The Chariot of Jagannath

The ideal society is the vehicle of the indwelling Godhead of a human aggregate, the chariot for the journey of Jagannath. Unity, Freedom, Knowledge and Power constitute the four wheels of this chariot.

The society, created by human intellect or by the play of the impure life-impulses of Nature, belongs to a different order: here it is not the chariot of God who directs the destiny of the collectivity, but a masquerading deity who deforms the divine intuition by covering up the God within; it is rather the vehicle of the collective ego. It wanders aimlessly along the path heaped with numerous pleasures, pulled by the immature and incomplete resolutions of the intellect, and the old and new dull urges of the lower nature. As long as ego is the master, it is not possible to find the goal — even when the goal is seen it is not possible to drive the chariot straight in that direction. The truth that the ego is an obstacle to the divine fulness applies not only to the individual but holds equally good in the case of the collectivity.

Three main divisions of the ordinary human society are noticeable. The first is the well-built chariot, polished, shining, clean and comfortable, fashioned by skilled artisans; drawn by strong well-trained horses, it goes forward cautiously at an easy pace without any haste along a good road. The Sattwic ego is its owner-passenger. This chariot goes round the temple of God situated on a high region above it. Unable to go very close to the high ground, it circles it at a distance. If any one wants to go up, the rule is to get down from the chariot and climb on foot. The ancient Aryan
society which came after the Vedic age can be called a chariot of this type.

The second is the motor-car of the luxury-loving efficient worker. It rushes forward restless and tireless, at a breakneck speed, roaring through the storm of dust and shattering the street beneath it. Ears are deafened by the noise of its horn; it relentlessly pursues its way knocking down and crushing anybody that happens to be in its path. Danger to the life of the passengers is great; accidents are frequent; the car is often smashed and repaired with difficulty, yet proudly it continues. There is no fixed goal but whenever a new vista is seen not too far away, immediately the owner of the car, the rajasic ego, drives in that direction shouting, ‘This is the goal, this is the goal.’ One derives much pleasure and enjoyment in riding this car; yet peril is unavoidable, and to reach the Divine impossible. Modern society of the West is a car of this nature.

The third is the dirty, old, dilapidated bullock cart, slow as a tortoise, drawn by emaciated, starving and half-dead bullocks, and going on the narrow country roads; inside the car is sitting a lazy, blind, pot-bellied, decrepit man in shabby clothes; smoking with great pleasure his mud-stained hukkah and listening to the harsh creaking of the cart, he is lost in the profusion of the lazy and distorted memories of bygone days.

The name of the owner is tamasic ego and that of the cartman book-knowledge. He consults an almanac to fix the time and direction of his departure. His lips repeat the slogan, ‘All that is or has been is good and any attempt to introduce something new is bad.’ By this chariot there is a bright and early prospect of reaching, though not the Divine, at least the Void of Brahman.

The bullock-cart of tamasic ego is safe as long as it rolls on the dusty unpaved village roads. We shudder to think what
might happen to it if one day it got on to the broad streets of the world where fleets of rapid automobiles rush about. The danger lies in the fact that it is beyond the knowledge and capacity of the tamasic ego to recognise or admit the time for changing the vehicle. It has no inclination to do so, for, then its business and ownership would be undone. When a difficulty arises, a few among the passengers say: ‘No, let it alone. It is good because it is ours.’ These are orthodox or sentimental patriots. Some say: ‘Why don’t you repair it here and there?’ — as if by this simple expedient, the bullock-cart could be immediately transformed into a perfect and priceless limousine. Such patriots are known as reformers. Others say: ‘Let us have once more our beautiful chariot of yore.’ At times, they even try to find ways and means of accomplishing this impossibility. There is no particular indication anywhere to warrant that their hopes would ever be fulfilled.

If we must choose one of these three vehicles, giving up still higher endeavours, then it is logical to construct a new chariot of the Sattwic ego. But so long as the chariot of Jagannath is not built, the ideal society will also not take shape. That is the ideal and ultimate image, the manifestation of the highest and profoundest truth. Impelled by the Universal Godhead, the human race is striving to create it, but owing to the ignorance of Prakriti it only succeeds in creating a different image either deformed, crude and ugly or, if tolerably fair, incomplete in spite of its beauty. Instead of creating Shiva, it fashions either a dwarf or a demon or an inferior deity of the intermediate worlds.

Nobody knows the true form or design of the chariot of Jagannath, no artist of life is capable of drawing it. Hidden under many layers, this picture shines in the heart of the Universal Godhead. To manifest it, gradually through the effort of many divine Vibhutis, seers and creators, and establish it in the material world is God's intention.
The real name of the chariot of Jagannath is not society but commune. Not a loose human association with diverse tendencies or merely a crowd but an unfettered invisible organisation, the gnostic community created by delight and the unifying power of self-knowledge and divine knowledge.

Society \((\text{samāj})\) is the name given to the organisation, that device which allows a human collectivity to work together. By understanding the root of the word, we can also seize its meaning. The suffix \(sama\) means united, the root \(aj\) signifies to go, to run, to fight. Thousands of people come together for the sake of work and to satisfy their desires. They pursue numerous aims in the same field — who can come first? Who can get to the top? — and because of this there is struggle and competition, quarrel and fighting not only among themselves but with other societies as well. To bring about order into this chaos, obtain help and satisfy mental tendencies, various relations and ideals are established; the result is something temporary, incomplete and achieved with difficulty. This is the image of society, of the lower existence.

The inferior society is based upon division. A partial, uncertain and short-lived unity is constructed upon that division. The structure of the ideal society is entirely the opposite. Unity is the foundation; there is a play of differentiation, for the sake of multiform delight, not for division. In the society we find a hint of physical and mentally conceived unity arising from work; but unity based on the self is the soul of the spiritual commune.

There have been a number of partial and unsuccessful attempts to establish a commune in a limited field, whether inspired by the intellectual ideas of the West or in order to follow unhindered the discipline of inaction leading to Nirvana as among the Buddhists or because of the intensity of spiritual feeling like the early Christian communities. But
before long all the defects, imperfections and normal tendencies of society infiltrated into the spiritual commune and brought it down to ordinary society. The idea of a restless intellect cannot endure; it is washed away by the irresistible current of old and new life-impulses. An intensity of emotion cannot bring about success in this endeavour; emotion is worn out by its own impetus. One ought to seek Nirvana all alone; to form a commune for the love of Nirvana is a contradictory action. A spiritual commune is by its very nature a field for the play of work and mutuality.

The day the Self-born unity will come into being by the harmony and integration of knowledge, devotion and work, as impelled by the Will of the Virat Purusha, the Universal Person, on that day the chariot of Jagannath will come out on the avenues of the world, radiating its light in all directions. Satya Yuga, the Age of Truth will descend upon earth; the world of mortal man will become the field for the play of the Divine, the temple-city of God, the metropolis of Ananda.