 'theoretical communism' bears further light on the situation. Upon examining this theory one realizes that history, according to Marx, is but a constant dialogue between individualism and collectivism. Sharing an inextricable relationship Marx wrote: "communist

theoreticians, the only communists who have time to devote to the study of history, are distinguished precisely by the fact that they alone have discovered that throughout history the 'general interest' is created by individuals who are defined as 'private persons'. They know that this contradiction is only a seeming one because one side of it, what is called the 'general interest' is constantly being produced by the other side, private interest, and in relation to the latter it is by no means an independent force with an independent history - so that this contradiction is in practice constantly destroyed and re-produced. Hence, it is not a question of the Hegelian 'negative unity' of two sides of a contradiction, but of the materially determined destruction of the preceding materially determined mode of life of individuals with the disappearance of which this contradiction together with its unity also disappears."<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo, addressing the same problem but from an integral spiritual perspective, made the following observation: "We may concentrate on the individual life and consciousness as the self and regard its power, freedom, increasing light and satisfaction and joy as the object of living and thus arrive at a subjective individualism. We



may, on the other hand, lay stress on the group consciousness, the collective self; we may see man only as an expression of this group-self necessarily incomplete in his individual or separate being, complete only by that larger entity, and we may wish to subordinate the life of the individual man to the growing power, efficiency, knowledge, happiness, self-fulfillment of the race or even sacrifice it and consider it as nothing except in so far as it lends itself to the life and growth of the community or the kind. We may claim to exercise a righteous oppression on the individual and teach him intellectually and practically that he has no claim to exist, no right to fulfil himself except in his relations to the collectivity. These alone then are to determine his thought, action and existence and the claim of the individual to have a law of his own being, a law of his own nature which he has a right to fulfil and his demand for freedom of thought involving necessarily the freedom to stumble and sin may be regarded as an insolence and a chimera.

The collective self-consciousness will then have the right to invade, at every point, the life of the individual, to refuse it all privacy and apartness, all self-concentration and isolation, all independence and self; and determine

everything for it by what it conceives to be the best thought and highest will and rightly dominant feeling, tendency, sense of need, desire for self-satisfaction of the collectivity.

But also we may enlarge the idea of the self and, as objective, "Science sees a universal force of Nature which is the one reality and of which everything is the process, we may come subjectively to the realization of a universal Being or Existence which fulfills itself in the world and the individual and the group with an important regard for all as equal powers of its self-manifestation."<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.2 On Democracy

Sri Aurobindo rejects the State Idea as a political organization on the grounds that it fails to foster the attainment of individual freedom. Identified as the embodiment of coercive authority the state totally disregards the inner callings of the soul of man and its absolute need of freedom. Viewed as the progressive self-conscious evolution of society, modern democracy stands for the complete liberty of the individual. The exercise of freedom is vitally essential for an integral all round development of the individual.

According to Sri Aurobindo there exists two important fundamental principles which serve as a guide or framework within which individualistic democracy functions. Firstly individualistic democracy dictates that all individuals are to have equal political rights promoting the full development of all and not just a privileged section of society. Secondly each individual is to govern his life according to the dictates of his own reason and will as long as he does not violate or encroach on the rights of others.

Similar to the position of Sri Aurobindo, Marx claims that man must gradually move from the realms of necessity to that higher phase of freedom. Demolishing

the notions of atomization with society Marx tries to establish what he terms a 'true democracy'. Speaking from a radical Jacobean democratic standpoint Marx held that the only real political solution was one that sang the glories of democracy. Interesting to note, however, is that Marx's postulation 'true democracy' and what he later refers to as 'man's communist essence' share an extremely close kinship in Marx's scheme of things. In fact one can go to the extent of saying that 'democracy', which is founded upon 'man's communist essence', is fundamentally non-different from communism itself. True democracy implies the realization of man's communist essence. Such notions, however, must be viewed and assessed in relation to his writings in the 'critique'.

In extolling the free expression of the human spirit, the forces of democracy, according to Sri Aurobindo, foster and maintain the liberty and dignity of the individual. Freely developing his potential and exploring new vistas, man seeks his own perfection within the realms of democracy. It is for this reason Sri Aurobindo regards democracy as a vital stage in social evolution. Training men to use their minds and to apply their intelligence, democracy even in its most perfect form will always remain, according to Sri Aurobindo, a mere representation of greater things to come.

Despite these noble tenets of democracy, Marx and Sri Aurobindo acknowledge that the gulf between theory and practice is yet to be bridged. Describing man as a half-rational being, Sri Aurobindo attributes the failure of democratic individualism to the innate tendency of the individual to misuse his freedom. Instead of developing his individuality he misuses freedom, consolidating his own power and imposing and enforcing his will at the expense of curbing the freedom of his fellow human beings. Such a situation gradually alienates the offending individual from the vast majority of people.

Modern democracy which operates via parliamentary forms of government fails to procure liberty and equality for all members of society since its very nature allows itself to be controlled by a dominant class. What we have as a result of this are numerous bourgeois states. The creation of bourgeois or middle class republics brings forth the class struggle. The oppressed classes strive towards the ideals of freedom and liberty enshrined in a democracy based on truth and not falsehood as prevalent in the bourgeois states.

Further, modern democracy monopolized by a small minority which invariably promotes its own interests, fails to allow the most able and the most capable to participate in government structures. To this end Sri

Aurobindo wrote: "individualistic democratic freedom results fatally in an increasing stress of competition which replaces the ordered tyrannies of the infra-rational periods of humanity by a sort of ordered conflict. And this conflict ends in the survival not of the spiritually, rationally or physically fittest, but of the most fortunate and vitally successful. It is evident enough that whatever else it may be, this is not a rational order of society; it is not at all the perfection which the individualistic reason of man had contemplated as its ideal or set out to accomplish."<sup>23</sup>

Commenting on competitive individualism Marx also condemns bourgeois democracy with equal gusto. Denouncing the plutocratization of the political process, Marx identifies the state as a political organization which consciously exploits society. He further states that democracy is used as an institutional mechanism by the ruling class to legalize its exploitation of the depressed classes.

For Sri Aurobindo the true ideals of democracy are yet to be realized. True democracy as purported by Sri Aurobindo, "will be free from class jealousies and class conflicts in which all interests will be harmonized, all rights, .... shall be resolved or dissolved in duty, wherein co-operation for the good

of all shall replace competition for the profit of each to the detriment of others, and the reign of love shall be brought on earth as it is in heaven"<sup>24</sup>.

#### 4.3 From Individualistic Democracy to Socialism

A realization of the shortcomings of individual democracy, setting in motion the cycle of social development, has led to the evolution of state socialism. An examination of Sri Aurobindo's early writings bears adequate testimony to the fact that Sri Aurobindo realized that without socialism, true democracy would remain but an ideal never to attain its fulfillment. Socialism being the protest of the human soul against the despotism of a plutocratic democracy champions the desire for equality in man. "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 collectivity, the pack, the hive, the mass. The result to which this points and to which it still seems irresistibly to be driving us is a new ordering of society by a rigid economic or governmental socialism."<sup>25</sup>

Socialism dictates that social and political equality be maintained by the state. It seeks to replace the competitive order of society by a co-operative one. It also aims at enforcing an equitable distribution of

the wealth of the society, or else would seek to entrust the management of wealth in the hands of the state. Emphasizing the need to improve and increase the powers of production, socialism visualizes an era of abundance of commodities for all people. Clearly evident is that socialism harbours hopes of inculcating in the individual something that he has so far failed to achieve, i.e., the need to live for the community rather than for himself.

Marx also identifies the chief aim of socialism as the upliftment and emancipation of man. Envisaging socialism as the realization of political and industrial democracy, man is no longer motivated by competitive production but produces in an associated manner. This is perhaps the basic difference between the proletarian state and the bourgeois state. While the latter is an instrument of exploitation, the former annihilates the exploiter in preparing the people to work towards the establishment of a socialist economy. Thus far the success of socialism can be attributed to the fact that it is an economic philosophy which attempts to give meaning and coherence to the struggle of the labouring classes.

Commenting on the plight of the toiling masses, Marx denounced in the severest of terms the depths of degradation into which the working class had sunk due



to capitalist exploitation. Realizing however the revolutionary nature of the labouring classes he was convinced that this class would gradually increase in numbers as the process of industrialization advanced, and that their revolution would be in the interest of the majority, waged by the majority.

For Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, socialism is not just the seizure of power from the bourgeoisie by the depressed classes. Neither is socialism visions of the depressed classes establishing a non-coercive social order based on equality of opportunity for all. Whilst willing to recognize the positive aspects of socialism, Sri Aurobindo maintains that such a revolutionary concept is characteristic of most transforming ideologies and fosters certain far reaching and important implications otherwise overlooked by the over zealous masses.

Sri Aurobindo highlights the pitfalls of Socialism and explains that, "socialism, labouring under the disadvantageous accident of its birth in a revolt against capitalism, an uprising against the rule of the successful bourgeois and the plutocrat, has been compelled to work itself out by a war of classes. And, worse still, it has started from an industrialized social system and itself taken on at the beginning a purely industrial and economic appearance. These are accidents that disfigure its true nature.

Its true nature, its justification is the attempts of the human reason to carry on the rational ordering of society to its fulfillment, its will to get rid of this great parasitical excrescence of unbridled competition, this giant obstacle to any decent ideal or practice of human living."<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, although, "socialism may bring in a greater equality and a closer association into human life, but if it is only a material change, it may miss other needed things and even aggravate the mechanical burden of humanity and crush more heavily towards the earth its spirit."<sup>27</sup>

Whilst upholding the social and economic egalitarianism of socialism Sri Aurobindo's main thrust of criticism lies in the fact that the socialist order fails to secure liberty and equality for the individual. Denying the very freedom by which man grows, the state decides what is in the best interest of the individual. Surrendering himself completely to the state a certain degree of individual liberty is allowed as long as it does not clash with the egalitarian basis of the state. Such an artificial or imposed equality secured via strict regulation is an infringement on liberty itself.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that socialism, although professing to respect the democratic basis of individual liberty, pursued to its full development, heralds the complete destruction of the distinction between social and political activities. As a result of uniformity, regulation and mechanization being the natural outcome of socialism Sri Aurobindo observes that, "unnecessary interference with the freedom of man's growth is or can be harmful. Even co-operative action is injurious if, instead of seeking the good of all compatibly with the necessities of individual growth, - and without individual growth there can be no real and permanent good of all, - it immolates the individual to a communal egoism and prevents so much free room and initiative as is necessary for the flowering of a more perfectly developed humanity. So long as humanity is not full-grown, so long as it needs to grow and is capable of a greater perfectibility, there can be no static good of all independent of the growth of the individuals composing the all. All collectivist ideals which seek unduly to subordinate the individual, really envisage a static condition whether it be a present status or one it soon hopes to establish."<sup>28</sup>

Commenting on the failures of individualistic democracy and assessing the extreme power wielded by the state in socialism, Sri Aurobindo is convinced that totalitarianism is the next logical outcome of

socialism. "Totalitarianism of some kind seems indeed to be the natural, almost inevitable destiny, at any rate the extreme and fullest outcome of Socialism or, more generally, of the collectivist idea and impulse. For the essence of Socialism, its justifying ideal, 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, haphazard confusion and waste, enforcing and perfecting co-ordination, assuring the best functioning and a sufficient life for all."<sup>29</sup>

According to Sri Aurobindo the unilateral control of man's entire life by the political authority is an unavoidable reality. The rest of the problem lies in man's need to create some sort of uniformity in his social and political life despite the intrinsic difference between these two areas of activity. Sri Aurobindo attributes the evils of totalitarianism to the mechanical role of reason in shaping human life. Reason, he maintains, has an inherent tendency towards uniformity, mechanizing the parts in a whole. It must be noted that the concept of integral truth posited by Sri Aurobindo is truth based not on reason but on the spirit.

In the final analysis Sri Aurobindo does not dismiss socialism as being devoid of any positive impulse. Viewed in relation to social evolution, socialism is indicative of a higher dimension of man's development. Sri Aurobindo's criticism of socialism whilst directed more towards its practice to standardise human life, unwittingly ends up mechanising it. Such a development serves only to contribute to man's difficulty in trying to evolve an ideal society compounded by an integral human nature which can attain its fullest satisfaction only in an ideal integral society. But in reality, society demonstrates a unique trend: it leans either towards state authority or towards the liberty of the individual. As a result one does not know how exactly to strike a balance between the two.

Whilst Marx speaks of the whole man, Sri Aurobindo posits the idea of the integral man. All things considered, the ideal man cannot grow except in an ideal community in which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity blend together forming a harmonious combination.

#### 4.4 On Communism

Marxist philosophy draws a distinction between the earlier and higher phases of communism, linking these two phases is the dictatorship of the proletariat, the main thrust of Marxism which ultimately leads socialist

society to the communist goal. Marx maintains that, "between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat"<sup>30</sup>. According to Marx this revolutionary transitory stage can by no means be by-passed simply because it provides man with the necessary training he requires which would enable him to enter the 'realm of freedom'. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat the equal right of all men cannot be established.

Marx asserts that the first phase of communism cannot produce instantly the noble ideals of justice and equality. This can be attributed to the fact that bourgeois rights and privileges are deeply ingrained in the life blood of society and culture. It is for this reason that the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the capitalistic exploiters in order to free humanity, thereby improving social relations between man and man.

Having outlined earlier the characteristics of what Marx calls 'crude communism' i.e., socialism, in which man strives for the realization of his humanity, let us now examine the higher phase of communism in which man will exist after his full transformation. Identified as a vast association of complete individuals,

communism is viewed as the, "positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being - a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully-developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism, it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man - the true resolution of the strife between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution."<sup>31</sup>

The final stage of communism may very well be described as the positive abolition of private property which liberates man from the compulsive acquisitive mania, identified as the prime source of human bondage. The transcendence of private property leads undoubtedly to the all-round, full-flowering of the human personality.

Another important feature of the final phase of communism pre-empted by a 'socialized humanity' is the withering away of the state. After having realized his real nature thereby freeing society from all forms of inherent contradictions, man will not need any external authority to regulate his conduct. The communist adage

'from each according to his ability to each according to his need' is regarded as some kind of inner moral obligation which urges all individuals to uphold and protect the principles of communist society.

