**Question: Define anarchism. Critically discuss the Principles (features) of anarchism.**

**Answer**

**Meaning:** The Concise Dictionary of Politics precisely says that the anarchism as a synonym for moral and political disorder. In general terms the word is used in stands for the absence of domination, hierarchy and power over others. The etymology of the term ‘anarchism’ traces back to the Greek word ‘*anarchia*’ which is often taken to mean *‘having no government’* or *‘being without a government’,* as can be seen, the original meaning of anarchism was not simply *‘no government’.* *‘Anarchy’* means *‘without a ruler’,* or more generally, *‘without authority’,* and it is in this sense that anarchists have continually used the word

**Definitions:**

There are many definitions of anarchism, and the most important of them are the following:

1. In the words of **Emma Goldman,** "*Anarchism is a movement aiming at the emancipation social, spiritual and political of the individual".*
2. **Sebastien Faure** defines it as, “*whoever denies authority and* *fights against it is an anarchist. To deny authority and to propagate it continuously is called anarchism*”.

Thus, anarchism is opposed to political authority in any and every form. It became a revolt against every type of authority, political, social, religious and economic. It is sometimes called an ideology. Its aim is to free man politically from the tyranny of the state, economically from the tyranny of the capitalist and morally from the tyranny of priest or church.

**Main Exponents:** The supporters of anarchists may be divided into the following three major groups:

1. **Revolutionary or violent anarchists,** who advocated the violent means are-Proudhan, Bakunin, and Kropotkin etc.
2. **Philosophical or religious anarchists**, who lay stress on the use of peaceful methods are-Ruskin, Henry Thoreau and Tolstoi.
3. **New anarchists,** who take a soft line of methods are-Nozick, Wolf and Barkman.

**Principles or Core Themes of Anarchism:**

It is very difficult to state in a precise form the basic tenets or concepts of anarchism because of the fact that there is no single exponent of the theory. Several exponents of the theory have viewed the theory in their own ways which have created a lot of confusion about it. In spite of this primary problem certain basic principles have been devised. They are:

1. **Opposition to state:** The anarchism is anti-state theory. It condemns the existence of state as not only undesirable but also as an unnecessary evil. According to the anarchist the state is a great hindrance in the way of society and upholds a system which makes human life most miserable. The state as a political organization is oppressive. It forces the individuals to show their obligation to the state and any refusal is followed by punishment. It is state is the source of all sorts of corruption and evils. Such an organization is to be abolished. So long the state exists there cannot be any emancipation of people.
2. **Natural order:** Anarchist believes in the natural goodness of mankind. They opined that human nature is sufficiently optimistic to sustain the notion of natural order and harmony. From this perspective, social order arises spontaneously and it does not requires the machinery of law and order.
3. **Attack on religion:** The anarchists also condemn religion and the church. According to them church is the friend of the state and capitalists. Religion is a force of evil and religious institutions are the centers of corruption. Religion makes the people superstitious and tolerant of the injustices of the capitalist and political authorities.
4. **Opposition to private property:** The anarchist is strongly opposed to the private property. Private property leads to the misery of the people and gives rise to the questions of mine and thine. Proudhon himself called private property as theft. According to anarchists, private property is the root cause of capitalism.
5. **Condemn representative government:** The anarchists also condemn representative government which they consider a sort of fraud. It is a form of government by amateurs and cannot be accepted to be efficient. The whole of the representative system is unreal as it cannot represent the whole people.
6. **Effect of power:** The anarchist endorsed the dictum of **Lord Acton** that, “*power corrupts man and absolute power corrupts absolutely”*. According to the anarchists the exercise of power makes man selfish, arrogant, oppressive and inhuman. Kropotkin asserted “this or that despicable ministers might have been an excellent man, if power had not been given to him”.
7. **Economic freedom:** The anarchists not merely interested in overthrowing the state as an end itself, but condemn and challenge the present social and economic structure of the society. Bakunin argued that ‘political power and wealth are inseparable.’ He asserted that the anarchist identified themselves with the poor and exploited, and against the oppressor and exploiters. Majority of the anarchists have a preference for an economy in which free individuals manage their own affairs without the need of state ownership or regulation.

**Criticisms:** The theory of anarchism is not infallible. Following are some of the criticisms against anarchism:

1. Critics allege that anarchism preaches the philosophy of destruction. They want to establish a society based on love and cooperation. This is obviously impracticable because love cannot come out of murder, destruction or violence.
2. Experience reveals that growth of human civilization and the existence of the state have gone hand in hand. The anarchists denying state they deny the civilization.
3. Critics pointed out that anarchist view of state is defective. The state is not the destroyer of liberty but is a necessary condition for its guarantee
4. The present inequalities and injustices are the result of private property is exaggerated by the anarchists. It may be held that not all crimes are the crimes against property.

1. In a sense, anarchism taken as another variety of utopian socialism.
2. Some critics have bracketed anarchism with terrorism on the ground that both have declared their strong opposition to the rule of law and apathy against it.
3. The anarchists condemn the power and coercive authority of the state. But, there are many areas of state activity involving social services, are definitely free from force and coercion.

**Conclusion**

The above points have induced the anarchist thinkers to challenge the authority of state and even to annihilate it. The modern state is nothing but an organization managed by very few persons. Minority imposes its rule and authority over the majority. Such a state can never be called a democratic one. In fine, it is a state controlled by elites and for the benefits of elites.