CYCLICAL THEORY OF HISTORY

Much has been thought and written on the nature of history, and the debate whether it is linear or cyclical in development has never been resolved. It may also be asked whether the linear progress is just the course between two supposed milestones of the historical cycle i.e., the beginning and the end which are one and the same. The thought about the cyclic nature of universal phenomena in general and historical movement in particular originated from the very time when man began to speculate over them. The credit of developing the earliest idea regarding the cyclical theory goes to Anaximander of Greece, who said that everything must return again to the primal mass whence it sprang only to be produced anew. According to his doctrine of cyclical recurrence innumerable worlds presumably succeed one another in time.

The creation of things is, according to him, injustice in the sense that by becoming what they are, they rob the

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1. Frank Thilly, A History of Philosophy, Allahabad, 1984, p. 25. Anaximander (610-540 BC) the Student of Thales was the doyen of the pre-sophist school of thought. He believed that the universe in its beginning was an undifferentiated mass. Everything, he held, arose from this mass due to the separation of opposites, though separated things would at last come to a union. Everything must return finally to the primordial substance, completing the cycle of recurrence.

infinite, and justice demands their return to the infinite. There is thus an eternal cyclical recurrence of the process of separation from and return to the primordial substance. The interpretation of human history in these cyclic terms evidently fascinated Plato and the same doctrine reappeared in one of the most famous passages in Virgil who perhaps used it to adorn the paean of optimism inspired by the Augustan pacification of the Hellenic world. The question regarding the reappearance of the bygone things which Virgil did not face was answered centuries after by Shelley when he asked to the 'West Wind': "If winter comes can spring be far behind"? In the last chorus of his Hellas he began with a Virgilian reminiscence:

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The Earth doth like a snake renew....

The cyclic theory had been the core of Indian thought. The Vedas, Upanishads and all the related literature hint at the cyclic nature of things and happenings. Sri Aurobindo derived his theory from these literature and this he used to modify the one he got from the German historiography.

3. Ibid, p. 118
5. Ibid, p. 252
While theorising on the philosophy of history and its developments Aurobindo was not satisfied with merely the question of how and when a thing happened, but in answering why it happened too. He was more concerned with the factors that necessitated the happenings and thereby with the theory of causation which deals even with the origin of the universe. Here his thought was influenced by the ancient Indian postulation of Sathkaryavada, the rational philosophy that points to the existence of a cause behind all effects or which says that no existence can be born of non-existence. Thus to him behind all the worldly phenomena there is a cause or the supreme spirit which works out the cosmic web. What is visible is the manifestation of the invisible. Variety originates from unity and vice versa, both being inextricably intertwined. Thus Aurobindo says:

the material object becomes something different from what we see, not a separate object on the background, or in the environment of the rest of nature but an indivisible part and even in a subtle way an expression of the unity of all that we see.

It is this unity from which everything proceeds and to which everything recedes. Aurobindo identifies this unity as the 'Brahman' (or the ever growing entity) or the cosmic

energy which is both mutable and immutable or kinetic and potential (Nirguna and Saguna). Thus to Aurobindo from the being there is the becoming. From a fathomless zero which occupied the world "a power of fallen boundless self awake". But the problem this religious truth faced was that when the age of conventionalism had stepped in the followers of different creeds tried to interpret it in conformity with their physical and material requirements. We hear of the truth discovering natural science imprisoned for long in the dark cells of the European Church. We hear of the miserable plight of Socrates, and later Copernicus whose only crime was inquisitiveness. But so far as Indian religion was concerned conventionalism got itself confined to the social realms and never had it penetrated to the realm of intellect, science or metaphysics which were still going on with their enquiry unmarred by any imposition or suppression. It may not be an exaggeration to say that what maintained the vitality of Indian culture through centuries was its inquisitiveness, objectivity and boldness to accept and proclaim the truth. The validity of Indian reading

9. "He on whom the sky, the earth and the atmosphere are woven, and the wind, together with all life breathes. Him alone knows as the one soul". Mundaka Upanishad, 2-2-5.
10. Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Pondicherry, 1984, p.1. Here Aurobindo thinks in line with the vedic view of creation, i.e., the manifestation of the primordial energy through matter. "The sages searching in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of being and non-being... creative force there was, and fertile power, below was energy, above impulse". Radhakrishnan and Moore, Tradition of Indian Philosophy, London, 1967, pp. 23-24.
about the truth of the cosmic oneness is at present supported by the modern discoveries in science. Although modern science still lags behind in reaching the realms known to the eastern mystics and is totally ineffective in imbibing the highly intuitive vision through the laboratory apparatus, there is still an apparent parallelism between the views of physics and eastern world view; both envision a basic unity. To Albert Einstein "what is important is the force of this superpersonal content and the depth of the conviction concerning its overpowering meaningfulness".

The Quantum Theory forces us to see the universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole. The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of

11. The Eastern literatures often refer to the indivisible reality of which all things are mere parts. This point is illustrated in Milindapanho and in the teaching of Aswaghosha. "What is meant by the soul as such, is the oneness of the totality of all things, the great all including whole." Aswaghosha, The Awakening of Faith, D.T. Suzuki (Trans), Chicago, 1900, p.55.

The same is revealed by Modern Physics. According to Niels Bohr, "Isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems". See Niels Bohr, Atomic Physics and Description of Nature, New York, 1958, p.57.


different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole. Modern Science has even come to a position of negating the very difference between matter and energy. In the words of Capra:

one of the strongest parallels to eastern mysticism (found in modern physics) has been the realization that the constituents of matter and the basic phenomena involving them are all interconnected; that they cannot be understood as isolated entities but only as integral parts of a unified whole.