In the field of production, man produces material goods for the sole reason of giving vent to his productive nature. This is supported by the fact that man produces material goods even when he is devoid of any physical need. This, according to Marx, demonstrates that man expresses himself creatively via material production in order to realize his inner essence. With the abundance of material goods man will no longer organize his affairs around economic or political laws, but around the laws of aesthetics. Echoing similar sentiments Afanasyev also claims that a man in communist society "combines in himself spiritual richness, moral purity and physical perfection".<sup>32</sup>

Assessing Sri Aurobindo's response to the dawning of the final phase of communism, ushering in a stateless society, we detect in his writings a strong sense of skepticism. Whilst Sri Aurobindo might laud the communist crusade against exploitation, expropriation, and the suppression of the toiling masses, he is convinced that communism in action has degenerated into a dictatorship by an authoritarian party and proletarian imperialism.



Moving further and further away from the original Russian Ideal, Russian communism, discarding democratic liberty, has developed into a rigorous totalitarian regime. Maintaining that the state machine would be extremely reluctant to allow itself to be abolished without a struggle, Sri Aurobindo observes that thus far there is no concrete evidence indicating that the state authority is withering away. Only until political power is gradually decentralized and relegated to the masses, will the state start withering away.

Although "the communistic principle of society is intrinsically as superior to the individualistic as is brotherhood to jealousy and mutual slaughter"; Sri Aurobindo concludes that, "all the practical schemes of Socialism invented in Europe are a yoke, a tyranny and a prison".<sup>33</sup>

He states further that, "if communism ever re-establishes itself successfully upon earth, it must be on a foundation of soul's brotherhood and the death of egoism. A forced association and a mechanical comradeship would end in a world-wide fiasco".<sup>34</sup>

#### 4.5 On Anarchism

Viewed as a protest of the human soul against the tyranny of a bureaucratic socialism, anarchism identifies as its primary goal the establishing of a rational social order that secures freedom and justice for the individual by the total elimination of the state thereby creating harmonious stability in the sphere of institutional life. The state with its coercive mechanisms of power and extreme authoritarianism is the chief obstacle preventing the formation of a free and spontaneous co-operation based on justice and moral freedom.

Placing great faith in the innate goodness and the natural co-operative disposition of man Sri Aurobindo rejects what he calls the vitalistic or violent form of anarchism. According to him this brand of anarchism fostering socially destructive tendencies, reacts against all forms of established norms or principles. In such an association the survival of the fittest at the expense of all else would undoubtedly reign supreme. Despite being an unwavering critic of the cult of the state and its emphasis on collective social life, Sri Aurobindo is ready to acknowledge the pro's of social regulation and organization in the early stages of society. He therefore concludes that the rejection of any and all types of coercive authority by vitalistic anarchism is perhaps short-sighted.

Sri Aurobindo also levels certain criticisms against the advent of philosophical or intellectual anarchism. Evaluating intellectual anarchism from a purely psychological standpoint, he claims that it has been thus far founded on two natural endowments of the human mind. Firstly it promotes the enlightenment of reason which enables man to construct a social and political system based on natural co-operation, freedom and justice. Secondly, recognizing the perimeters of one's own freedom there is a willingness to grant an equal amount of freedom to another individual.

Such notions, although not totally rejected, are only a partial solution and therefore questionable. Intellectual anarchism revolving around the principles of reason and impulse which the two conflicting poles of our nature, cannot, according to Sri Aurobindo, arrive at an amicable point of agreement unless it yields to a higher principle within. And that which no longer allows reason to stifle the impulses or to subordinate itself to the free play of impulses is the principle of the spirit. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the rational and impulsive poles of human nature, can be harmoniously integrated only at the spiritual level. Exploring the Marxian perspective we find that Marxian theory following anarchism condemns with equal vigour the state as an expression and symbol of exploitation by the ruling classes. The withering away of the state

in the final phase of communist society can most definitely be classified under the broad umbrella of anarchism.

It must be noted however that whilst Marx focuses on the autonomy of sociology in forming a well organized, rational objective social order, Sri Aurobindo employs the power of the spirit, an internal subjective force in order to build an ideal social order. According to Sri Aurobindo socialism based on pure mechanical reason cannot provide the principle and power of unity. For Sri Aurobindo the inspiring tenets of socialism must first spiritualize itself if it harbours visions of firmly establishing itself within society.

The spiritual sources of inner governance and unity where each man is not a law unto himself but is the law, brings forth the perfect stateless society, marking the beginning of spiritual anarchism. Placing great emphasis on spiritual transformation Sri Aurobindo claims that unless we develop within a truly spiritual force a real anarchist society cannot establish itself. Sri Aurobindo affirms that, "a spiritual age of mankind will perceive this truth. It will not try to make man perfect by machinery or keep him straight by tying up all his limbs. It will not present to the member of society his higher self in the person of the policeman, the official and the corporal, nor, let us say, in the form of socialistic bureaucracy

or a Labour Society. Its aim will be to diminish as soon and as far as possible the element of external compulsion in human life by awakening the inner divine compulsion of the spirit within and all the preliminary means it will use will have that for its aim. In the end it will employ chiefly if not solely the spiritual compulsion which even the spiritual individual can exercise on those around him".<sup>35</sup>

In relation to Sri Aurobindo's integral man born out of internal subjective enquiry, Marx posits the idea of the whole man. For Marx as long as private property prevails and the class struggle remains unresolved, man cannot be free. The free man represents the whole man enjoying real freedom in a communist society. Marx's concept of anarchism as portrayed in the final phase of communist society and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual anarchism depict interesting parallels. Whilst the former emphasizes the external institutional side of human nature the latter concentrates on the inner subjective side.

Whilst neither Marx nor Sri Aurobindo deny a harmonious blending of the internal and external aspects of human nature, the methods they employ in order to reach that ideal social harmony differ greatly. Emphasizing the primacy of social institutions Marx affirms that human freedom requires always some kind of objective foundation. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo maintains that the attainment of freedom is solely an inward

enquiry. In reaction to the Marxian stance he maintains that a freedom that requires objective foundation remains unstable in nature. Stressing the absolute need of spiritual transformation Sri Aurobindo advocates a spiritual comradeship which promotes the realization of an inner union.

Refuting further the Marxian claim that freedom needs some kind of basis or foundation Sri Aurobindo postulates that true freedom implies liberation from all dependents or determinations. Granted that the material, vital and intellectual satisfaction of our needs are essential Sri Aurobindo states that these satisfactions only pave the way for and do not provide the foundation for freedom. Whilst these may be the necessary conditions for freedom, they are not at all sufficient. Freedom will always remain unconditional. The concept of spiritual anarchism as developed and propounded by Sri Aurobindo would thrive only in a perfectly spiritualized society. He therefore pleads for the complete divinization of the individual and collective life.

#### 4.6 The Aurobindonian Concept of Spiritualized Society

Never satisfied with the present state of things, man is constantly moving forward, striving to achieve the highest heights both personally and socially. Driven by an intense passion for self perfection, realisable

in an ideal society, man's quest both inward and outward knows no bounds. For Sri Aurobindo the consummation of human social development is the advent of the spiritualised society. Spiritual culture which harmonizes both the inner and outer perfections of a society lead ultimately to the realisation of a spiritualized humanity. This spiritualised humanity founded on a deeper genuine brotherhood is reflective of the profound unity of mankind.

Before proceeding any further it becomes absolutely imperative at this point to draw a distinction between the concepts of spiritualism and religion. Very often, though erroneously viewed as synonymous with each other, religion more often than not decays and degenerates into perverse forms thereby losing its spiritual touch. It is no longer religion but the unsullied eternal nature of spirituality that points to the attainment of Self Realization.

Despite religion being an effective socializing and moralizing force in human society, Sri Aurobindo observes that, "organized religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society; it could not do so because in governing society it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the

whole being".<sup>36</sup> Realising the numerous shortcomings of religion, its promotion of disunity amongst people of other faiths, its accumulation of various superstitions and its inability to cope with the advances of science, Sri Aurobindo is convinced beyond all doubt that religion is sadly inadequate and therefore not able to solve the problems of the world. The real solution lies in the radical transformation of one's inward consciousness. Again it must be stressed that although religious experience might be analogous to spiritual activity it cannot be identified with it absolutely or totally.

Further expounding the gap between religion and spiritualism Sri Aurobindo is very much aware of the "much hatred and stupidity that men succeed in packing up decorously and labeling 'Religion'!"<sup>37</sup> Believing in a personal or impersonal God has nothing to do with spiritualism. Examining the Indian tradition we encounter many philosophical systems like Jainism, Buddhism and Sāṃkhya which do not reserve any place for God in the grand scheme of things. Yet the spiritual content and character of these systems are extremely difficult to deny. It is not surprising therefore that Sri Aurobindo regards "atheism as a necessary protest against the wickedness of the Churches and the narrowness of creeds".<sup>38</sup>



Perhaps the most trenchant critic of religion will remain Karl Marx. Attacking vehemently the foundations of organized religion Marx wrote: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of the real distress and protest against real distress. Religion is the cry of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opinion of the people." Writing in the same vein Marx goes on to the extent of stating that, "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its conditions is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusion. The criticism of religion is therefore, in embryo, the criticism of the vale or woe, 'the halo of which is religion'".<sup>39</sup>

Marx asserts that religion is the precursor of false hope, devoid of foundation and extremely unscientific. He also maintains that with the amassing of scientific knowledge, and consequent reduction of various woes of mankind, religion will become progressively redundant. At this point it must be noted that whilst Sri Aurobindo might share a similar platform with Marx in criticising the evils perpetrated by the forces of an organized, highly institutionalized religion, it is as far as he goes. Parting company with the Marxian

viewpoint Sri Aurobindo at no stage calls for the total abolishing of religion, he would prefer rather to perfect it.

In keeping with his integral outlook Sri Aurobindo attempts to bridge the gap between religion and spirituality, in his bid to re-establish and to allow real religion to surge forth, shedding off all elements of decay and degeneration. Moving towards a realization of his goal he observes that, "in reality, the European has not succeeded in getting rid of religion from his life. It is coming back in Socialism, in the Anarchism of Bakunin and Tolstoy, in many other isms; and in whatever form it comes, it insists on engrossing the whole of life, moulding the whole of society and politics under the law of the idealistic aspiration. It does not use the word God or grasp the idea, but it sees God in humanity. What the European understood by religion, had to be got rid of and put out of life, but real religion, spirituality, idealism, altruism, self devotion, the hunger after perfection is the whole destiny of humanity and cannot be got rid of".<sup>40</sup>

To come back to Marx, despite his shunning of religion as a mere shroud serving only to conceal and, to an extent, justify certain basic social and economic inequalities, there are those scholars who maintain that although devoid of any religious impulse Marxism,

encompassing the entire scope of human activity, illustrates the unique synthesis of both the material and spiritual domains.

Steeped in the spiritual though non theistic tradition and expressing himself in purely philosophical language, Marx's socialism, championing the cause of the down-trodden, is viewed as a protest against organized exploitation which manifests itself in the social economic and political spheres of human activity.<sup>41</sup>

Extolling the spiritual impulse as the rational basis for the social programme postulated by Marx, Fromm writes: "Socialism (in its Marxist and other forms) returned to the idea of the 'good society' as the condition for the realization of man's spiritual needs. It was anti-authoritarian, both as far as the Church and the State are concerned, hence it aimed at the eventual disappearance of the State and at the establishment of a society composed of voluntarily co-operating individuals. Its aim was a reconstruction of society in such a way as to make it the basis for man's true return to himself, without the presence of these authoritarian forces which restricted and impoverished man's mind.

Thus Marxist and other forms of socialism are the heirs of prophetic Messianism, Christian Chiliastic sectarianism, thirteenth-century Thomism, Renaissance Utopianism, and eighteenth-century enlightenment. It is the synthesis of the prophetic-Christian idea of society as the plane of spiritual realization, and of the idea of individual freedom. For this reason, it is opposed to the church because of its restriction of the mind, and a liberalism because of its separation of society and moral values. It is opposed to Stalinism and Krushchevism for their authoritarianism as much as their neglect of humanist values."<sup>42</sup>

Despite the spiritual impulse in Marx's socialism, as highlighted and propounded by many acclaimed scholars, Sri Aurobindo is very much aware of the mystical and religious elements that have crept into Marxism and Russian communism. Realizing to an extent the distortion of Marx's teaching and its reduction to some kind of dogma Sri Aurobindo declares that, "in Russia the Marxist System of Socialism has been turned almost into a gospel. Originally a rationalistic system worked out by a logical thinker and discoverer and systematiser of ideas, it has been transformed by the peculiar turn of the Russian mind into something like a social religion, a collectivist mystique, an inviolable body of doctrines with all denial or departure treated

as a punishable heresy, a social cult enforced by the intolerant piety and enthusiasm of a converted people."<sup>43</sup>

The lofty ideals of communism have degenerated into some kind of corrupt social religion and have failed to establish a perfect social order due to its total neglect of the spiritual impulse. According to Sri Aurobindo the spiritual impulse is the only true binding force promoting a real and eternal unity. Such a unity which is an important prerequisite for social regeneration is the direct outcome of spiritual realization. Promoting a deeper brotherhood the social character of the spiritualized society is founded upon the spiritual equality of all human beings.

"A spiritualized society would treat in its sociology the individual from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skillfully densed machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult."<sup>44</sup>

Freed from the forces of external coercion, responding to a divine law the individual relies solely on an inner spiritual compulsion. Spiritual individuals

no longer bound by the fetters of egoism live in the spirit as the collective soul. The individual, fully conscious of the divine self within, progressively spiritualizes the entire scope of human activity. The spiritual impulse permeates the entire scope of human life and brings forth the growth of an inner freedom which seeks not only one's own individual liberation but the liberation of others as well. This demonstrates the complete law of the spiritual being in a spiritualized society and is the sign and the condition of a perfect life.

Realising that spiritualism has often been rejected as a philosophy of transcendentalism, Sri Aurobindo in defiance of popular belief boldly declares that the spiritual age will be an era fully realisable in this world and is not just a spiritual concept, having in reality only the confines of an illumined mind. Expressing himself in essentially sociological terms Sri Aurobindo claims that the social, political and economic institutions of society are in dire need of spiritual transformation, it being the only criterion possible for the development of the ideal individual and the ideal society.

Lauding the ideals of an integral spirituality as the ultimate hope for a perfect society Sri Aurobindo concludes that, "a spiritualized society can alone

bring about a reign of individual harmony and communal happiness; or, in words which, though liable to abuse by the reason and the passions, are still the most expressive we can find, a new kind of theocracy which shall be the government of mankind by the divine in the heart, and minds of men".<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.7 Religion of Humanity and Marxist Humanism

Although Sri Aurobindo agrees to a certain extent with the tenets of socio-political concepts like democracy, socialism, communism, anarchism and humanism he pleads for a radical transformation of the empirical ego of man. Thus alone can the ideals of his religion of humanity based on spiritual gnosis be realized on earth. Driven by a superior transforming power in consonance with moral, and spiritual criteria the religion of humanity seeks to stabilize the outward uniformity of the world order. In doing so the religion of humanity fosters the development of a sense of freedom and equality as well as a sense of true unity with the world.