Thus there is a basic unity upon which the whole world is structured, by which all the phenomena are worked out. There are the visible and the invisible of which the former is an expression. Aurobindo points out, "we have therefore two fundamental facts... a fact of Being, a fact of becoming. To deny one or the other is easy, but to find out their relation is the true and fruitful wisdom." 

Thus from the being emerges the becoming. It was controversial among both the metaphysicists and physicists whether the being is mutable or immutable or whether it is both. We hear of Sankara's exposition of the Niroguna.

15. Fritjof Capra, op.cit, p. 299.
Brahman (The Supreme Being without attributes) and Madhava's Saguna theory, and also of the condominium between the two. Science also speaks on the kinetic and potential forms of energy. Energy though immutable is also subjected to mutation, for there is nothing as dead matter, but only movement. Therefore in Sanskrit we have the term Jagath (ever moving) to denote the world. There is a permanence coincided with change, a harmonious blend of creation and destruction or what are called opposites. Here Aurobindo's thought is influenced by the teachings of the Gita and his readings in Heraclitus, both being the exponents of world beyond the opposites, where the opposites bring out a union, a poise and rhythm, where the opposites cease to exist. The primary unity itself is in constant motion and change, its creation is destruction, its destruction, creation. The universal process is a transition from one condition to its opposites, and in this sense everything unites opposites within itself. War, said Heraclitus, is the father of all things, War is the King of all; and the saying, like most of the apothegms of the Greek thinker, suggests a profound truth, says Aurobindo. From a clash of material or other forces everything in this world seems to

Also see B.N.K. Sarma, Sri Madhva's Teachings in His own Words, Bombay, 1979, pp. 144-45.
19. Frank Thilly, op.cit, p.33
be born. By a struggle of forces, tendencies and principles, the beings, proceed in progressive cycles, creating the new and destroying the old. To substantiate this point Aurobindo quotes the Gita:

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Thou shalt not Conquer except by battle with thy fellows and thy surroundings; thou shall not even live except by battle and struggle and by absorbing into thyself other life. The first law of this world that I have made is creation and preservation by destruction.
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Creation, preservation and destruction are thus the three aspects of the being set together in an unending line, in a cyclical process. Again we hear of the vedantic theory of the eternal cycles of manifestation and the withdrawal from manifestation. We hear of the Supreme being immersed in its cosmic sleep during each interval so as to start forth once more with all its potent force. The theory of the universal cycles is thus established by both physics and metaphysics. This is the basis of Aurobindo’s cyclical theory.

As there are universal cycles, so also there are historical cycles. Aurobindo accepts the theory of the

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cyclical movement in human history instead of the linear theory of human progress. Many scholars and philosophers of History in modern times upheld the rhythmic theory though some criticized the constant motion and held that progress often brings us back to the starting point. The concept of social cycles can be seen in the Hegelian dialectics with its clockwise three stages characterized with catastrophic movements and retrogressions. Similar was the view of Nietzsche who revived the theory of 'eternal recurrence'. In his exposition of the cyclical theory Aurobindo has been profoundly influenced by the German historian Karl-Lamprecht just as by the concept of the Vedic cycles.

Aurobindo says:

..... in pre-war Germany, the metropolis of rationalism and materialism but the home .... of new thought and original tendencies.... a first psychological theory of history was conceived and presented by an original intelligence..... the German historian, originator of this theory, seized on a luminous idea .... its basic idea formulated a suggestive and illuminating truth,

22. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Calcutta, 1969, Vol-I, p. 196. This reminds us of the French adage: "The more it changes the more it looks the same".
and it is worthwhile following up some of the suggestions it opens out in the light especially of eastern thought and experience.

Lamprecht divided the German history into various successive stages. Firstly, there was the symbolic age, the age of fancy and imagination when man had no separate legal personality. Secondly, there was the typal age when types were developed. The later middle ages witnessed the advent of the conventional age characterized by the territorial basis of political rule and emergence of urban centres. With the Renaissance and Reformation started the fourth stage, the stage of individualism which culminated in the rational philosophies. The Romantic movement with the reaction of feelings against too much of rationality ushered in the fifth or subjective age. The present age, according to Lamprecht, is one of nervous tension with no dominant ideal. Though Lamprecht's theory of these cycles is structured on the basis of German history he thought that it could be given a generalization, for every society or nation has these various psychic and historical stages to get through. But it may not be understood that Lamprecht's was purely a psychological interpretation. Influenced by Marx, he, to a good extent, believed in the economic influence on the social and psychic life.

26. Ibid, pp. 1-3
28. Ibid,
Although Aurobindo was much influenced by Lamprecht, he points out some of the defects in the conceptual scheme of the German historian. It lacks a logical sequence since Lamprecht makes a mechanical jump from one stage to another. The theory of psychological cycles does not tell us anything about the inner meaning of the successive phases or the necessity of their succession. He does not discover the ultimate teleology towards which the historical process is moving. The concept of a spiritual ultimate reality which, according to Aurobindo, manifests itself in history and imparts an immanent meaning and a final teleology to historic development is thus missing in Lamprecht. Lastly, the role of the creative intellectuals in history is not given the due recognition and the economic factors are over-emphasized perhaps of Lamprecht's being influenced by the materialistic thought. Aurobindo speaks of the historians who deny or put aside as of very subsidiary importance the working of the idea and influence of the thinker in the development of the human institutions.

The French Revolution, it is thought, would have happened just as it did and when it did, by economic necessity, even if Rousseau and Voltaire had never written and the eighteenth century philosophic movement in the world of thought had never worked out its bold and radical speculations.

30. Ibid
31. Ibid
32. Ibid, p. 1
However, Aurobindo says, the suggestions Lamprecht has offered us, if their intrinsic sense and value are examined, may yet give some insight into the secret of historic evolution. It is the line on which, Aurobindo held, it would be most useful to investigate. Therefore without discarding Lamprecht Aurobindo tries to analyse the various stages the nations and societies passed through.

According to Aurobindo every society had its maiden step to the age of symbolism, when the societies tried to express the wordless, invisible, intangible and transcendental realities with the help of symbols, when intuition, mysticism and imagination predominated. He opines that in Indian history the age of symbolism was represented by the Vedic age. During this period India's poet-seers inlaid the knowledge of their mystic experience in the flower-bed of poetic imagery. For, while interpreting the vedas he refuted the modern occidental readings in Indian history. A Europe with its materialistic approach, could hardly understand the wisdom of India couched in symbolic expressions. Its intellect could not cut across the superficialities. For instance, the various vedic gods were the symbolic representations of the many sided aspects of the one supreme reality. "One existent, sages speak of in many ways, as Indra, as Yama, as Matariswan, as Agni" Aurobindo says, the vedic rishis ought surely to have

35. Sri Aurobindo, Benkim-Tilak-Dayananda, Pondicherry, 1970, p.9
36. Ibid p.39
known something about their own religion, more than Roth or Max Muller. It seems that Aurobindo's thought here is further influenced by Dayananda's Yogic interpretation of the vedic lore. Aurobindo opines, the vedic texts are neither ritualistic and mythological as interpreted by Sayana nor merely materiological and naturalistic as found in European interpretations. "We have instead a real scripture, one of the world's sacred books and the divine word of a lofty and noble religion." But we failed to understand this, because we read always our own mentality into that of the ancient forefathers. Therefore, we find in them only a group of imaginative barbarians. To us poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy and imagination a caterer to our amusements, entertainer of man's ordinary psychic feelings. But to the men of old, Aurobindo says, the poet was a seer, a revealer of the hidden truths to when imagination was no dancing courtesan but a priestess in the god's house commissioned not to spin fiction but to image difficult and hidden truths. For instance the meaning of the universe, the be-all and end-all of all lives is the progressive revelation of a great transcendental and luminous reality, an ever-broadening emergence towards the ultimate. "That luminous emergence is the dawn (Ushas)"

37. Ibid
38. Ibid p.40
39. Ibid
41. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.5
which the Aryan forefathers worshipped" 42. It will be more convincing if we take for example, the 'Purusha Suktha' hymn of the 'Rig Veda' which speaks of the sacrifice of the 'Purusha' or 'Brahman' and the emergence of the four-fold division of society, from the mouth, the arms, the navel and the feet of the god respectively 43. To us this is merely a poetical image with the sense that the Brahmins were the men of knowledge, the Kshatriyas the men of power, the Vaisyas the producers and support of the society, the Sudras its servants. To Aurobindo this is a symbolic expression of the idea that truth manifests in different ways, that the god has different faces—the Divine as knowledge in man, the Divine as power, the Divine as material prosperity, the Divine as service 44. Gita too says that god is the satisfier of those desirous of having knowledge, wealth, etc., and that god even condescends to the level of a servant before a devotee 45. Moreover, these divisions answer to four cosmic principles, "the wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things, the power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, the harmony that creates arrangement of its parts, the work that carries out

42. Sri Aurobindo, 'The Life Divine', p.42
43. Purushasuktha - 13
   Brahmanosya mukhamasid
   Bahurajanya xritha
   Uru thadasya yad vaisyam
   Padbhya sudro ajayatha.
45. Gita VII. 16.
what the rest direct". Likewise, the Gita presents the picture of Arjuna as a man subject to the action of the Nature-Force. Travelling in the celestial chariot led by the divine guide, he is fighting against the forces of unrighteousness. With the help of divine light he surmounts all the difficulties across his path. In the Vedas also we have this image of the human soul and the Divine, riding in one chariot through a great battle to the goal of a high aspiring effort. The Divine is there 'Indra', the lord of the world of light and immortality, the power of the divine knowledge which descends to the aid of the human seeker battling with false-hood, darkness, limitation and mortality; the goal is that plane resplendent with the light of the supreme truth with Indra as its master. The human soul is 'Kutsa' who constantly seeks the seer knowledge, as his name implies. The son of Arjuna or Arjuni, the white one, the child of 'Switra', the white mother, he is the enlightened soul open to the bliss of the divine knowledge. A similar interpretation Aurobindo gives to the stories of Mahabharata, especially the tale of Sathyavan and Savitri which is recited as a story of conjugal love conquering death. To him this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the

47. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, p.18
48. Ibid
49. Sri Aurobindo's preface to his 'Savitri'.
Vedic cycle. Sathyavan is the symbol of the soul carrying the divine truth of the being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance. "Savitri is the divine word, the daughter of the sun, the goddess of the supreme truth who comes down and is born to save" all the fallen ones from the grip of mortality. Aurobindo has it that this symbolism can be seen not only in vedic India but also in the Biblical genesis wherein we see Adam and Eve, eating the forbidden fruit, had fallen to the earth, a symbolic representation of the soul who, being attached to the worldliness (represented by the fruit of delusion) fall from the celestial heights to the world of ignorance and mortality.

The most notable characteristic of this age was the spiritual outlook leading to a tendency to make everything in society a sacrament, religious and sacrosanct. But it is to be noticed that it was not rigidly binding on the social life which was free of all religious rigidities. It was an age when religion was not socialized and vitiated. Religion then was not a fetter to the human progress. It aimed at helping the individual and his soul transcend the sensual and worldly barriers and imparted to him a free and ever broadening space for his individual development. But Aurobindo says, this tendency to make everything a

50. Ibid
51. Ibid
sacrament had its profound influence on the society in the long run, for the ethical ideology deriving from spirituality acted as the cause to a new change. There came in society a tendency to give everything an ethical and moral basis when the abstract spirituality and the higher truth once expressed through symbols began to recede to the background. An age of highest moral type, more psychic than spiritual thus began to crystallize. It was the dawn of the typal age.