Man, no longer living in the ego but in the spirit, moves towards an increasing oneness of human life. Sri Aurobindo maintains that the religion of humanity creates a real spiritual and psychological unity which allows for a free diversity within the conscious oneness of the spirit. The advent of such a sense of

unity treats in its sociology individuals not as physical aggregates of society but as suffering souls progressing towards the attainment of freedom and human perfection. In the sphere of economics man will enjoy unlimited freedom, creating not a huge engine of production but experiencing the joys of work according to his own nature. And finally its politics rejects the development of the cult of the State which forces individuals to worship the State as his god and his larger self.

It must be noted that Sri Aurobindo cautions that his religion of humanity must not be confused with the western humanism of the eighteenth century rationalists, which was directed against the theological world. The fundamental principle of this kind of humanism is that the moral worth of humanity should be respected and human values are to be preserved for positive social benefit devoid of any theological or metaphysical abstractions. Claiming that philosophy has significance only if it has social relevance, humanism was anthropomorphic and secular.

In reaction to the humanism of the eighteenth century rationalists Sri Aurobindo states that man is not the ultimate end in his philosophical system. Refusing to glorify empirical man, he believes that man has significance only in so far as he is an expression of the divine. Viewing man solely in relation to the



divine spirit Sri Aurobindo infuses modern humanism with a spiritual dimension. According to him as long as humanism extols the contemporary aspirations of empirical man, devoid of spiritual foundation, it can never be a permanent solution.

Reflecting on the significance of Marxism, we notice strong humanist elements in Marx's thought. Evaluating capitalism from a moral standpoint Marx's humanistic programme is regarded as a philosophy of the progressive realization of the whole man, a natural outcome of the historical process. "The humanistic - ethical basis of his work is composed of the concepts of de-alienation, freedom, social equality and justice, the abolition of exploitation and the disappearance of social classes, the withering away of the state, the creation of self managing associations of producers and so on. No satisfactory socio-political ethics today can steer clear of these values."<sup>46</sup>

Marx's vehement criticism of capitalism cannot be studied separately from his anthropological notions. within existing society, man's entire scope of human activity is subordinated to a non-human purpose. Capitalism not only alienates man from himself and his own labour but serves also to alienate man from man. According to Marx only the tenets enshrined in socialism can liberate man from the 'realm of necessity' to the 'realm of freedom'. Realizing his

true self man enters into a free association with other men on an equal basis. This free association, knowing no national barriers, unites man with the rest of mankind.

Marx envisages socialism as the real basis of humanism. Unless we recognize and deal with the causes of institutional alienation and the dehumanization of man it would be naive to think that Marxism can effectively enrich the ethical quality of our lives in modern society. Writing in the German Ideology, Marx claims that his philosophy is a synthesis of humanism and naturalism, illustrating man's conquest not only over history but nature as well.

Commenting on Marx's radical transformation of human society Schaff writes: "Scientific socialism is essentially humanist, and the essence of its humanism is its conception of the happiness of the individual. Everything in Marxism - its philosophy, political economy and political theory is subordinated to this. For Marxism is the sum of theoretical instruments which serve one practical aim, the struggle for a happier human life. This is how Marx understood the question while still young, when he said that a revolutionary philosophy is the ideological weapon of the proletariat". Such is the meaning of the Marxist postulate of the unity of theory and practice. And this is why the theory of happiness takes on a specific

form with Marxism not as the abstract reflection of the meaning of happiness or of its subjective components, but as the revolutionary idea of that transformation of social relations which would make possible the creation of the conditions for a happy life by removing the social obstacles to such a life-Marxist socialism approaches the problem of individual happiness from its negative side, that is to say, it investigates the social obstacles to human happiness and how they can be removed. It is this approach which brings positive results, because of its realism."<sup>47</sup>

However, in order to create a happier social life man, according to Marx, will first have to positively abolish the ownership of private property. The attainment of this fundamental principle is not an easy task and upon closer examination we realize that this very principle renders Marx's conception of the future society like Sri Aurobindo's, to be somewhat idealistic. The total abolition of private property and the development of human oneness in thought and practice based on a psychological unity, is equally untenable.

Criticizing the objective institutionalism of Marxism, Sri Aurobindo is convinced that the spiritual religion of humanity is the aim of mankind in the subjective age. Such an attitude is ascribed to the fact that

institutional religion up to now has failed to unify mankind because it has always allowed itself to be overridden by credal dogma and narrowness.

Placing great emphasis on social interaction, the religion of humanity permeates and transforms every aspect of human activity, internal and external. The blossoming of spiritual values upholds and identifies freedom as vitally important for human perfection. Both Marx and Sri Aurobindo though advocating two different school of anarchism stress the necessity of freedom for human perfection and emancipation.

Rejecting Marx's glorification of empirical man in attempting to create a free and just society, Sri Aurobindo maintains that the movement towards a greater social and political unity does not necessarily imply a boon in itself; if it neglects the cultivation of man's inner spiritual unity. While Sri Aurobindo advocates that man must first attempt to realize freedom in the life of the individual and then make it manifest in objective social institutions, Marx posits that social freedom must precede individual freedom. The ideal of individual freedom, irrespective of its noble intent cannot be realized in practice if social freedom is not first made a concrete reality.

In this regard Sri Aurobindo stresses that long after individual freedom is secured via institutional means, thus serving their function, individuals demand the maintenance of such institutions that purport external compulsion. Such a development by Sri Aurobindo's standards can only inhibit social progress and advancement. For Sri Aurobindo the institutionalization of human relations via its own inherent limitations is said to curtail the freedom of the individual.

Upholding his philosophy of integration Sri Aurobindo accepts neither the realism of Marxism nor the idealism of the transcendentalist. Whilst realizing that the main thrust of social development is the procurement of individual freedom in an ideal society Sri Aurobindo does not negate the importance of the functions of external objective institutions. The presence of an inner sense of unity and freedom lends meaning and eternal durability to outward unification.

Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy postulates that force, and not matter in its physical sense, as Marx would have, is inherent in the very nature of consciousness. Consciousness for Sri Aurobindo is indicative of the underlying spiritual whole, the spirit of which serves to reconcile all apparent contradictions into one spiritual unity. Sri Aurobindo

applies this metaphysical doctrine to the social reality in order to eliminate the factors of conflict and contradiction.

Sri Aurobindo contends that it is only in the light of the spiritual principle that one can comprehend the complex relation between matter and spirit, two stark opposites. Material and spiritual objects, different poises of the same Reality, are essentially integrated and is part of a complex harmony of opposites. Accordingly Sri Aurobindo claims that the spiritual mind, lying above the normal reason, capable of synthesizing all apparent contradictions is an important ingredient for the dawning of the religion of humanity.

Reflecting on the religion of humanity as opposed to the basic defects of humanism Sri Aurobindo concludes that, "in positivism Europe has attempted to arrive at a higher synthesis, the synthesis of humanity; and Socialism and philosophical Anarchism, the Anarchism of Tolstoy and Spencer, have even envisaged the application of the higher intellectual synthesis to life. In India we do not recognize the nation as the highest synthesis to which we can rise. There is a higher synthesis, humanity; beyond that there is a still higher synthesis, this living, suffering, aspiring world of creatures, the synthesis of Buddhism;

there is a highest of all, the synthesis of God, and that is the Hindu synthesis, the synthesis of Vedanta."<sup>48</sup>

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EXPLORING THE REALMS OF FREEDOM

Common to philosophical enquiry in the traditions of the east and the west is an insatiable quest or search after freedom. Every individual is seeking the fullest concrete expression of freedom not only in the spiritual realms but in the socio-political arena as well. Recognizing that the west has made great strides in the sphere of external freedom, Sri Aurobindo maintains that the east, concentrating on inner or spiritual freedom has exhausted fully its metaphysical implications. Acknowledging the influence of western politics on modern Vedantins he readily concedes that the application of the ancient idea of moksha enshrined in Vedanta to socio-political phenomena is a relatively new development.

Infusing the spiritual concepts of Vedanta with a political activism, Sri Aurobindo evolves an exalted social philosophy which claims to solve many of the problems that afflict humanity. Permeating the ideals of democracy, socialism, anarchism, nationalism and internationalism, political Vedantism seeks not only to perfect our social structures but also attempts to put man in touch with his inner reality. Political Vedantism represents a true synthesis of western and eastern ideals. Appropriately Sri Aurobindo states that, "we in India have found a mighty freedom within ourselves, our brother-men in Europe have worked towards

freedom without. We have been moving on parallel lines towards the same end. They have found out the way to external freedom. We meet and give to each other what we have gained. We have learned from them to aspire after external as they will learn from us to aspire after internal freedom."<sup>1</sup>

It is often postulated that the clue to the understanding of man, who is the central orb of all philosophical quest, lies in the nature of freedom. Marx's analysis of the relation between man and freedom is undertaken primarily from a socio-historical perspective. Focusing on the struggles of the oppressed and the exploited in the course of human history, freedom, an eternal human aspiration has always been for Marx an expression of protest. According to Marx's philosophical model freedom is placed in the context of necessity, the individual in the context of society, and man in the context of history.

Using the historical process as a standard, Marx claims that there exists in human history a ruling power of goodness which man must progressively realize in order to attain liberation. Formulating a purely external or social conception of freedom, Marx asserts that it is the forces of external necessity and its limitations that provides the impetus which urges man to transcend the realms of necessity only to enter the realm of freedom. For Marx the attainment of freedom symbolizes not only self perfection but also

represents the culmination of all human ideals. Marx regards freedom as the essence of truth and the highest social and moral ideal. He observes that the unfolding of the historical process illustrates a progressive movement towards a realization of complete human freedom and emancipation.

### 5.1 The Concept of Integral Freedom

As already mentioned Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy stems directly from his general philosophical world view. Drawing socio-political implications from his metaphysics Sri Aurobindo evolves the concept of "integral freedom". An unwavering defender of human freedom, he asserts, that the perfect human order can only be established by the collective efforts of highly evolved individuals who have realized an inner spiritual freedom. The descent of the spiritual consciousness is an important prerequisite for the harmonious working of true individualism and true collectivism in an integral unity, neither effacing each other.

Whilst guarding against violating the harmonious relationship between the individual and the collective, Sri Aurobindo never fails to stress that the perfection of society depends first and foremost upon the perfection of the individual. The individual, remaining central to his social philosophy, demands

certain fundamental rights for the complete realization of individual freedom. The assertion of individual rights must not be dismissed totally as an expression of one's ego but is rather a spontaneous out-pouring of freedom, an innate quality in man. Steering cautiously between the concepts of individualism and collectivism Sri Aurobindo maintains that rights are equally vital for individual self-development and collective perfection. According to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo's postulation, spiritual society represents a perfect blend of state authority and personal liberty, which otherwise devoid of the inner all-transforming spiritual element remain but irreconcilable enemies. Individual freedom and institutional freedom representing different poises of that greater Reality, rightly understood, are basically complimentary.

According to Sri Aurobindo: "Spirituality respects the freedom of the human soul, because it is itself fulfilled by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, dharma. This liberty will give to all the fundamental parts of our being."<sup>2</sup> Seeking to permeate the entire realm of human activity spiritual freedom must not be viewed as something divorced from social existence. For Sri Aurobindo freedom within generates an outer material liberation, and freedom from social and political oppression and exploitation. Sri Aurobindo further

declares that spirituality bearing the capacity for material advancement, "will give the same freedom to man's seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and aspirations"<sup>3</sup>. Freedom of the spirit does not imply an inconsistency with the performance of action in the material world.

Sri Aurobindo is also very aware that an integral freedom, based on an inner transforming consciousness, promotes an increasing oneness of human life in the material world. Identified as the true motive force of human development man is moving towards the establishment of a free unity amongst men. In attempting to reveal the innermost truth of human life, Sri Aurobindo proclaims that, "freedom comes by a unity without limits; for that is our real being. We may gain the essence of this unity in ourselves; we may realize the play of it in oneness with all others. The double experience is the complete intention of the soul in Nature"<sup>4</sup>.

Man becoming progressively aware of the truth about himself, transcending mechanical necessity, realizes a perfect spiritual unity. Upon such a realization the forces of uniformity and regimentation will cease to influence human activity. According to Sri Aurobindo uniformity merely represents a false sense of real unity or oneness at which it is extremely difficult to arrive. Realizing however that the establishment of a

perfect harmony between unity and diversity is a remote possibility, Sri Aurobindo advises that as an interim measure we should settle for the ideal of uniformity applying it carefully and with caution. Despite such a situation Sri Aurobindo passionately urges that man should not lose sight of or stop striving after the real aim of Nature, which is a true unity supporting a rich diversity.

Driven by an incessant need to enrich all aspects of human life Sri Aurobindo pleads for an ideal synthesis of spiritual and political freedom. The attainment of such a synthesis automatically implies the dawning of a truly higher humanity. Identifying the concept of "integral freedom" as an important criterion for the promulgation of a spiritualized society Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Freedom is a godhead whose greatness only the narrowly limited mind, the State-worshipper or the crank of reaction can now deny. No doubt, again, the essential is an inner freedom; but if without the inner realization the outer attempt at liberty may prove at last a vain thing, yet to pursue an inner liberty and perpetuate an outer slavery or to rejoice in an isolated release and leave mankind to its chains was also, an anomaly that had to be exploded, a confined and too self-centered ideal."<sup>5</sup>

## 5.2 Marx's Concept of Freedom

According to Marx the procurement of real freedom within the historical context meant the full flowering of the inherent and real potentialities of the essence of man, which he also equates with self actualization. Upholding the concept of human self determination Marx maintains that independence and freedom are products of pure self creation. Man governed by his own nature, owes his existence to himself and to himself alone.

It is for this reason that Marx posits a real freedom encompassing the physical and mental faculties of man, as against an absolute freedom. According to him man, being incapable of transcending the necessities of his own metabolism, fails to secure absolute or full freedom. Falling short of the true ideal, man has it within his power only to counteract alienation, exploitation and oppression thereby creating conditions which are most dignified and adequate to human nature.

Dissatisfied, human nature spurred on via the forces of exploitation, advance in accordance with the causal laws of historical necessity. The denial of freedom, viewed as a serious indictment on human creativity, calls for a radical transformation of the entire social structure which presently controlled by the forces of capitalism has led to the growth of economic



individualism. Man's dire quest for freedom of will and action determines the nature of the social context and historical reality in relation to the laws of socio-historical necessity. History, viewed as an ensemble of human actions and interactions, is regarded as the realization of freedom itself.