The second stage, the typal, is predominantly psychological and ethical. Religion here acts as the sanctifier of the social dealings and activities; it becomes a mystic sanction for the ethical motive and discipline, i.e., the 'Dharma'. Its time-old duty of expressing the Divine Being or Cosmic principle in man ceases. Therefore Aurobindo says, there developed a firm but not yet rigid social order based primarily upon temperament and psychic type with a corresponding ethical discipline and secondarily, upon the social and economic function. But the social and economic forces were not the primary or sole factors; instead the function was determined by its suitability to the type and its helpfulness to the discipline. The evolution of the theory of varna in ancient India, during the

53. Ibid
early phase of the post Vedic period is an instance in point. It began to be defined on the basis of taste, character and function (Guna and Karma) and not on birth as could be seen in later periods; it was based on the idea of the honour of personal merit. It is the idea of social honour: the honour of Brahmin which rests on his piety and reverence for things of the mind and spirit, the honour of Kshatriya based on courage, chivalry, strength and nobility of character; the honour of Vaisya which maintains itself by rectitude of dealing, mercantile fidelity, order, liberality and philanthropy; the honour of Sudra which gives itself in obedience, subordination, faithful service, a disinterested attachment perhaps coincided with a dignity of labour. Likewise, the theories of Asrama and Purushardhas had their origin during this age, aiming at perfecting and ordering the life of a householder. The

56. Ibid, p.7
   The Gita says that the four 'Varnas' were created according to the differences in aptitudes and actions of men (IV-13). The duties of the four sections were clearly defined according to the dispositions born of their own nature (XVIII - 41, 42, 43, 44).
58. (i) In the Asrama system the life of Brahmin or any man who follows the Brahminic practices is divided into four stages - the stage of 'Brahmachari' when one spends his early life for education either in own house or in the house of the teacher, the stage of 'Graha-tha' when one, after leaving the teacher's house, enters household life; the stage of 'Vana Prasthin' when he, seeing his children educated and well placed, retires to the forest in renunciation, the stage of 'Sanyasi' or the seeker of the ultimate truth, the divine.
   (ii) Purushardhas are four in number - Dharma, Ardha, Kama and Moksha. Dharma is the religion or morality or the guiding principle of life that makes man adhere
early Christian principles of chastity, poverty and obedience offer a parallel, though at a lesser degree, to the Hindu life tenets. But as time passed, the types "ceased to have a living root in the clear psychological idea or to spring naturally out of the inner life of man". The types were getting conventionalized though in a most noble way and in the end they became just superficial traditions than a reality of life. Thus from the very typal age the seed-cause for the appearance of a new age comes; the types naturally give way to conventions.

The conventional age begins when ideas recede to the background and finally cease to exist, leaving behind mere

strictly to such principles like truth, justice, charity, piety, etc., in his worldly dealing. Basing on Dharma, one is directed by the Dharmasasthas or scriptures to have his economic dealings (or Ardha) so that they may not be in line with the utilitarian practices of greed and the resulting exploitation. The Ithihasa says that one who hoards more than what he actually requires needs punishment. The third element, Kama (desire) denotes any kind of desire one has in life. But the fulfilment of desires also, the Dharma sastras say, should be done without side-tracking from the principles of Dharma. The 'Purushardhas' thus emphasize both right aims and right means. Such a life would lead man towards 'Moksha', the deliverance from the meshes of delusion, and help him attain the divine. A blend of materialism and spiritualism, it was believed, would bridle life with principles.

See Manu, II. 2, 13. Kamachmathana prasastha II. 2 (To act solely from desire for reward is not laudable) Ardhakameswaskthanam dharmajnanam vidhiyathe II. 13 (The knowledge of the 'Dharma' is prescribed only for those not given to desire and acquisition of wealth) See also Apastambha, I.6.

forms and superficialities. The conventional age begins with a tendency to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to bind education and training to a traditional and unchangeable form, to subject thought to infallible authorities to cast a stamp of finality...

Perhaps in its beginning it has its golden age when the spirit and thought that inspired its forms were, though confined, yet living, not yet stifled to death by the growing hardness of the structure they were cased in. And looked from a long distance of time posterity may see in it something good and noble. For instance, a modern European who would look back to the medieval Europe may find something delightful in its distant appearance of poetry, nobility and spirituality and fail to notice the folly, inequity, cruelty, oppression and all dark aspects of those harsh ages. So too the Hindu orthodox idealist who sees in it a society perfectly ordered in with the regulations of the ethical codes. Aurobindo agrees, in this early

61. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.8
62. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
conventional age there is much indeed really fine and sound that help the human progress. But it is just like a light which gives vision and but due to the growing intensity dazzles and makes one blind. For, it is not the true 'Sathya Yuga' (age of truth) but an age of duplicity, age of an alloyed metal or of a "hard burnished copper with a thin gold leaf covering it". It is only an age of dim light extinguishing into the darkness of death and decrepitude when society falls more and more into the satanic grip of moral bankruptcy and the blasphemous ghosts of the retreated ideas. This tendency is more vivid in the evolution of caste where the outward supports of the ethical fourfold order begin to exaggerate enormously their proportions. Though in the early age birth does not have much importance in the social order due to the prevalence of faculty and capacity, it changes as education and tradition become naturally fixed in a hereditary groove. Birth and tradition gain an upper hand, and the highly ethical social outlook silently withdraws or becomes an 'ornamental fiction'. Finally even the economic basis begins to disintegrate. In the economic period of caste

the priest and pundit masquerade under the name of the Brahmin, the aristocrat and feudal baron under the name of Kshatriya, the trader and money getter under the name of Vaisya, the half-fed labourer and economic serf under the name of Sudra.

66. Ibid
67. Ibid, p.8
But when the economic period ceases to exist, privileges based on birth and family come to occupy the field. Mere conventions which we saw in the pre-Buddhist India or pre-renaissance Europe come in. True, there may come movements and institutions to reform the system. But being isolated, they often fail to find out the old truth of symbolism, they being not intense in their attack on conventions. Naturally in a generation or two conventionalism would apply its iron grip on the new movement and annex the names of its founders. This grip of conventionalism continues to exist until there comes a period when the "gulf between

68. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 10.

69. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p. 11; This can well be illustrated in the light of the 6th century (B.C) India when Buddhism took its birth. When vedic religion stagnated and drifted towards conventions Buddha appeared on the scene. Born to reform the vedic society by standing against ceremonials, caste system and exclusive priesthood, Buddha took up the old theory of Karma or the unattached (Nisanga) work that helps one attain the ultimate beauty differently called Kaivalya, Nirvana, etc. For, both Buddhism and Brahminism envision the ultimate salvation, the transcendental reality attainable to all irrespective of any distinction. The path both laid down was also the 'Middle path' (Madhyamika Marga) or the path between attachment and detachment. i.e., the pure unattachment ('Vairagya' or 'Nisanga'). But it lies in the irony of history that as time passed Buddhism became a separate creed with its own conventions and subdivisions (i.e. the Mahayanists and Hinayanists), making Buddha himself more an object of worship than one whose teaching, if practised, would lead to higher realities. Buddha, taken to the fold of the Brahminic divinities, began to be worshiped as one of the many incarnations of Vishnu. Brahminic fold thus annexed the name of the Buddha.
convention and truth becomes intolerable" , when the men of intellectual power strike at the bastilles of conventions and seek by their individual reason the truth society has long lost. As a result an age of protestantism is brought in along with a sense of freedom from the prison house of conventions . However, it is not a desirable freedom, for, Aurobindo says, it is only a partial freedom and it is entirely superficial which is sought by destroying the walls of conventions and not a freedom or an eternal liberation that comes from the discovery of the ultimate truth . However he says, it is a necessary prelude to the understanding of that creative truth .

70. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 10.
71. Ibid
73. Individualism never touched off the oriental life as it did in Europe. Indeed the Western dominated East never experienced it, for during the period when individualism was raging in Europe the eastern conventional principles of society were struggling against the western-imported individualism. Aurobindo opposes the opinion of those who held that Europeanism would instil among the orientals the feeling of individualism. To him it would be totally improbable. But Aurobindo holds, if such a thing would occur the East would follow its own bent and evolve a new social order that would be "rather in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality" so as to help the world enquire into the very core of its being or its original nature. Also see for instance the Spenglerian view that the non-European nations would inwardly abhor the modern destructive mechanism, be they "Indian or Japanese, Russian or Arab". Arthur Helps points out that the Gandhian Philosophy proves this view to some extent. But Spengler is no optimist and therefore, he doubts whether India in the long run could hold out against Industrialism, the idea of wealth, war and violence. Aurobindo's optimism cuts across all doubts. (Arthur Helps introduction to the abridged edition of Spengler's The Decline of the West, New York, 1932).
The age of individualism comes when it is convinced that truth is lost in the soul and practice of humanity and that the conventions are merely nonsensical and unintelligent. Now man, inspite of the natural conservatism of the social mind at last perceives that truth is dead and that he is living by a lie. In this individualistic age he attempts to get back from the customary belief and practice to some sort of real and tangible truth. By this individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire and a claim upon life he moves towards that desirable form of truth. He tends to remould in a more vital form religion, society, ethics, political institutions, social relations and dealings. Aurobindo says, it was in Europe that individualism has taken its birth and exercised its full sway. There it began with a revolt of reason, culminating in a triumphal progress of physical science. At the threshold of the individual age the practices become mere blasphemy. The individual finds everywhere a religion which does not rest upon an ever-verifiable truth, but upon the dictum of a pope, an obsolete social code or the tradition of a church. Even in politics he finds divine rights, established privileges and sanctified tyrannies armed with oppressive powers giving a self-justification, and usurping by foul means a claim or title to exist. Society gets divided by narrow domestic walls, fixed disabilities and

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75. Ibid
76. Ibid
privileges. Adherence to truth and justice become a thing of past, and the sanctimonious divinity appears. Therefore the individual has to rise in revolt and to turn the eye of a resolute inquisition against every claim of authority. Convinced of the utter disregard of truth and the emptiness of the puffed up superficialities, he flings off the social yoke, and declares the truth as he sees it. As a means to expose the truth he strikes inevitably at the root of every practice, momentarily perhaps even the moral order of the society, it being based on the authority he condemns and the conventions he is out to uproot. He is there to "destroy the falsehood and lay bare a new foundation of truth". This was what we saw in the reformation movement. A personal illumination supported by a theological reasoning touched off the age of individualism in Europe. A crude primitive perception of natural rights and justice resulting from the general oppression, blind faith and injustice, makes the individual think. This has its reverberation first in the religious field, the political and social fields getting stirred afterwards. It questions the conventional forms of religion, the mediation of the priest-hood between soul and god and a substitution of priestly authority for scriptural authority. This was coincided with another development, the Renaissance which in fact did more good than the Reformation. For, here we saw the