Rejecting all notions of servility, Marx sought to liberate man from his fragmented and dehumanized state caused by the ravages of slavery and exploitation. Moving towards a total realization of man's human essence, Marx places freedom in the realm of necessity. It is interesting to note at this point that Sri Aurobindo also places the attainment of freedom in the category of necessity. Freedom is the consciousness of necessity, the ability to decide and act according to that consciousness.

Despite placing freedom in the category of necessity, the spiritualist and the materialist draw different conclusions from this premise. When the spiritualist proclaims that freedom is the 'willing of nothing except itself' he explains from the standpoint of metaphysics that there exists an infinite eternal Being devoid of all limitation. Rejecting this view Marx maintains that matter in motion and not consciousness, is the notion of Being and as such willing cannot have itself as its sole and unlimited object. Matter in motion gives rise to consciousness which is subject to

certain laws which are seemingly external to it. Within Marxist quarters consciousness as consciousness does not point to an awareness of the entire Being, which is matter in motion. By the same token will as will cannot effectively will the entire Being as its object.

The Being of the materialist is not consciousness in which parts are supposed to be internally related. The parts contain the whole and the whole is in the parts. From a Marxist perspective man with all his ability of thought and action cannot contribute towards the formation of some kind of spiritual association with men either of the past or of the future. Although man's being is historically limited it must nevertheless be explored and established by acts of will and consciousness in the material conditions of life.

Evaluating the material conditions of life, Marx states that the acquiring of knowledge pertaining to social reality is the key to the attainment of freedom. Working extremely closely with the system of production, affords the working class an excellent understanding of the structure and function of the very system that oppresses them. Comprehending the reality of historical necessity the working class effectively equips itself with the necessary ammunition which would eventually prepare for the transition from (capitalism

a state of human alienation and exploitation), to socialism, (a state of equality and freedom). Unless capitalism as an institution is abolished and man bridges the gap between himself and nature man will not be able to return to himself as truly man. It is only in a classless society that man will be able to transcend class loyalty, realize his inner essence and enter into free association with fellow human beings. Clearly for Marx the dawning of the communist society is tantamount to the establishment of the reign of freedom.

According to Marx any theory of freedom which fails to take into account the historical process and its legacy of man's moral struggle is bound to prove shallow, incomplete and hardly effective in practice. Weak in its very make up, such a conception of freedom cannot withstand the enormous pressures of the concrete socio-economic conditions of exploitation and alienation. Counteracting such a situation Marx refuses to confine the problems of freedom exclusively to an inner consciousness but instead applies them to socio-political conditions of man's existence in the material world.

Drawing a distinction between philosophic liberation and real liberation Marx explains, "we shall, of course, not take the trouble to enlighten our wise philosophers by explaining to them that the

'liberation' of 'man' is not advanced a single step by reducing philosophy, theology, substance and all the trash to 'self consciousness' and by liberating man from the domination of these phases, which have never held him in thrall. Nor will we explain to them that it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world and by employing real means, that slavery cannot be abolished without the steam engine and the mule and the spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and that in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. Liberation is a historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse..."<sup>6</sup>.

Clearly evident is that the development of the productive forces as reflected by the historical process brings forth the growth of freedom. Marx reduces the entire scope of human activity to the historical process admitting neither elements of abstraction or transcendentalism. Having only historical significance, freedom, an exalted moral ideal in the Marxist scheme of things is regarded as the real transcendence of alienation.

Real freedom, maintains Marx, can only be achieved via a social community. Asserting his true individuality within the collectivity man secures for himself personal freedom. Upholding that freedom has relevance only in the context of human life Marx takes into account the external factors only - that is the physical and social environment. Acknowledging that man is influenced by the physical environment and the social relations within society Marx advises that, "if man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as man. If correctly understood interest is the principle of all morality, man's private interest must be made to coincide with the interest of humanity."<sup>7</sup>

Stressing the importance of man realizing himself as totally man, Marx vehemently attacks the division of labour. The division of labour runs contrary to the interests of humanity at large since it serves only to fragment human capacities and potential. As such man becomes a slave to labour and is regarded as a mere appendage to a particular job, thereby reducing him to the status of a tool. Real freedom enables a man to develop in any direction he so desires.

Viewed in relation to the capitalist system which is based not only on free competition but the inhuman exploitation of the labour of the working class, Marx is convinced that economic or material factors alone are real in the realization of freedom. According to Marx the exemption from compulsory industrial labour and the shortening of working hours are vital factors in liberating man from the dehumanizing conditions under which he labours.

Driven by an intense passion Marx advocates a program of violence in order to attain that which is morally desirable, i.e., freedom. For freedom is not only the aim of human existence but is also regarded as the moral perfection of mankind. The moral perfection of man stemming directly from the freedom of economic necessity conveys not only an individual striving after freedom but collective action as well, culminating in collective social freedom.

Commenting on the coercive forces of capitalism which inhibit man's creative expression Marx wrote: "If man is unfree in the materialistic sense, i.e., is free not through the negative power to avoid this or that, but through the positive power to assert his true individuality, crime must not be punished in the individual, but the anti-social sources of crime must be destroyed, and each man must be given social scope for the vital manifestation of his being. If man is

shaped by environment, his environment must be made human. If man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society, and the power of his nature must be measured not by the power of the separate individual but by the power of society."<sup>8</sup>

Such a notion of freedom one observes is the positive abolition of self aggrandisement, avarice, power and wealth. Man as an active member of society recognises the causes of society's decay. Man thus proffers concrete measures in order to prevent the impending total destruction of society. Affirming that freedom can be attained via human effort alone Marx maintains that it is imperative that the proletariat strives for the kingdom of freedom. For the struggle for freedom as a moral ideal is viewed as a uniting force, the only weapon in the hands of the proletariat to change existing exploitative social conditions.

Freedom, an important prerequisite for the ideal communist society, represents a state of consciousness held in perfect equilibrium. Social institutions reflecting the true consciousness of the working class depicts a state of perfect harmony devoid of all human contradictions. With the withering away of the state and the said harmony between man and man, and, man and nature new vistas are opened before man.

In relation to this Marxist conception, Aurobindo also maintains that institutional determination does not necessarily imply the negation of freedom or an obstacle to the nature of consciousness. If an institution depicts successfully the true nature of an inner consciousness then it cannot be regarded as a negative determinant of freedom. False consciousness according to Sri Aurobindo is the direct outcome of an intrusion of an alien power in the sphere of consciousness. This alien power subjugates consciousness to the bodily senses and physical matter. Consciousness expresses itself freely and spontaneously only in a state of complete freedom devoid of material conditions and restraints. True freedom according to Sri Aurobindo can only be attained when consciousness as subject can freely express itself as object devoid of alien determination and inner dualism. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual integralism culminates in an integral freedom which posits an harmonized inner and outer perfection.

It must be noted however that the Marxist notion of freedom together with the Aurobindoian conception remains to a great extent an ideal, never to be realized absolutely and completely. The link between ideal freedom and practical action is absent making the inspiring concept of superman or total man hardly a practical reality. Such a situation should not however



stop man from striving towards or approximating in practice the lofty ideals of freedom enshrined in a classless society or a spiritual society.

Refocussing our attention on Marx we note that freedom for him means man's ability to will and act as he ought depending directly on the external circumstances which allow him to act as he wills. Marx identifies the function of freedom as being two-fold. On one level he views freedom as the expropriation of exploitation and on another level he sees freedom as the realization of man's inner essence. Regarding freedom as being synonymous with moral goodness Marx claims that in the final analysis the liberation of mankind from the fetters of bondage implies the liberation of humanity as a whole.

### 5.3 Freedom and Social Justice

Justice in the Indian tradition is equated to the concept of Dharma. Viewed as the profound meaning of freedom, stressing personal fulfillment, dharma allows man to grow towards perfection in accordance to the laws of his own being. Commenting on the ethical inferences of Vedantic teaching Sri Aurobindo states that, "not only perfect love and beneficence but perfect justice with its necessary counterpart in action, honest dealing and faithful discharge of duty are the natural outcome of the Vedantic teaching. For if we see ourselves in others, we shall not only be willing but delighted to yield to them all that is due to them, and must shrink from wronging or doing hurt to ourselves. The debts we owe to parents, family, friends, the caste, the community, the nation we shall discharge not as an irksome obligation, but as a personal pleasure. The Christian virtue of charity, the Pagan virtue of justice are the very sap and life of Vedantic morality"<sup>9</sup>.

Whilst it is true that man needs freedom of thought and action in order to grow towards perfection, he must at the same time not disregard the human dignity and freedom of others. This is an extremely important standard for without it his own liberty and freedom is never completely assured. Claiming that the power of freedom should be rationally exercised Sri Aurobindo

states that, "this habit of discipline and obedience is not inconsistent with liberty but rather the condition for the right use of liberty and even for its preservation and survival"<sup>10</sup>.

In the early stages of society's development Sri Aurobindo is prepared to admit the use of the legal system for the upholding of liberty: Law, regarded as a mode or rule of action is absolutely imperative for the maintenance of freedom and liberty. Sri Aurobindo explains that: "Human society progresses really and vitally in proportion as law becomes the child of freedom; it will reach its perfection when, man having learned to know and become spiritually one with his fellow-man, the spontaneous law of his society exists only as the outward mould of his self-governed inner liberty."<sup>11</sup>

Sri Aurobindo further explains that, "the power to observe law rigidly is the basis of freedom; therefore in most disciplines the soul has to endure and fulfill the law in its lower members before it can rise to the perfect freedom of its divine being. These disciplines which begin with freedom are only for the mighty ones who are naturally free or in former lives have founded their freedom"<sup>12</sup>.

Sri Aurobindo asserts that the cause for the violation of the principles of liberty can be attributed to the sad lacking of unity between man and man and, between community and community. Instead of developing via mutual help and understanding man asserts himself thereby encroaching on the free development of other individuals.

As a result of our own limited ignorant capacities we need an external law, which inevitably leads to regimentation, to solve our socio-political dilemmas. Being something completely external and therefore alien to our own nature, law serves to order society from a purely mechanical and artificial basis. An imposed law also tends to stunt and inhibit the natural growth of the individual in particular and society at large.

Evaluating the Indian philosophical concept of Karma, i.e., the law of retribution and compensation in relation to an external law Sri Aurobindo observes that: "The law of Karma can be no rigid and mechanical canon or rough practical rule of thumb, but rather its guiding principle should be as supple a harmonist, as the Spirit itself whose will of self-knowledge it embodies and should adapt itself to the need of self-development of the various individual souls who are feeling their way along its lines towards the right balance, synthesis, harmonies of their action. The Karmic idea cannot be -

for spirit and not mind is its cause - a cosmic reflection of our limited average human intelligence, but rather the law of a greater spiritual wisdom, a means which behind all its dumb occult appearances embodies an understanding lead and a subtle management towards our total perfection.

The ordinary current conception of law of Karma is dominantly ethical, but ethical in no very exalted kind. Its idea of Karma is a mechanical and materialistic ethics, a crudely exact legal judgment and administration of reward and punishment, an external sanction to virtue and prohibition of sin, a code, a balance. The idea is that there must be a justice governing the award of happiness and misery on the earth, a humanly intelligible equity and that the law of Karma represents it and gives us its formula... Their first motive seems to be ethical, for justice is an ethical notion; but true ethics is Dharma, the right fulfillment and working of the higher nature, and right action should have right motive, should be its own justification and not go limping on the crutches of greed and fear. Right done for its own sake is truly ethical and ennobles the growing spirit; right done in the lust for a material reward or from fear of the avenging stripes of the executioner or sentence of the judge, may be eminently practical and useful for the moment, but it is not in the least degree ethical, but is rather a lowering of the soul of man; or at least

the principle is a concession to his baser animal and unspiritual nature .... The dependence of the pursuit of ethical values on a sanction by the inferior hedonistic values, material, vital and lower mental pleasure, pain and suffering, appeals strongly to our normal consciousness and will; but it ceases to have more than a subordinate force and finally loses all force as we grow towards greater heights of our being. That dependence cannot then be the whole or the final power or guiding of Karma."<sup>13</sup>

In the final analysis Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that the disadvantages of the compulsion advocated by legal systems in maintaining law and order, far outweighs the advantages. Expressing strong sentiments in this regard he declares that, "better anarchy than the long continuance of a law which is not our own or which our real nature cannot assimilate. And all repressive or preventive law is only a makeshift, a substitute for the true law which must develop from within and be not a check on liberty, but its outward image and visible expression"<sup>14</sup>

According to Sri Aurobindo the liberty which the external laws seek to preserve, via the forces of coercion, is outward and mechanical and is therefore an unreal liberty. Real liberty in harmony with the deepest laws of life and based upon free groupings of free individuals in a natural association, reconciles

individual liberty with the collective ideal in order to assist all of mankind in the one common work of humanity. Perfect freedom devoid of external compulsion, the sign of the perfect condition of life, indicates according to Sri Aurobindo the growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualisation.

Responding no longer to an external compulsion, man moving towards self knowledge subscribes to the highest inner law of his own being. Living by an inward spiritual law, the spiritual aim not only allows for the free development of man but for science and philosophy as well.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "the perfectly spiritualized society will be one in which, as is dreamed by the spiritual anarchist, all men will be deeply free, and it will be so because the preliminary condition will have been satisfied. In that state each man will be not a law to himself, but the law, the divine law, because he will be a soul living in the Divine and not an ego living mainly if not entirely for its own interest and purpose. His life will be led by the law of his own divine nature liberated from the ego"<sup>15</sup>. It is clear for Sri Aurobindo that the attainment of real freedom and social justice in the socio-political realm is only possible with the descent

of a truly spiritual consciousness. For freedom and law important prerequisites for real social justice can only be reconciled in the spiritual consciousness.

Commenting on the noble ideals of the social trinity i.e., liberty, equality and fraternity with the aim of achieving social justice, Sri Aurobindo maintains that it too has remained largely mechanical. Operating purely on a superficial level the social trinity has failed to appeal to the higher inner consciousness of man. Unless man undergoes a spiritual or psychological transformation the attainment of a free co-operative communism, upholding the principles of an inner social justice, devoid of governmental force and social compulsion, will remain but an impossibility.

Sri Aurobindo advises that: "Freedom, equality, brother-hood are three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and the communal ego. When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine-made society. A society that pursues liberty



as its ideal is unable to achieve equality, a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty."<sup>16</sup>

Thus far Sri Aurobindo observes that no social or political institution has ever succeeded in bringing forth the ideal of fraternity. For the ideals of fraternity and brotherhood are not products of mental or ethical perfection but emerge from a deeper truth of our being. Affirming that the ideals of fraternity would have to be first realized in the soul of humanity before manifesting in the sphere of human activity Sri Aurobindo states that, "the union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of self development, the self development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition

of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the Spirit"<sup>17</sup>.