77. Ibid, p.14
78. Ibid, p.14
79. Ibid, p.15
80. Ibid
vigorous return of the ancient Gregco-Roman mentality, "the free curiosity of the Greek mind, its eager search for the first principles and rational laws and the high intellectuality, and the Roman's large practicality and his sense of harmonizing life with a robust utility and just principle of things". These were the factors which inspired Europe to seek the principles of order and control which all human societies call for. But there are reverts and reverse for, always this new intellectual individualism may not necessarily lead humanity to the discovery of his lost truth. In most cases it remains a perilous experiment to the imperfect human race. Due to this the social justice, through its stark assertion, leads to continual struggle and revolution, ending in an exaggerated assertion of will. For there are absent the two supreme necessities, a general standard of truth to which all must voluntarily subscribe and some principles of social order founded on the universally recognizable truth of things. The truth Europe sought through the newly discovered scientific theories, though for the time being seemed to provide it, actually led the humanity to another typal age. The new orders which were the by-products of individualism again put the individual in

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81. Ibid
82. Ibid
83. Ibid, p. 17.
84. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.20.
chains. If there was once the religious law maker to regulate the social activities of man now there appears the scientific, administrative and economic expert. Instead of the religio-ethical sanction there is the scientific and rational or naturalistic motive and rule. For instance, Aurobindo says, we already saw a violent though incomplete beginning of this line of social evolution in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Communist Russia where individualism was subjected to an elastic collectivism, where individuals became an organized set of robots. If to quote the Hegelian or the Marxian view 'synthesis' gives way to the 'thesis' which expresses itself quite differently as time and place vary. An individual slavery again comes into being.

Individualism, however establishes the human dignity in two ways. Firstly, it now gets universally accepted that every individual as part of the society has all rights to the full life and full development of which he is individually capable. It thereby uprooted the aristocratic norms which so far had ruled the society with the fafnir-like horror. "This conception has been accepted in full by all

85. Ibid
86. Ibid
87. In the Fascist or Communist view the individual is nothing but only an atom of the social body. Aurobindo quotes the proclamation of a German exponent: "We have destroyed the false view that men are individual beings; there is no liberty of individuals. There is only liberty of nations or races". Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self Determination, p. 20.
progressive nations and is the basis of the present socialistic tendency of the world". Secondly, there is the deeper truth which individualism has discovered. It is that man is the part of society to which he is to contribute creatively. He finds individualism in collectivism. He is something in himself as well as a part of the collective existence. Thus it helps man play his assigned role for his fellow beings and search for more truths into his own being. Individualism thus leads to subjectivism.

The course of the world is thus set adrift on the way to subjectivism aimed at rediscovering the substantial truths of life, thought and action which have been long lost or overlaid by falsehood of conventional standard. The age of subjectivism sets the world on the threshold of something unknown and supra-sensual which Europe thought would be found with the help of modern physical sciences. The materialism of the nineteenth century gave way to the new philosophies like Nietzsche's theory of 'will-to-power'. Bergson's emphasis of intuition above intellect,

89. Ibid
90. Ibid pp. 18-19.
(i). 'Will-to-power' was Nietzsche's search for the inherent power of spirituality latent in man. In some circumstances it may appear that the whole aim of humanity is a 'will-to-live'. But this is not so. What man desires or should desire is not the mere preservation, but an enhancement of his state of being i.e., the greater power. Nietzsche says, the triumph in competition which was a prominent element in Greek education and culture, the artistic creation, the philosopher's intellectual conquest of the cosmos or the ascetic's self-conquest
or the latest human philosophical tendency to accept a suprarational faculty and a suprarational order of truths, Aurobindo says, are also the best examples. Aurobindo says, these tendencies of thought were the attempts to read profoundly and live by the life-soul of the universe and tended to be deeply psychological and subjective in their method, although in their application by the lesser minds they often assumed superficial and destructive appearances. Yet another characteristic of the age is the nations' manifestations of the 'will-to-power'. Man is not a seeker of the mere worldly pleasures which are fraught with sadness, for each enjoyment worldly is a death, it being fatal to the spiritual purification. There is the eternal happiness derivative of the vision of 'beauty'. The pursuit of this happiness involves a high degree of self discipline, for men lack great power so long as they are dominated by animal passions. Man should sublimate his impulses, employ them creatively and raise himself high. Those who attain this state are, according to Nietzsche, called "Übermenschen" (supermen). Man must have an intuitive acknowledgement of his intrinsic superiority. (Thilly, op.cit., p. 504).

(ii) The characteristic note of this subjective tendency may again be seen in the new idea about education and upbringing of the child which became current in the pre-world war era. In the medieval period it was customary to educate according to the norms of the conventional virtue, or by the individual interest or the ideals of the teacher. But the pre-war era brought about a change. Education went a step ahead to believe that each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and the teacher is to enable and help the child to educate himself, "to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capabilities and to grow freely as an organic being". It was realized that he was not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material. It was nearly a road towards searching out of the inner being of man i.e., the divine, to make education the manifestation of perfection, to have a knowledge of the hidden truth. "That was the knowledge which the ancients sought, to express through religious and social symbolism, and subjectivism is a road of return to the lost knowledge", says Aurobindo.

discovery of their soul or the spiritual and humanitarian missions with which destiny has commissioned them. Nowhere was the nation soul having more an outward expression than in India where the Bengal resurgence of the early 20th century spearheaded the whole national movement. For it was more subjective, a return to the spirit latent in the bosom of India. It was of course aggressive, but it got the sublime touch of spirituality, a poetic imagination, an inspiring pacifism and above all, as true to Indian tradition, a broadminded national message. To India the national movement was more defensive than offensive; it never took to an imperialist aggression like that of the post-unification Germany. More or less the same was the nature of the Irish movement. But Germany did err in this matter. Just seeing the mirage or the unreal German spirit she made a leap in the dark. Nietzsche's 'will-to-power' was mistaken as an exhortation for aggression and imperialism, and Germany was on the verge of a destructive and premature adventure. Aurobindo argues, had Germany fully understood the real purpose of the 'will-to-power' she would have been on the path to discover her real nation soul or the subjective force of which the lamp was lit by her great philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche, by her a great thinker and poet Goethe, by her great musicians like