Sri Aurobindo is convinced that the spiritual principle bridging the gap between liberty and equality and culminating in brotherhood is a vital ingredient for real social justice. It must be noted that his trenchant criticism of democracy and socialism as inadequate alternatives stem directly from its neglect of individual freedom. Postulating the dawning of a spiritualized society for the sole purpose of achieving an integral freedom Sri Aurobindo claims that, "it is not likely that the immediate future of the democratic tendency will satisfy the utmost dreams of the lover of liberty who seeks an anarchist freedom, or of the lover of equality who tries to establish a socialistic dead level, or of the lover of fraternity who dreams of a world-embracing communism. But some harmonization of this great ideal is undoubtedly the immediate future of the human race."<sup>18</sup>

This harmonization Sri Aurobindo envisages as the spiritual synthesis of individualism and communism, which heralds a society founded upon true freedom and real social justice.

#### 5.4 The Marxian Viewpoint and Sri Aurobindo

Viewed against the background of social relations in the material world, the concept of justice has two primary functions i.e., regulative and prescriptive, keeping the negative aspects of society in check it serves to preserve, promote and consolidate the positive aspects of human conduct. It must be noted however that the standards of conduct cannot be predetermined and most certainly did not hold true for all times or periods in history. It is for this reason that social theorists have evolved the concept of law, which according to them when rationally conceived and applied with control can take care of the demands of justice.

Regarding communism as an indictment on the exploitive capitalist society, many scholars argue that communism is a fight for social justice and the equal distribution of material wealth. Attacking capitalism as the sole cause for the dehumanization of man Marx wrote: "Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. we call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise."<sup>19</sup>

The concept of distributive justice rapidly gaining eminence within the perimeters of communism was popularly held to be the positive aspect of justice. However, it must be noted that despite distributive justice being enforced to a certain degree by lawful authority, a truly just social order cannot be fashioned around this one principle alone. According to Marx the call for the application of distributive justice within the existing social system is tantamount to a travesty of justice itself. Such a notion would imply the mutual adjustment of claims between two antagonistic classes which in effect means negotiating with the forces of evil.

For Marx the search after justice within the capitalistic ridden society with its class distinction and inequality is a mere impossibility. Social justice demands that we purge existing oppressive societies of all its inequalities thereby creating more satisfying forms of justice. Justice means the active process of preventing or remedying that which causes or strengthens the forces of injustice. Being an active process it is most certainly not a static quality of human will. Social justice depends largely on freedom and the ability to exercise that freedom to know and to do what is just. Whatever form of society we want to establish or in whatever manner we want to change the existing society, some measure of freedom is required to initiate the necessary steps.

Harbouring strong reservations about the existence of true social justice Marx conceives law as merely consolidating the interests of dominant social groups based on the forces of production. Morality and justice have relevance only in accordance to the forces of production which they reflect. In such a society each mode of production depending on its method of distribution evolves its own standard of equality. In reaction to the existence of historically conditioned moralities Marx maintains that the economic structure of society which governs cultural development does not allow justice to remain above it. As long as justice is viewed in relation to economic determinism it remains but an empty and hollow concept.

Commenting on such a development Tucker is of the opinion that, "the issue for Marx was not justice but man's loss of himself under enslavement and dehumanizing force and his recovery of himself by the total vanquishment of this force"<sup>20</sup>. It is only upon the advent of a communistic society that man released from the fetters of exploitation will be able to realise himself as truly man.

Attacking capitalism from a moral point of view, Marx identifies capitalism as the sole cause for man's dehumanized alienated existence. As such Marx asserts

that exploitation and alienation will only cease when capitalism is positively abolished. Under the communistic social order, the society of true and ultimate human freedom, man will develop unhindered, producing goods not for the sake of production but as an expression of his creative potential. Such a society would be ordered around the much quoted maxim, "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs".

The increase in the productive forces due to the all round development of the individual makes communist society, a society of abundance. With this economic abundance there will be no need for economic justice since the distribution of material goods will not revolve around the satisfaction of need. The higher phase of communism not only satisfies man's material needs but also "provide him no less generously with everything needed for his cultural advancement, and for his leading a rich and satisfying life"<sup>21</sup>. Subscribing to a communist morality, devoid of all state coercion, man having realized himself as truly man works for the social good of society.

Noting that freedom has meaning only in relation to concrete social relations, Marxists are of the opinion that the quest for equality and justice are not spontaneous outpourings, rather they are the product of human reaction against the present exploitative

system. A reaction by the exploited against the exploiters for a just egalitarian society. Drawing a distinction between the bourgeois demand for equality and the proletarian quest for equality, Engels states that, "the real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the 'abolition of classes' any demand which goes beyond that, of necessity passes into absurdity."<sup>22</sup> Equality therefore does not imply economic equality but simply means the ability to transcend those elements of existing society which alienate and dehumanize man in the concrete social relations of society.

According to the Marxist standpoint equal opportunity does not necessarily imply economic equality. For them equal opportunity is neither a practically nor rationally conceived theory. The basic defect of equal opportunity is that it creates avenues for individuals to abuse and misappropriate public resources at the expense of other individuals in society. Such a situation inevitably leads to grave social, economic and political problems. Apart from having strong Utopian leanings, herein lies the absurdity of the theory of equal opportunity. Thus the only equality that Marxists are prepared to speak about in their bid to create some kind of social justice and harmony, is in relation to man's full emancipation from his dehumanizing state of existence.

For Marx, freedom steeped in the historical process is the gradual unfoldment of man becoming himself. Examining the relation between history and freedom it is interesting to note that Marx, without committing himself to any type of spiritual teleology arrives at a theory of history, which in many respects bears common ground with that of Sri Aurobindo's. Despite their diverse metaphysical positions it is truly amazing how these two theories of history, one teleological and the other anti-teleological arrive at similar conclusions.

Upholding and defending the basic ideals of freedom Marx and Sri Aurobindo declare with equal gusto the inevitability and the necessity of providing the conditions for the establishment of a just society. Despite proclaiming the one single goal Marx and Sri Aurobindo differ primarily in their assessment and evaluation of the different factors involved in the quest for the establishment of an ideal social order, i.e., the individual, the community and humanity at large.

Freedom inextricably linked to the above-mentioned factors cannot be regarded as solely an objective institutional endeavour nor an exclusively psychological enquiry. These two different methods of approach serve rather to compliment each other. Sharing a symbiotic relationship the individual and



objective institutions reinforce each other. Whilst allowing for and fostering the development of individual creativity and initiative the institution provides a limited measure of freedom to those individuals lacking sufficient drive and enterprise. Freedom is thus a function of practical initiative and institutional safeguard.

Like Marx, Sri Aurobindo agrees that freedom for the normal man must be expressed institutionally otherwise freedom devoid of objective expression due to man's socially conditioned nature has neither meaning nor significance. Commenting on man's urge to objectify or institutionalize freedom in terms of external social compulsion Sri Aurobindo observes that, "long after the individual has become partially free, a moral organism capable of conscious growth, aware of an inward life, eager for spiritual progress, society continues to be external in its methods; a material and economic organism, mechanical, more intent upon status and self-preservation than on growth and self-perfection. The greatest present triumph of the thinking and progressive individual over the instinctive and static society has been the power he has acquired by his thought - will to compel it to think also, to open itself to the idea of social justice and righteousness, communal sympathy and mutual compassion, to feel after the rule of reason rather than blind custom as the test

of its institution and to look on the mental and moral assent of its individuals as at least one essential element in the validity of its laws."<sup>23</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's main point of emphasis and criticism of the Marxian model is that a just social order cannot be established exclusively via institutional freedom which can be enforced to a point by lawful authority. Restrictive freedom breeds only a crippled morality which fails to promote harmony between the moral law in the individual and the law of his needs and desires, otherwise in constant conflict.

According to Sri Aurobindo absolute ethical standards postulated by moralists are extremely ill evolved. Invariably adopting an authoritarian attitude they rigidly stick to certain absolute standards totally negating individual claims and desires which are inconsistent with their standards of truth and justice. Sri Aurobindo cautions that the fact we have reached a stage where we can identify or establish ideal social laws to which we must all strive does not mean that we comprehend fully the truth that these laws may posit.

In order to counteract such a situation Sri Aurobindo draws our attention to another area of justice which manifests in the domain of human psychology. If human psychology is not developed with reason and sympathy then lawful state authority has limited relevance and

cannot effectively administer justice. Human psychology therefore tends to bridge the gap between morality and law.

Extremely difficult is the task of persuading a man devoid of moral bent to be an effectively law-abiding human being. The authority of law flows directly from reason and man's concern for other human beings. Sri Aurobindo identifies man's inner authority as the basis of all laws, both moral and legal. "In other words there is, above society's external law and man's moral law and beyond them, though feebly and ignorantly aimed at by something within them, a larger truth of a vast unbound consciousness, a law divine towards which both these blind and gross formulations are progressive faltering steps that try to escape from the natural law of the animal to a more exalted light or universal rule."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly the spiritualist concludes that normal reason points not to liberty and creativity but is characterized by order and authority.

Neither Marx nor Sri Aurobindo can dispute the absolute necessity of freedom and perfection for man's social evolution. Whilst Marx employs the external method to achieve the goal of a just society Sri Aurobindo relies primarily on the internal method. The difference between these two philosophers regarding the achievement of their goal reflects moreso the primacy of method and not of method itself. Viewed in relation

to his integral philosophy Sri Aurobindo states that man cannot develop ideally by purely concentrating on and regulating the material conditions of life. Nor can he attain and develop his higher potentialities by depending entirely on psychological investigation.

Sri Aurobindo's main criticism of Marx's external objective method is that it prescribes that man conform to external laws for his social development. External law determined by reason can never do justice to the complex nature of human creativity. Following the external method man, according to Sri Aurobindo, inevitably tends to conform to external standards which lead not to creativity but uniformity and rigidity.

Maintaining that true human freedom cannot be confined wholly to the external world, Sri Aurobindo asserts that all social phenomena in their final analysis is psychological. Presented in a simple empirical manner against a metaphysical background, the psychological approach assumes the whole of reality to be fundamentally spiritual. To this end Sri Aurobindo wrote, "The external method tries always to mould the psychological condition of men into changed forms and habits under the pressure of circumstances and institutions rather than by the direct creation of a new psychological condition which would, on the contrary, develop freely and flexibly its own appropriate and serviceable social forms"<sup>25</sup>.

The institutional products of the external method neglect man's psychological or spiritual demands of developing human nature. Unless our social institutions are formed and transformed according to our psychological needs there would be an imbalance, according to Sri Aurobindo between what we really are and our institutional environment. Until man realizes the vital importance of assimilating inner change along with external readjustment, the perfection of human life and the attainment of a truly just society based on real freedom will remain an unaccomplished ideal.

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## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Psychology and the Foundations of Integral Knowledge

Dwelling on man's quest for the attainment of an all-round harmony of perfection, we observe in Aurobindo's philosophical system a conscious though unartificial attempt to formulate a worldview which adequately encompasses all aspects of existence. Despite being highly abstract and extremely theoretical, Aurobindo's contribution to the socio-philosophical world must not be dismissed as merely another highly developed philosophical system.

The main aim of integral sociology, which identifies as its basis the reconciliatory power of spiritualism, is the establishment of a spiritual anarchist society - which devoid of all external compulsion is based on spontaneous concord and mutuality born of a greater truth of our own being.

Aurobindo's philosophising therefore is not an integral synthesis of Indian and Western thought for the sake of philosophy; his is an integral yoga which proposes to

serve as a guide and a viable alternative for modern man in a world characterized by alienation, exploitation and fragmentation.

Realizing the primacy of metaphysics and the psychological spiritual analysis of man and society, integral sociology is best described as a metasociological enquiry, prescribing within its scope a perfectly integrated unity of mankind.

Reflecting on historical development and its relentless forward march, Aurobindo is of the opinion that history teaches us nothing. According to him historical events and social phenomena depict a torrent of confusing and impermanent external conditions. Such impermanence unless viewed against its appropriate metaphysical background has neither significance nor meaning.

The historian, by focussing exclusively on external institutions and data, fails to comprehend the inner truth of the spirit via which history itself advances. Stressing the importance of man's ideative and creative activities and the mental and emotional dimensions of his being, Aurobindo affirms that the psychological analysis and interpretation of the historical process cannot be ignored. Maintaining that there exists an inextricable link between the power of ideas and social reality, Aurobindo asserts that it is the power of ideas which shapes and moulds material institutions.



It must be noted that it is no philosophical wonder that some aspects of materialism serve only to enrich, strengthen and concretize certain spiritual phenomena. The advances of history betray a practical effort and a genuine need to forge some kind of synthesis or integration of the materialist and spiritualist world views. Aurobindo himself awaits the dawning of an integral knowledge.

Whilst rejecting the outward institutional approach Aurobindo does not fail to recognize the initial importance and necessity of employing external methods and mechanical means, so long as it draws mankind closer to the goal of establishing a spiritual anarchist society. For Aurobindo all socio-philosophical ideologies (and socialism in particular), despite their noble claims and programme of action, inevitably culminate in totalitarianism, social regimentation and uniformity, and a negation of human freedom.

By the same token Marx also admits the element of psychology within the scope of his socio-philosophical enquiry. Marx, however, uses psychology only in so far as it lends empirical credibility to scientific inquiries such as physiology and neurology. Unlike the Marxian standpoint, Aurobindo's integral psychology does not lend itself to empirical investigation beyond

a certain point. In defence of his own position Aurobindo argues that modern western psychology is undoubtedly superficial and sadly deficient. The empirical mind devoid of spiritual intensity and depth is incapable of perceiving that which lies beyond itself. The spirit which points beyond logic and reason is fathomless and unintelligible and must be realized as such.

Penetrating the very stuff of existence, Aurobindo is convinced that, "whatever the manifestation may be, spiritual or material or other, it has behind it something that is beyond itself, and even if we reached the highest possible heights of the manifested existence these would be still beyond that even an Unmanifested from which it came... Both formulas (materialism and spiritualism) have a truth in them, but neither touches the secret truth of the Supreme"<sup>1</sup>

Recognising the outward physical and scientifically verifiable manifestations of the Mind, Aurobindo in his attempts to "touch the secret truth of the Supreme", acknowledges that beneath the conscious operation of the mind there exists a powerfully potent higher mind of gigantic dimensions. Likewise surface man attending only to his physical senses is limited by his physical experiences and is unconscious of the inner workings of the higher mind. "Observable consciousness" will always remain but a tiny visible fragment of our being.

Attacking Marx's use of psychology Aurobindo states that, "modern science, obsessed with the greatness of its physical discoveries and the idea of the sole existence of Matter, has long attempted to base upon physical data even its study of Soul and Mind and of those workings of Nature in man and animal in which a knowledge of psychology is as important as any of the physical sciences. Its very psychology founded itself upon physiology and the scrutiny of the brain and nervous system. It is not surprising therefore that in history and sociology attention should have been concentrated on the external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developments, while the deeper psychological elements so important in the activities of a mental, emotional, ideative being like man have very much been neglected. This kind of science would explain everything in history and social development as much as possible by economic necessity or motive... There are even historians who deny or put aside as of a very subsidiary importance the working of the idea and the influence of the thinker in the development of human institutions... Recently, however, the all-sufficiency of Matter to explain Mind and Soul has begun to be doubted and a movement of emancipation from the obsession of physical sciences has set in, although as yet it has not gone beyond a few awkward and redimentary stumblings. Still there is the beginning of a perception that behind the economic

motives and causes of social and historical development there are profound psychological, even perhaps soul factors."<sup>2</sup>

Aurobindo moves that the materialists can no longer alienate or ignore the "Kingdom of inner consciousness" as a valid source of knowledge. Viewed in relation to the very possible exhaustion of scientific investigation and scientifically accumulated knowledge, the Upanisads hold that inner consciousness with its multifarious planes and provinces is in itself infinite". For below this conscient nature is the vast Inconscient out of which we come. The Inconscient is greater, deeper, more original, more potent to shape and govern what we are and do than our little derivative conscient nature. Inconscient to us and to our surface view, but not inconscient in itself or to itself, it is a sovereign guide, worker, determinant creator. Not to know it is not to know our nether origins and the origin of the most part of what we are and do"<sup>3</sup>

Integral knowledge admitting gradually the existence of a cosmic consciousness in history will serve, according to Aurobindo, to enrich modern western psychology. Bridging the gap between the spirit and intellectual reason and attempting to provide logical justification of what had been found by inner realization, Aurobindo

affirms that psychological enquiry in the east has always recognised the reality of cosmic existence and upheld subjective progress.

Remaining extremely critical of Western psychology Aurobindo asserts that the main aim of ancient Indian thinkers, "was to study and arrange and utilize the forms, forces and working movements of consciousness, just as the modern physical sciences study, arrange and utilize the forms, forces and working movements of objective Matter. The material with which they had to deal was more subtle, flexible and variable than the most impalpable force of what the physical sciences have become aware; its motions were more elusive, its processes harder to fix but once grasped and ascertained, the movements of consciousness were found by Vedic psychologists to be in their process and activity as regular, manageable and utilizable as the movements of physical forces. The power of the soul can be as perfectly handled and as safely, methodically and puissantly directed to practical life-purposes.."4

Passing through the initial materialistic stages of science and philosophy, Aurobindo draws attention to the fact that "exact observation and untrammelled yet scrupulous experiment are the method of every true science. Mere observation by itself is insufficient, for observation without experiment, without analysis and new combination, leads to a limited and erroneous

knowledge; often it generates an empirical classification which does not in the least deserve the name of science. The old European system of psychology was such a pseudo-scientific system. Its observations were superficial, its terms and classifications arbitrary, and its aim and spirit abstract, empty and scholastic. In modern times a different system and method are being founded but the vices of the old system persist. The observations made have been incoherent, partial or morbid and abnormal; the generalisations are far too wide for their meagre substratum of observed data and the abstract and scholastic use of psychological terms and the old metaphysical ideas of psychological processes still bandage the eyes of the infant knowledge, mar its truth and hamper its progress. These old errors are strangely entwined with a new fallacy which threatens to vitiate the whole enquiry, - the fallacy of the materialistic prepossession."<sup>5</sup>

Failing to harness the power of one's inner consciousness would surely lead to a gross limitation of knowledge. According to Aurobindo an integral consciousness allows for the returning of man to the "original truth" and the "whole truth" of his being and his existence. For Aurobindo integral knowledge is not something non-existent, new or that which has to be

learned or invented, rather it exists in an integral Reality waiting to be discovered or self-revealed in a spiritual experience.

Functioning as a reconciliatory force, "an integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole".<sup>6</sup> Spiritual philosophy does not regard Matter and Spirit as incompatible alternatives. Matter and Spirit will always remain different poises of the one ultimate Reality. Such a position calls for an equal realization of both Matter and Spirit which are valid and necessary sources for the founding of an integral knowledge. Claiming to perceive the multifarious facets of Truth, Integral Knowledge serves as a corrective to the exclusive pursuit of either Matter or Spirit.

Drawing attention to the different orders of reality, Aurobindo states that the objective external world, directly perceived by the senses, is but only one aspect of existence. Subjective inner experiences, advises Aurobindo, are just as important, relevant and real as any outward external physical phenomena. Highlighting and explaining the strengths of subjective experience, Aurobindo points out that, "if the individual mind can know something of its own phenomena by direct experience it is ignorant of what happens in

the consciousness of others except by analogy with its own or such signs, data, inferences as its outward observation can give it. I am therefore inwardly real to myself, but the invisible life of others has only an indirect reality to me except in so far as it impinges on my mind, life and senses. This is the limitation of the physical mind of man; and it creates in him a habit of believing entirely only in the physical and of doubting or challenging all that does not come into accord with his own experience or his own scope of understandings or square with his own standard or sum of established knowledge."<sup>7</sup>

Moving away from the rigid physical standard in order to embrace and acknowledge the subjective inner movements of the self, in no way implies the admittance of unverified truth in one's quest for knowledge. Like the external objective standards which are not above error and possess their own unique methods of enquiry, the subjective approach also has its own system of enquiry, observation and verification. An intelligent and practical synthesis of the subjective and objective methods of enquiry leads, according to Aurobindo, to a perfectly balanced "Truth-Consciousness" inherently possessed of self-knowledge and world-knowledge.

One-sided knowledge can never solve the problems of existence. The problem of existence transcends a purely materialist or spiritualist solution. Whilst it



is important to comprehend the scope and philosophical implications of Matter, it is just as important and relevant to know and understand all that lies behind the material surface.

Stressing the importance of the essence of the whole, the parts of the whole, and its complementary nature, Aurobindo claims that, "an integral knowledge demands an exploration, an unveiling of all the possible domains of consciousness and experience. For there are subjective domains of our being which lie behind the obvious surface; these have to be fathomed and whatever is ascertained must be admitted within the scope of the total reality. An inner range of spiritual experience is one very great domain of human consciousness; it has to be entered into up to its deepest depths and its vast reaches. The supraphysical is as real as the physical; to know it is part of a complete knowledge."<sup>e</sup>

Aurobindo further maintains that, "an integral knowledge...must be a knowledge of the truth of all sides of existence both separately and in the relation of each to all and the realtion of all to the Truth of the Spirit. Our present state is an Ignorance and a many-sided seeking; it seeks for the truth of all things but, - as is evident from the insistence and the variety of the human mind. Speculation as to the fundamental Truth which explains all others the Reality at the basic of all things, - the fundamental truth of

things, their basis reality must be found in some at once fundamental and universal Real; it is that which once discovered, must embrace and explain all, - for "That being known all will be known" : The fundamental Real must necessarily be and contain the truth of all existence, the truth of the individual, the truth of the universe, the truth of all that is beyond the universe. The Mind, in seeking for such a Reality and testing each thing from Matter upwards to see if that might not be It, has not proceeded on a wrong intuition. All that is necessary is to carry the inquiry to its end and test the highest and ultimate levels of experience"<sup>9</sup>

Presenting Matter and Spirit as two divergent irreconcilable entities is a total violation of the principles which lean towards the founding of an integral knowledge. Aurobindo subscribes to the view that Matter is a form of Spirit, Matter in itself allowing for a realization of Spirit. For Aurobindo the reconciliation of Matter and Spirit, man's vital interests and desires and his ethical spiritual moorings, can only be possible via an evolutionary synthesis. The evolution of mind, life and Spirit in Matter, the Supreme Truth of being, demonstrates the first signs of a dawning of an integral knowledge.

Identifying integral knowledge as the aim and objective of the evolutionary progress, Aurobindo concludes that, "throughout the world there are plenty of movements inspired by the same drift, but there is room for an effort of thought which shall frankly acknowledge the problem in its integral complexity and not be restrained in the flexibility of its search by attachment to any cult, creed or extant system of philosophy. The effort, a quest for the Truth that underlies existence and the fundamental Law of its self-expression in the universe, the work of metaphysical philosophy and religious thought; the sounding and harmonising of the psychological methods of discipline by which man purifies and perfects himself, - the work of psychology, not as it is understood in Europe, but the deeper practical psychology called in India Yoga and the application of our ideas to the problems of man's social and collective life".<sup>10</sup>

## 6.2 Marx and Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy

Assessing the power of assimilation of Aurobindo's integral philosophy in relation to Marx's philosophical communism, one encounters numerous areas of agreement between these two philosophical models. Infusing Vedanta with a socio-political activism Aurobindo joins Marx in challenging vigorously the very existence of oppression, exploitation and alienation in society.

Re-defining the role of philosophy, Marx and Aurobindo attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For theory to have any semblance of relevance it must express itself in concrete social relations, making positive contributions to the practical sphere of human interaction.

Examining concrete human and social relations Marx and Aurobindo seek to highlight and challenge all those social conditions which limit human freedom. Human freedom is lauded by many social philosophers as the key to the understanding of man and his social interaction. Regarded as the greatest social value Marx and Aurobindo firmly believe that man is constantly moving towards a gradual gaining of a greater degree of freedom.

This move towards a greater freedom is an extremely important activity aimed at changing and transforming the existing social reality. The quest for human freedom, a universal human value, stimulates the social progress which is accompanied by an increase in human activity with respect to the surrounding reality, the result of which is the humanisation of the world.

The communist ideal which aims at liberating man from his dehumanized existence urges mankind to move from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom. Only

when man attains the realm of freedom will he triumph over his alienated existence and realize himself as truly and fully man.

Understanding the full import of the procurement of freedom, its meaning and implications, man in society upholds the sacredness of human dignity and freedom. Following such an understanding he realizes that his own personal liberty and freedom is never completely guaranteed if he disregards or violates the human dignity and freedom of others.

Marx and Aurobindo readily agree that the forces of greed and egoistic need, which drastically curtail and inhibit the attainment of real human freedom, are the chief cause of human misery, suffering and bondage. According to Aurobindo the attachment to material things has a long history in terms of motivating man in the most negative of ways. Motivated by purely selfish gains, man's entire life revolves around the urge to possess and to amass more and more material wealth, totally disregarding the needs or sacred rights of others.

Marx identifies the ownership of private property, which he describes as egoistic greed, as the main controlling factor of man's alienation from his true self. Totally dissatisfied with the present state of

things, Marx like Aurobindo, is convinced that freedom from greed and the forces of acquisitiveness will inevitably lead to the dawning of a real freedom.

Taking his cue from the philosophy of non-attachment Aurobindo explains that man in society rising above his lower nature, must perform his said duty completely devoid of any hedonistic intention or the securing of material reward. For Aurobindo the performance of selfless action is a viable and logical solution, liberating man from the bondages of greed and the forces of acquisitiveness and thereby eradicating the cause of human strife and misery.

In a similar vein Marx advises that Man should never lose sight of the fact that he is the producer of the material modes of production and not slave to them. According to Marx, "man differs from the lower animal in that he is a free conscious producer, who could create things even if there were no pressure upon him to produce in order to survive."<sup>11</sup> Compulsion to produce material goods in a capitalist society motivated by profits and surplus value serves only to alienate man from his real self.

In order to counteract the forces of alienation man must bask in the glory of his own creativeness, producing material goods not out of necessity but merely to express his essence as a truly productive

being. Despite the cultivation of such an attitude Marx observes that the world of objects has always managed to successfully take precedence over man, thereby reducing man himself to a dehumanized condition. In reaction to the placing of external objects above man due to his own designs, man then tends to seek for some kind of meaning in the very world, which limits and inhibits his freedom.

Producing material goods for the sale of capitalistic production serves only to enslave the individual further, thereby consolidating the position of the capitalist bosses.

Accordingly Marx claims that, "labour is external to the worker, ie, it does not belong to his essential being that in his work, therefore he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind."<sup>12</sup>

Following the condemnation of the forces of greed and the acquisitive urge, Marx and Aurobindo are equally anticapitalist, capitalism being the epitome of human bondage, oppression, exploitation and alienation. For Aurobindo capitalism has totally enveloped the whole phenomenon of modern society. With its innately

competitive spirit which sets man against man, the acquisitive urge is recognised as one of the most distinguishing marks of modern capitalist society.

Capitalism rapidly moving towards self expansion is regarded as a divisive force progressively dividing society into two camps ie. the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Remaining a trenchant critic of capitalism's dehumanizing programme of action, Marx notes that "along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reaches a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst sounds. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."<sup>13</sup>



Supporting fully the struggles of the proletariat against their degenerated existence and the present dehumanizing status quo, Marx and Aurobindo regard the broad working masses as the decisive force of historical progress. Representing a truly revolutionary class the proletariat actively challenges the present social reality. In their bid to transform capitalist society they create material goods and spiritual values which in the final analysis makes history itself.

Extremely critical of Utopian reasoning of the future humanity and all those who merely theorize about the dehumanizing effects of capitalism whilst operating within its very framework, Marx calls for the immediate overthrow of capitalism itself. For it is the complete dismantling of capitalist society which not only puts an end to all class struggle and conflict but emancipates man from the law of economic determinism as well.

Reflecting on the historical process Marx and Aurobindo affirm that capitalism, due to its inherent nature, is self destructive. Applying the dialectical method to the material development of society Marx maintains that society develops via the conflict of opposites.

As such human society evolves from primitive communism to feudalism, from feudalism right up to capitalism which represents the culmination of the struggle of the economic classes. The struggle of the economic classes under capitalism inevitably gives rise to communism of which socialism is the first step.

Subscribing to a similar viewpoint Aurobindo also holds that capitalism is but one stage in the progressive evolution of social development. Although regarding socialism as the logical outcome of capitalism's decay Aurobindo does not, as already mentioned in earlier chapters, uphold unconditionally the principles of socialism or that of its final evolute, communism.