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92. Ibid.
93. Ibid
95. Ibid p. 34
Beethoven and Wagner and all the German soul and temperament which they represented. But this real spirit was not fully recognized by Kaiser William II or Bismark whose appearance was in many respects rather a misfortune for the growing Germany. Because, Aurobindo says, Bismark’s "rude and powerful hand precipitated its subjectivity into form and action at too early a stage". Bismark could not understand the real Germany or her spiritual strength. Instead he took it for cruelty and aggression, and failed to translate the vision of the German philosophers to a proper outward expression. He could not bridge the gulf between idea and imagination and the world of facts or between vision and force. He failed to have a desirable transmission of the real German vision. So Germany took her demonic appearance, lost her sublime potential and missed the real goal. And she was dragged, as time passed, to the vortex of the two world collisions. Because, according to Aurobindo, two world wars resulted from an undesirable meeting together of, or a 'confused half struggle' or a 'half effort at accommodation' between "old intellectual and materialistic and the new still superficial subjective and vitalistic impulses of the

96. Ibid p. 35
97. Ibid p. 34
Here Aurobindo is much ahead of Spengler, the German philosopher-historian. For Spengler believed that the doom of Germany resulted from the discontinuity of the Bismarkian
west". Or it was due to the "formidable combination of a falsely enlightened vitalistic motive-power with a great force of... an accomplished materialistic science". The war, however, was a blessing in disguise to some extent, because it by a salutary ruin cleared the way of all the checks to a truer development towards a higher goal. It had given a clear warning to abandon the path of arms race and aggression, war and violence and emphasized the relevance and probability of the safer ways. Aurobindo therefore urges all to give an outward expression to the more subjective 'will-to-power' and look beyond the red mist of the tradition or from Bismark's failure to train a political elite competent to deal with the foreign affairs. He cites the training of the medieval page, cloister education, the training of the Prussian officers corps, the English Public Schools and University Training for the Indian Civil Service and the Training for the Roman Catholic Priesthood. But Bismark had started nothing like, to train a class of political elite to carry on his foreign policy. But the question that what would have happened even if there would have been a continuity of the Bismarkian tradition in German foreign policy is left unanswered. As is well known Bismark was a clever 'juggler' who operated his foreign policy which was characterized by double dealings. He put the whole of Europe in a political melting pot with his destructive tactics. Even if Bismark had trained a School of 'Jugglers' it would not have any way prevented the world war or have placed Germany in good relation with foreign States. Perhaps it would have artfully delayed the World War, but would not have avoided its possibility. For the evil cause would certainly lead to destructive results. Thus compared to Spengler Aurobindo is more a visionary than a politician, to whom the translation of an ideal vision into a proper work alone is the panacea for the worldly ills.

100. Ibid
blood of war. Aurobindo says, the soul of a nation is something great and divine. It should not be mistaken or shut up in an Armour plated social body. For, it can only stifle the growth of the inner reality and end in decay or the extinction of all that is 'unplastic' and 'unadaptable' :

According to Aurobindo there is an ideal subjectivism which is the only ideal law for social development. This, he says, is in nothing other than the searching of one's own inner being ie., the cosmic unity of which all are the expression. Aurobindo sublimates this theory of universal oneness or integral humanism with the touch of spirituality. The ideal law is that all things are one in their being, origin, their general law of existence, their interdependence and the universal pattern of their relations. In the course of realization of this basic unity each individual, social group or nation has its own chosen way. For though subject to differences they adhere to one particular pattern; one must work with the diversity to work out a unity. Man has the infinite potential to do this, because he is distinguished from nature's less developed creatures by a greater power of individuality. Being the embodiment of such a power, something divine or celestial,

101. Ibid p. 36
102. Ibid
103. Ibid, p. 37
104. Ibid, p. 37
106. Ibid
he is to channel it for himself and for the world he lives in. Man must, therefore, become an individual soul and find and manifest himself in each human being. He must think for himself and others, for a lonely salvation is not his complete ideal. "Always he is the

107. The theory of universal brother-hood has been an oft-emphasized one. Both religious philosophers and modern universalists, have been in agreement regarding this point. The vedic apothegm 'Let the whole world be happy' or the Christian saying 'Do unto others as you do unto you' or the Universal brotherhood as preached by Islam or the Buddhist principle of 'Dharma' or piety have the same connotation. But the modern world organizations, though established to save the future generation from the perils, lack a sublime religious touch. The love and mutual co-operation they preach seem to be more to save one nation from the attack of other nations or suppress a fafnir who may ruin the world peace than to perpetuate a kingdom of peace and divine love in the world of mortals. For instance we have got a U.N. peace force. This tells us that even after centuries of experience man has not learnt that what is needed is the 'force of peace' rather than a 'peace of force'. Aurobindo seems to favour the view that man, whatever religion he may belong to, must go back to his own principles of 'Dharma' so as to use them for the good of himself and others. For the religious principles are the same save for their outer shell.

108. See for instance some symbols which the ancient Indian poets and artists presented. For the ideal was to help others first and oneself the last. This is what Vyasa tells through his story of 'Akshaya Pathra' (the vessel which held a never failing supply of food and was given by the sun god) from which Draupathi took her share only after serving every one, for after her share the vessel would become empty for the day. This is more expressed in the Buddhist image of the 'Bodhisatwa' which is the statue of a saint who prays for the opening of the world of salvation for all before he enters it. Because to salvage oneself, leaving others behind is not in conformity with the Buddhist theory of 'non-ego'. The purpose which the ancient Indian scriptures offer us as the true object of all human actions is 'Loka Samgraha' or the holding together of the human race. But while translating this vision into reality, society should guard itself against slipping once more into the state of totalitarianism that quells individualism. Both society and individual must grow side by side, aiding and being aided by each other, for no
traveller of the cycles and his road is forward". Besides, only the growing individuals can help their nations grow, and to close them up in the armour-plated society body is to chain society's own feet. So freedom and harmony should be compatible. True, the individual belongs to the race-type or the nation. But if by a part of himself he belongs to the nation, by another he exceeds it and belongs to humanity. Therefore the community or the nation must stand as a "mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity.