Unlike Marx who extolled socialism as the highest achievement of world civilization fostering genuine freedom and real democracy, Aurobindo views the socialist principle as an embodiment of governmental regimentation, uniformity, absolutism and implicit totalitarianism. Whilst admitting that, "the communistic principle of society is intrinsically as superior to the individualistic as is brotherhood to jealousy and mutual slaughter", Aurobindo concludes that "all the practical schemes of Socialism invented in Europe are a yoke, a tyranny and a prison."<sup>14</sup>

Maintaining that Communism alone due to its inherent contradictions and limitations on freedom cannot adequately solve the problems of modern society, Aurobindo explains that the solution lies in 'the emergence of a new and as yet unforeseen principle'. Accordingly Aurobindo proclaims that a solution to man's present-day existence will only prove viable if it draws from a wide range of socio-philosophical phenomena thereby integrally synthesizing the forces of individualism, collectivism and anarchism in order to arrive at a higher social order, and satisfying the intellectual and the practical needs of society and the individual.

Aurobindo is of the opinion that historical materialism is seriously limited and as such proffers his integral world-view as an alternate social philosophy. Realizing that the creative impulses in social theory would have to come from outside Marxism, Aurobindo does not fail to acknowledge the powerful attraction of Marxist ideas and the excellent practical effectiveness of the Marxist method in solving social problems. It is for this reason that Aurobindo does not call for a total annihilation of Marxism but attempts to build upon and supplement Marxism with other philosophical concepts.

Reacting to certain fundamental problems within traditional Marxism Aurobindo rejects totally the attribution of social primacy solely to the modes of production. According to Marx's analysis of the nature of society everything revolves around economic modes of production. Marx's economic theory undoubtedly enjoys an exalted position within his system of thought and together with other elements, constitutes the scientific basis of the philosophy of Marxism.

Following his extolling of the economic factor as the sole driving force of the historical process, Marx asserts that the nature of society is primarily determined by its system of production. According to Marx, "in the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It

is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence determines their consciousness."<sup>15</sup>

Explaining further, Marx states that in a capitalist society the primary aim of the revolutionary proletariat is the destruction of the present social reality. As such he maintains that the mode of production is directly responsible for promoting and fostering social change. To this end Marx wrote, : "At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production... From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."<sup>16</sup>

According to Aurobindo the reduction of Marxism solely to its economic aspect deprives Marxism as a philosophy not only of its integral nature as a science, but as a revolutionary current as well. Neither historical materialism nor scientific communism has as yet examined social production in its integral form. The element of unity between the production of man himself and the conditions of his life have been somewhat ignored.

Aurobindo most certainly does not subscribe to the Marxian claim that our consciousness is determined by our social existence which in turn is determined by the material conditions. Maintaining that both Matter and Spirit are two different poises of the one Reality, Aurobindo is of the opinion that spirituality reconciling Matter and Spirit are fundamental to all social life and activity.

Viewed against the historical process Aurobindo refuses to accept that man's consciousness is governed solely by the existing economic modes of production changes. For Aurobindo history is the progressive unfolding of man's divinity in society. As such it is the ideas in history which are more important and take precedence over the economic elements. According to Aurobindo it is the power of ideas which determine social existence and not social existence which determines consciousness.

Appropriately he declares that, "it is the idea which expresses itself in matter and takes to itself bodies... It is the idea which shapes material institutions."<sup>17</sup>

Highlighting the real power of ideas Aurobindo claims that "the arrival of a new radical idea in the minds of men is the sign of a great coming change in human life and society; it may be combated, the reaction of the

old idea may triumph for a time, but the struggle never leaves either the thoughts and sentiments or the habits and institutions of the society as they were when it commenced. Either new forms replace the old institutions or the old while preserving the aspect of continuity have profoundly changed within ..."<sup>18</sup>

According to Aurobindo the material resources and environment influence man's inner consciousness only to a limited degree. To assume therefore that it influences consciousness absolutely and totally is erroneous. Man is a complex active and self-conscious being who is constantly moulding his own material conditions in the light of his knowledge of the inner self. Marxism on the other hand limits human freedom, for everything is determined by the economic modes of production.

Man is most definitely not merely a productive force; recognizing the complexity of his very being he is of supreme value. As a result of the complex nature of man Aurobindo calls for the all round development of society and the individual. For Aurobindo the internal subjective movements of man are just as important as the more concrete objective conditions of existence and societal relations. Together the subjective and the objective conditions of society move towards a greater truth of an integral existence.

Giving equal attention to the objective and subjective realms of human existence will undoubtedly contribute to a greater and a fuller understanding of man in the development of society. Commenting on the Marxian model, and focussing purely on the external objective conditions of society, Aurobindo claims that although "socialism may bring in a greater equality and a closer association into human life, but if it is only a material change, it may miss other needed things and even aggravate the mechanical burden of humanity and crush more heavily towards the earth its spirit."<sup>19</sup>

In order to remedy such a situation Aurobindo is of the opinion that socialism needs to evolve further if it wants to take man forward. Socialism needs to explore the inner subjective world taking cognisance of man's thoughts and feelings and aligning it more closely with the existence of concrete human beings in their historical and social conditions.

Whilst neither denying nor underplaying the role of economic factors in moulding the course of history, Aurobindo explains that possessing an understanding of the inner human world proves to be fruitful both theoretically and practically for the cause of the cultivation of the new man. In order to perfect social relations and social institutions, it is imperative to proceed not only from the economic factor but from the human factor with its subjective movements as well.



What is required is a combination of the economic and the human elements in such a way that they will be adequately adapted to fundamental human social interests and needs.

Acknowledging that Marxism is defined as the science of the most general laws of development of the objective external world, Aurobindo's does not attempt to weaken or undermine Marxism but merely tries to enrich it with his integral approach. Although Aurobindo's integral philosophy is fundamentally different from Marx's philosophical communism, they identify the same ultimate goal, which to try and strive towards man's realization of himself as truly man. Thus whilst striving for the ideal of self-realization one observes that Marxism viewed in relation to Aurobindo's integral world-view depicts methodological differences only.

### 6.3 Towards the Creation of a Higher Subjective Social Order

Prevalent throughout Aurobindo's social philosophy is a dire need to comprehend the meaning and purpose of a changing society, attempting to synthesize its diversified forms of political, social and economic stratification into a higher unified truth of existence. Commenting on the evolution of knowledge, Aurobindo states with specific reference to India that, "the national mind turned a new age on its past

culture, reawoke to its sense and import, but also at the same time saw it in relation to modern knowledge and ideas."<sup>20</sup>

Imminent in the historical process is a gradual dawning of a higher state of consciousness, which expressing itself in socio-political activity illustrates the first signs of a fundamental change in human nature, allowing fully for the reign of universal peace, harmony and reconciliation.

Realizing the nature of man's being, Aurobindo 's analysis of social dilemmas neither demands nor prescribes certain ethical standards to which man must conform in order to institute any positive social changes. His plan of action is primarily a spiritual one, calling for a radical spiritual changes in human nature from which social ideals would be the natural and logical outcome.

The perfection of individuals in society inevitably paves the way for, and becomes the basis of, a new collective life. For Aurobindo the individual is undoubtedly the key of the evolutionary process. "Our nature is complex and we have to find a key to some perfect unity and fullness of its complexity. Its first evolutionary basis is the material life: Nature began with that and man also has to begin with it; he has first to affirm his material and vital existence.

But if he stops there, there can be for him no evolution; his next and greater preoccupation must be to find himself as a mental being in a material life - both individual and social - as perfected as possible."<sup>21</sup>

Emphasizing the intricate relationship between the individual and the collectivity Aurobindo explains that, "...the three principle preoccupations of our idealism, - the complete single development of the human being in himself, the perfectibility of the individual, a full development of the collective being, the perfectibility of society, and more pragmatically restricted, the perfect or best possible relations of individual with individual and society and of community with community."<sup>22</sup>

Upholding the supreme value of the individual Aurobindo maintains that the goal of human life is the positive transformation of ourselves and the world. In order for man to initiate some kind of social change he must first be wholly and integrally aware of himself and the truth of his being and existence. Real social unity can never be the product of an external outward consciousness.

The seeking and the attainment of the true law of individual perfection not only bring's with it complete truth of our external and internal existence,

but also helps to maintain the intricate balance between individual existence and collective existence. Convinced that the full subjective development of the individual is directly responsible for social evolution, Aurobindo claims that, "... all the old general standards have become bankrupt and can no longer give any inner help; it is therefore the individual who has to become a discoverer, a pioneer, and to search out by his individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire, claim upon life or whatever other light he finds in himself the true law of the world and of his own being."<sup>23</sup>

Noting that the modern world is characterized by great turmoil and transformation, Aurobindo advises that whilst subscribing to a higher truth of the inner law of his own being, man must caution against losing sight of the greatness of material laws and forces. Whilst it is true that one cannot live exclusively via the power of externalities one must not commit the error of forging a rift between the highest inner individual and outward social life. Both the subjective and objective aspects of life are equally important for the creation of a truly higher society.

Clearly evident that an integral synthesis of the subjective and objective aspects of existence for the sake of social evolution is no easy task, Aurobindo states that man must first try and find, "the ideal law

of his being and his development and, if he cannot even then follow it ideally owing to the difficulties of his egoistic nature, still to hold it before him and find out gradually the way by which it can become more and more the moulding principle of his individual and social existence."<sup>24</sup>

Emanating directly from the ideal law of man's being is the spiritual idea which, according to Aurobindo, lies behind and governs all social institutions and its evolutionary development. A unifying and harmonizing knowledge, solving the problem of individual and communal existence, is a sure sign of the dawning of a spiritual society. According to Aurobindo the spiritual or gnostic society is an expression of the truth of a 'spiritually united being and truth of a spiritually united life.'

Reacting against the external mechanical view of society, gnostic individuals do not subscribe to external laws of compulsion but respond only to spiritual compulsion and spontaneous concord. The evolution of the human mind and life allows gnostic beings in a spiritualized society to live in a complete spiritual mutuality and spiritual oneness.

Enjoying a unified self-knowledge in a gnostic consciousness, gnostic beings are best described as spiritual anarchists. According to Aurobindo these

spiritual anarchists owe their ultimate allegiance neither to the state nor to the community. Their allegiance is offered directly to the Truth, the real object of their existence.

Extolling the conditions of a spiritual existence, Aurobindo contends , "it is evident that in a life governed by the gnostic consciousness war with its spirit of antagonism and enmity, its brutality, destruction and ignorant violence, political strife with its perpetual conflict, frequent oppression, dishonesties, turpitudes, selfish interests, its ignorance, ineptitude and muddle could have no ground for existence."<sup>25</sup>

According to Aurobindo the first fatal flaw of communism (which follows the external objective method) is that it forces man to conform to an external law of compulsion. The communist ideal of a perfect freedom fostering the full and free development of every individual in the sphere of economics would be almost an impossibility if man continues to subscribe to external laws of compulsion.

Reacting therefore against all types of state coercion, Aurobindo rejects totally the Marxian concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a means of achieving freedom. Such a concept, despite its noble claims, violates the very dignity and freedom of the

individual that it is supposed to procure. Reflecting on the movements of human nature and its will to power, organized coercion will not foster or automatically lead to a perfect freedom. Organized coercion, according to Aurobindo invariably decays into a rigid state totalitarianism.

The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' with its programme of violence and brute force, irrespective of its final goal, can and will only produce an artificial mechanical unity of society. Safeguarding individual rights and the principles of a true democracy, Aurobindo maintains that the forces of democracy not only strengthens society. It is also in perfect harmony with the realization of a real integral freedom.

Dwelling on the laws of external compulsion, Aurobindo rejects the much quoted adage of the final phase of communism ie. 'from each according to his ability unto each according to his need' as absolutely unworkable and therefore totally unacceptable. Believing that economic emancipation is the ultimate goal, the final phase of communism is described as a society of economic abundance, satisfying fully all of man's needs and desires.

As a result of this economic abundance communist society, according to Aurobindo, will be in dire need of an equitable regulative system, which will adequately plan the distribution of an increased production. Here Aurobindo wishes to draw attention to the fact that external laws, failing to combat adequately the forces of acquisition and attachment, cannot make man truly communist. Until communist man is completely cured of the acquisitive urge via the laws of his own inner being, the urge to misappropriate power and wealth for one's own end will always be present.

Attacking man's bondage to mechanical necessity, Aurobindo claims that a philosophy of non-attachment to the material aspect of life is an important pre-requisite for the dawning of a truly communist society. In effect Aurobindo states that the final phase of communism cannot be attained via the Marxian method, unless it accepts within its scope the philosophy of non-attachment which prescribes the performance of, "work without clinging with the mind to the objects of sense and the fruit of the works. Not complete inaction, which is an error, a confusion, a self-delusion, an impossibility, but action fully and freely done without subjection to sense and passion, desireless and unattached works, are the first secret of perfection."<sup>26</sup>



#### 6.4 Final Reflections

It is interesting to note that modern day Marxists, realizing certain inadequacies and limitations of traditional Marxism include and state within their general framework that, "communism presupposes also a new type of man, a man who combines in himself spiritual richness, moral purity and physical perfection."<sup>27</sup>

Holding that communism sprang from profound humanist motives, Afanasyev asserts that the final phase of communism allows man to cultivate a genuine spiritual freedom. He defines, scientific communism as, "a science dealing with the ways and means of destroying capitalism with the laws governing the creation of the new, communist society and with the economic, social and spiritual conditions for the all round development of man."<sup>28</sup>

Focussing on current human problems modern communists demonstrate a general trend towards the political, ideological and moral cultivation of the individual - making spiritual - cultural demands which are necessary for social progress. Neo Marxists draw attention to the fact that Marxism does itself a great disservice by interpreting ideological concepts purely on a scientific level, thereby discarding any kind of axiological interpretation of philosophical categories.

Adam Schaff observes that, "scientific socialism is essentially humanist, and the essence of its humanism is its conception of the happiness of the individual. Everything in Marxism - its philosophy, political economy and political theory - is subordinated to this. For Marxism is the sum of theoretical instruments, which serve one practical aim, the struggle for a happier human life. This is how Marx understood the question while still young, when he said that a revolutionary philosophy is the ideological weapon of the proletariat. Such is the meaning of the Marxist postulate of the unity of theory and practice. And this is why the theory of happiness takes on a specific form with Marxism not as the abstract reflection of the meaning of happiness or of its subjective components, but as the revolutionary idea of that transformation of social relations which would make possible the creation of the conditions for a happy life by removing the social obstacles to such a life. Marxist Socialism approaches the problem of individual happiness from its negative side, that is to say, it investigates the social obstacles to human happiness and how they can be removed. It is this approach which brings positive results, because of its realism."<sup>29</sup>

Highlighting the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844' as the culminating point of Marx's philosophical development, scholars like Kamenka,

Fromm, Popper and Lewis claim that Marxist writings are full of moral judgements, both implicit and explicit. The 'Communist Manifesto', the 'German Ideology' and 'Capital' are undoubtedly permeated by a high spirit of ethics. To many such scholars Marx's trenchant criticism of capitalism is fundamentally a moral condemnation.