As the individual grows so also the nation must. It is the sum total of its individual aspirations to grow along with other nations, helping them to grow and imbibing their values. But in the universal progress of the nations they have, like the individuals, the right to be themselves, their just claim, as against any attempt at domination by other nations. They must assert this right not only for their own sake, but for the interest of humanity as well. The nations must thus help each other and progress on the path of give and take. As the individuals live by the lives of other individuals, so must the nations by the lives of other nations, subjecting the materials getting from each

state or legislator, no church or priest can "cut him rigorously into a perfect pattern" or give him a "mechanical salvation".

109. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination*, p.60
111. Ibid, p.62
other to the laws of one's own nature. For, the means may not be the same though the end is. As the individuals grow from within "the free development of the community or nation from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of mankind". Therefore the ideal law of all nations should be to bring their life in harmony with the human aggregate and contribute their share for the growth and perfection of beauty. The nations must help their men transcend the human limitations of the society, race and nation and to find themselves as the parts of humanity at large which they lead. Freedom in harmony is thus the only law of human progress.

113. Ibid, p.63
114. Ibid
115. Ibid, p.64
modern period from dark ages and the age of feudalism. Thus the difference between the civilized man and the natural man began to be made. In Germany Herder first used the term 'Kultur'. Goethe used the 'Geisekulture' and "characterized the four parts of a culture-its preliminary, early, late and civilized stages-with such a depth of insight that even today there is nothing to add". Kant conceived freedom to be the cardinal element of culture. He gives more importance to 'reason' and to individual who is a free agent with his every act a direct expression of pure reason. Fichte also holds more or less the same opinion. His basic insight, the one which he regards as the key to cultural growth, is the conception of freedom; it is the moving power in all progress and civilization. He envisions an "enlightened human power armed with its own inventions" and "a mankind using its powers in complete cooperation and marching forward in step ... without arrest of progress or setback, to a culture of which we can form no conception". These scholars also throw light on the difference between civilization and culture. Kant says that

"we have become civilized to the point of being over-
burdened in every kind of social behaviour and conventions" 
and conceives culture as "the drawing forth of a rational 
being's capacity for certain ends in general". The dif-
ference between mere superficial civilization and an in-
wardly directed culture has come in for further elaboration 
at the hands of many philosopher-historians. Spengler has 
elaborated this distinction. To Spengler every culture has 
its source in the proto-soul of humanity and has a prime 
symbol through which this soul often expressed itself. For 
instance the soul of old Egypt often expressed itself 
"almost exclusively by the immediate language of stone- 
stone, the emblem of timeless become space". The Chinese 
had its intensely directional principle of the Tao, the way 
which conducts him to his god. In the Faustian Western 
culture this symbol was the "space" which "is a spiritual 
something, rigidly distinct from the momentary sense-
present" that cannot be represented in linguistic expres-
sions. He lays much emphasis on 'Seelantum' or the soul 
of a culture because according to him:

"culture is born when a great soul awakens out of 
the proto-spirituality of the ever childish human-
ity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless

11. V.P. Verma, Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, 
Bombay, 1960, p. 144.
12. Spengler, op.cit, p.100
13.Ibid, p. 102; 
J Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Cam-
a bounded and mortal thing from the boundless and enduring. It dies when this soul has actualised the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences and reverts into the proto-soul.

The being or the essence or the soul of the culture has the innate urge and struggle to express itself through various forms. "The aim once attained - the idea, the entire content of inner possibilities, fulfilled and made externally actual the culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes civilization". According to Spengler "every culture has its own civilization". And this civilization is the end or the decaying stage and the "inevitable destiny of the culture". "Civilizations are the most external and artificial stages of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion". Civilization is the outward expression of a culture. Culture is the spirit and civilization its expression, or the being and the become. Civilization takes birth, lives and dies whereas the culture, unlike the civilization which is its kinetic form, remains potential.

15. Ibid, p. 72
Culture is enduring while civilization is subject to change and perishes. Civilization, to Spengler, is the end or the decaying stage of culture. Culture is the higher and civilization the lower. Civilizations "are an end, irrevocable, yet 'by inward necessity reached again and again". Each culture in its last phase reaches the period of civilization or its inevitable end. Spengler cites Buddhism, Stoicism and Socialism as the characteristic products of Indian, Roman and Western civilizations. Greek soul was the culture and Roman intellect, the civilization. Spengler even differentiates between the 'politic of civilization today' and the 'politic of culture yesterday'. The former serves the abstract which represents the power of civilization-money. This was the 'form' of Roman State. The politic of culture, on the other hand, is related to something higher. Spengler says, "it is possible to understand the Greeks without mentioning their economic relations; the Roman on the other hand can, only be understood through these". Therefore he says, 'Chaeronea' and 'Leipzig'.

18. Ibid
19. But to equate Buddhism with Stoicism and Socialism jalls on one's sensibility. Buddhism has not died unlike the other two. On the contrary it has merged into the main current of Indian thought and life so as to energise them. It is idealistic and not a part of the materialistic philosophy. It is the vital part of India's everlasting religion or 'Sanathana Dharma'. It has not perished and, if viewed in the light from the past, it will not perish and it can, unlike the other dead ideas of the world, claim a historical legality to find a prominent place among the living civilizations as Toynbee said. Buddhism is still a living religion. It is a living philosophy and not a part of the history of philosophy.