Neo-Marxists posit the idea that Marxism was a purely ethical treatise, and that Marx based his communist ideal primarily on a principle of morality. Adhering to on some kind of Godless spiritualism, they claim that the humanistic - ethical trends of Marx's thought revolve around the noble principles of de-alienation, social equality and justice, freedom, the abolition of exploitation, the eradication of social classes, the withering away of the state and so on.

Lending credibility to their ethical argument they quote the following passages directly from Marx,: "The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man. It ends, therefore, with the categorical imperative to, overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being...

The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self - contempt, abasement, submission, humility, in short, all the qualities of the canaille,

while the proletariat, not wanting to be treated as canaille, needs its courage, pride and sense of independence much more than its daily bread.

The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or socialized humanity."<sup>30</sup>

However, true to the academic tradition, such an ethical interpretation of Marxism is highly disputable. Completely rejecting such a conception, those scholars who bolster their own a-ethical interpretation of Marxism quote the following passages,:"Communists cannot preach any kind of morality at all, something that Stirner, does altogether too much. They cannot pose any kind of moral demands at all to people : love one another, do not be egoists etc. On the contrary, they know very well that egoism, just as well as self-sacrifice, is in specific conditions a necessary form of individual self-affirmation. Communism is for us not a stable state which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present, state of things.

Law, morality, religion, are to it [the proletariat - S.S] so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.

Morality is 'impotence in action.' Every time one struggles with some vice it is defeated. But Rudolph cannot even raise himself to the standpoint of independent morality, which is based at least upon human dignity. To the contrary, his morality bases itself upon consciousness of human weakness. His morality is theological."<sup>31</sup>

According to the a-ethical theorists of Marxian thought, although Marx championed the cause of the oppressed and the exploited, Marxism itself is not prescriptive or expressive of an ethical viewpoint. The ethical trends in Marx's thought, despite their moral import, are normatively neutral and must not be confused with normative ethics.

Maintaining that moral values remained external to the entire corpus of Marx's writings, a - ethical theorists claim that Marxism, as a philosophical system, is totally value free and is therefore scientific in its enquiry.

Whilst they might admit that much of Marxism is coloured with moral judgements and betrays an ethical dimension, a-ethical theorists adamantly declare that Marx did not subscribe to morals in the conventional sense of the term. Following Marx they are quick to

draw attention to the fact that there exists only specific moralities which cannot be understood apart from their specific social context.

Drawing a distinction between scientific socialism and utopian socialism a-ethical theorists exemplify Marx's view that absolute standards of morality are a myth. Shunning utopian socialism and its attempts to present society with a worked out system of ideals and moral axiom's, classical Marxism rejects totally the idea of constructing a system of normative ethical theories. What is required is not moral preaching or utopian theorizing but a radical transformation of the very foundations of existing society.

Further highlighting the difference between scientific socialism and utopian socialism, a-ethical theorists refuse to argue the case for socialism on the basis of values or a specific Marxist ethic. Summarizing the position of what has popularly become known as Marxist anti-moralism, Collier states : "The fact that Marxist theory is reliant for its practical effects on the wants and the struggles of an already existing class, already engaged in class struggle, and that it transforms the aims of that class only by raising the level of its objective understanding of society, distinguishes it sharply from a moral theory or an ideal... It makes no claim to universality, addressing instead specific, objectively defined classes and

groups. And it brings no new values, transforming the political practices of the oppressed, rather by its new explanations of their oppression."<sup>32</sup>

The position of ethics in Marx's thought is far more complex than is presented here. Although Marx did not formulate his own ethical theory it does not imply 'that ethics is peripheral to Marxism or to Marx's own thinking about society'. For the ethical theorists it was extremely difficult not to perceive the dawning of communism as ethically higher than previous social orders and as the first truly ethical human society.

Leaning towards the view that Marxism is permeated with ethical values and concerns, whether implicit or explicit, the writer draws attention to the fact that it is an important point of departure for the construction of a Marxist ethic. Such a construction would serve to enrich Marxism and its study of social phenomena.

Kamenka aptly concluded that, : "It was he (Marx) who pointed the way to a sociology of morals, to the recognition of moral codes and moral principles as social products, formed in specific social contexts, derived from human activities and human and social demands. He has thus greatly increased our

sophistication in talking about morals and he has enabled others - sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists - to increase it still further."<sup>33</sup>

Examining Aurobindo, we learn that there can be no absolute standard of ethics. Ethics according to Aurobindo rely solely upon fixed principles and rules of conduct. Defined as being no more than a system of norms of human conduct, which arises directly from the social situation ethics is regarded as an insufficient standard.

Rejecting outward ethical standards as an inadequate solution to the problems of man and society, Aurobindo appeals for the dawning of the psychological spiritual criterion of social action. Moral idealism must not be confused with the power of an inner spirituality.

Regarding the outward act as only a means towards an inner psychological perfection, Aurobindo states that, "there can be no reliable general law to which all can subscribe, no set of large governing principles such as it is sought to supply to our conduct by a true ethics. Nor can ethics at all or ever be a matter of calculation. There is only one safe rule for the ethical man, to stick to his principle of good, his instinct for good, his vision of good, his intuition of good and to govern by that his conduct. He may err,



but he will be on the right road in spite of all stumblings, because he will be faithful to the law of his nature."<sup>34</sup>

Reflecting on the power of existence, Aurobindo identifies the law of one's own being as the highest, truest and fullest expression of the self: "Therefore to live in one's self, determining one's self-expression from one's own centre of being in accordance with one's own law of being, svadharma, is the first necessity. Not to be able to do that means disintegration of the life, not to do it sufficiently means languor, weakness, inefficiency, the danger of being oppressed by the environing forces and overborne. Not to be able to do it wisely, intuitively, with a strong use of one's inner material and inner powers, means confusion, disorder and finally decline and loss of vitality. But also not to be able to use the material that the life around offers us, not to lay hold on it with an intuitive selection and a strong mastering assimilation is a serious deficiency and a danger to the existence."<sup>35</sup>

Rejecting therefore any kind of external compulsion and ethical idealism, Aurobindo maintains that the spiritual principle-viewed in relation to an integral methodology - is the only possible means via which man can make freedom an essential part of his internal and external atmosphere.

Commenting on the power of assimilation of the East he observes that, "assimilative, she may reproduce or imitate, the occidental experiment of industrialism, its first phase of capitalism, its second phase of socialism but then her resurgence will bring no new meaning or possibility into the human endeavour. Or the closer meeting of these two halves of the mind of humanity may set up a more powerful connection between the two poles of our being and realize some sufficient equation of the highest ideals of each, the inner and the outer freedom, the inner and the outer freedom, the inner and the outer equality, the inner and the outer unity. That is the largest hope that can be formed on present data and circumstance for the human nature."<sup>36</sup>

Following such a view, Aurobindo attacks the Marxian model, which according to him moves towards the foundation of a purely mechanical political unity of man. For him positive social change will dawn only when man evolves towards an inner oneness of all human beings, united in an inward fraternity.

To this end he wrote, : "A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accomodation of egos and interests grouped

or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more without finding the way. The evolution of mind working upon life has developed an organization of the activity of mind and the use of Matter which can no longer be, supported by human capacity without an inner change."<sup>37</sup>

The evolution of mind-as transferred onto the evolutionary development of society-does not culminate in the dawning of a spiritual society with a perfectly balanced internal and external nature. For Aurobindo the evolutionary nisus, whether of man or society, is a continuous and ongoing process inspiring and motivating man to create higher life-formations which always exceed the present state of social development or world order.

Driven by an intense passion to arrive always at that which is higher or supremely greater, Aurobindo declares that there is, "no reason to put a limit to evolutionary possibility by taking our present organization or status of existence as final."<sup>38</sup>

The Marxian position on social evolution is directly opposed to that of the Aurobindian model. For Marx social development culminates in the manifestation of

the final phase of communism. At this point one cannot but notice the contradiction between Marx's own dialectical methodology and the onward dialectical march of the laws of Nature. With Marx leaving no room for communism to transcend positively its own nature and evolve into something higher, Aurobindo maintains that such stagnation will inevitably lead to decay and degeneration.

Decay and degeneration will set in because the final phase of communism can be attained solely via the constraints of an external compulsion, thereby stifling inner growth and development. Thus a longstanding stable social order cannot be maintained. As a result of communism being an inadequate ideal and solution, Aurobindo asserts that, Vedanta realization "is the only practicable basis for a communistic society."<sup>39</sup>

Aurobindo, although an ardent admirer of Marxism's social dynamism and spirit, Marx's trenchant criticism of capitalist reality and Marxism's revolutionary transformation of the world towards a communist socialization, describes Marxism and its final phase of communism as another evolving utopia. Simply because, "to hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition; it is to ask for something unnatural and unreal, an impossible miracle."<sup>40</sup>

Society must be purged of all man-made inequalities and social injustices allowing for the full and free development of every individual.

Such a situation is only possible when social justice implies equality of both individual and economic opportunity. These two noble claims are in turn only possible when man awakens to an inward advance, subscribing to the higher laws of his own being. Aurobindo advises that psychological subjective agencies are absolutely imperative, and must be employed in the securing of social justice.

As would have been observed Aurobindo's theory of society with its attempts to harmonize the claims of the individual and the collectivity, its integral synthesis of spiritual individualism, economic socialism and internationalism, sound equally utopian.

In response to such a charge Aurobindo claims that his socio-philosophical theory of society is directly related to, and is in harmony with, the evolutionary plan of nature. According to him the dawning of a spritualized society is the logical outcome of social necessity and the inexorable march of the evolutionary process.

Upholding the spiritual reality as the key to his integral methodology, Aurobindo explains that, "at first sight this insistence on a radical change of nature might seem to put off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future; for the transcendence of our normal human nature, a transcendence of our mental, vital and physical being, has the appearance of an endeavour too high and difficult and at present, for man as he is, impossible... But what is demanded by this change is not something altogether distant, alien to our existence and radically impossible; for what has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it : what evolutionary Nature presses for, is an awakening to the knowledge of self... It is besides, a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation and which is brought closer at each crisis of human destiny when the mental and vital evolution of the being touches a point where intellect and vital force reach some acme of tension and there is a need either for them to collapse, to sink back into a torpor of defeat or a repose of unprogressive quiescence or to rend their way through the veil against which they are straining."<sup>41</sup>

The present era is undoubtedly a period of great and challenging social transformation. According to Aurobindo the future progress of humanity will stand arrested for as long as it remains governed by external political and economic ideals and necessities. Man

must realize that mechanical methods can no longer propel humanity forward but serves only to reduce men to mere economic and political automatons.

Whilst the forces of liberty, equality and fraternity are all noble ideals they cannot be, "realized in their truth by the power of the idea and sentiment alone : their real truth and practice can only be founded in the spirit."<sup>42</sup>

What is needed is a profound modification in the future civilization of the world. Aurobindo firmly advocates that the salvation of the human race rests with an integral development and synthesis of the objective and subjective forces of history, with an end to forming a truly higher world order.

Realizing that the internal subjective aspects of history have been somewhat neglected, he advises that the spiritual aim of human existence must be adequately recognized, or else mankind will be destroyed by the workings of her own unilluminated knowledge and soulless organization.

The mutual interpenetration of the subjective and objective forces of history, two great currents of human efforts, provide unlimited hope for the future of

humanity. "An outer activity as well as an inner change is needed and it must be at once a spiritual cultural, educational, social and economical action."<sup>43</sup>

Such a synthesis combating competitive individualism, capitalism and materialistic communism providing for the perfect growth and freedom of the individual, and the collectivity is extremely idealistic to anyone who is not alive to the reality of the power of ideas.

Aurobindo declares in relation to his integral philosophy, : "Ideals are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfil themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation. To the pragmatistical intellect which takes it's stand upon the ever-changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities, they are at most potentialities of the future truth and only become real when they are visible in the external fact as work of force accomplished. But to the mind which is able to draw back from the flux of force in the material universe...the ideal present to its inner vision is a greater reality than the changing fact obvious to its outer senses. The idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a practical reflection of the Idea which has created it."<sup>44</sup>



Aurobindo postulates an integral philosophy which recognizes and stresses that the inward area of consciousness in man be fully explored in order to comprehend the mystique of existence. Realizing that the external objective method cannot alone solve the complex problems of existence, Aurobindo's integral philosophy aims at emancipating man from any kind of polarized theorization; and more specifically from the Marxist worldview with its sterile scientism, mechanical methodology, dialectical logic and the reduction of all social phenomena to economic necessity.

Assimilating and comprehending the positive aspects of Marx's philosophical model in a higher synthesis Aurobindo maintains that, "firmness without dogmatism in our system, toleration without weakness of all other systems should therefore, be our intellectual outlook."<sup>45</sup>

Dwelling on human progress and psychological unity, Aurobindo firmly advocates that material change is only possible when man accepts an inner change along with the external readjustment. The completeness of the development of the psychological condition, with its own appropriate and serviceable social forms, depends upon the completeness of the development of an inward freedom, without which the true perfection of life is impossible.

Lying behind all the external circumstance and necessities there lurks an internal necessity in the being of man which must be realized. It is Aurobindo's firm belief that man can move effectively towards the creation of a new and higher world order through positively channelling the subjective forces of one's being, a complete understanding of human consciousness, and an integral synthesis of the cognitive resources of the human personality.

For many scholars the harmonization of Marxism with Idealistic metaphysics in order to meet the challenges of modern society is a spurious philosophical endeavour. Despite such an attitude Aurobindo (upholding the supremacy of mind and firmly believing in the power of ideas) postulates an Integral philosophy, in his bid to eradicate the social maladies that plague mankind.

The writer wishes to draw attention to the fact that although Aurobindo's Integral philosophy is highly idealistic, it does highlight the possible unity of nature in general and of mankind in particular. Idealism closely allied to moralism must presuppose, whether directly, or indirectly a standard of ethics which must further be justified by metaphysics. Idealistic metaphysics as Aurobindo's thought system

clearly indicates is an excellent representation of carrying our thought to its logical extreme and exploiting fully the implications thereof.

Aspiring to rise above mere consciousness and the ideals of truth and freedom, powerful motivating factors, urge man to strive towards perfection. Man preoccupied with the attainment of inactual ideals is constantly drawing a distinction between the ideal reality, which remains a positively creative force in our actual existence, and the problems of our mundane existence.

Characterized by an extremely comprehensive nature, depth and intensity of thought none can deny the positive contributions of, and the great strides made by Idealism in the philosophical world. It is for this reason that the writer is convinced that Idealism remains unsurpassed in that it still offers the best possible foundation for a philosophy of life.

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