

Is Man Social by Nature?

The problem regarding the factors responsible for the emergence of social life in human beings has been raised from the ancient times. Is man born with the instinct of gregariousness, i.e. whether he was naturally created as a part of a whole, with an urge in his nature to be united with the whole or if he was not created as a gregarious being, but external compulsions and determinism imposed upon him a collective life?

In other words, is he by nature inclined to live freely, and is disposed not to accept any kind of obligations and restrictions which have been imposed upon him, although they may be essential for social life? Has he in fact learnt from experience that no one is able to continue one's life in isolation, and so he has been forced to surrender to limitations imposed by social life?

Or, although he is not gregarious by nature, the factor that persuaded him to accept social existence was not compulsion, or at least compulsion had not been the sole factor? Or, was it by the ruling of his reason and through his faculty of calculation that he arrived at the conclusion that only through co-operation and social life could he better enjoy the gifts of nature, and, therefore, he chose to live in company with other human beings? Accordingly, the problem can be posed in three ways.

- (1) Man is social by nature.
- (2) He is social by compulsion.
- (3) He is social by his own choice.

According to the first theory, man's social life is similar to the partnership of a man and a woman in married life each of the partners was created as a part of a whole and by nature yearns to be united with the whole. According to the second theory, social life is like cooperation, such as a pact between two countries which are singly unable to defend themselves against a common enemy and are forced to work out an agreement of co-operation and collaboration. According to the third theory, social life is similar to the partnership of two capitalists, which gives rise to a commercial, agricultural or industrial company aiming at attainment of greater profits.

On the basis of the first theory, the main factor is inherent in man's own nature itself. On the basis of the second theory, it is something external to man's essence and independent of it. And according to the third theory, the main factor responsible for social life is man's intellectual and calculating faculty.

According to the first view, sociability is a general and universal goal which man naturally aspires to attain. According to the second theory, sociability is a casual and accidental phenomenon, a secondary and not a primary objective. According to the third theory, sociability is the result of man's faculty of reasoning and calculation.

It may be said on the basis of the study of the Qur'anic verses that sociability is inherent in the very nature and creation of man. In the Surah al Hujurat the Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ
أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ..

“O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes, that you may know one another [not that on account of this you may boast of being superior to others]. Certainly, the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the most God-fearing among you”
(49: 13)

In this verse, besides an ethical precept, there is an implication which indicates the philosophy of social existence of man, according to which mankind is so created that it always lives in the form of groups, nations and tribes, and an individual is known through his relation to his respective nation and tribe an identity which is an integral part of social existence. If these relations which in one way, are the cause of commonness and association between individual men, and, in the other way, are the cause of their separation and dissociation did not exist, it would have been impossible to distinguish one man from another.

As a consequence, social life, which is the basis of relationships of human beings with one another, would not have come into existence. These and similar other factors in social life, such as differences in features, colour, and physique, provide the ground for specific marks of distinction of an individual and impart individuality to persons.

Had all the individuals been of the same colour, features, and physique, and had they not been governed by different types of relationships and associations, they would have been like the standardized products of a factory, identical to one another, and consequently could not be distinguished from one another.

It would have ultimately resulted in the negation of social life, which is based upon relations and

exchange of ideas, labour and commodities. Hence, association of individuals with tribes and groups has a natural purpose. The individual differences among human beings serve as an essential condition of social life. It must not, however, be used as a pretext for prejudice and pride; for superiority is supposed to lie in human nobility and an individual's piety.

In verse 54 of Surah al-Furqan, the Qur'an states:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ مِنَ الْمَاءِ بَشَرًا فَجَعَلَهُ نَسَبًا وَصِهْرًا

“And He it is who hath created man from water, and hath appointed for him kindred by blood [relationships by birth] and kindred by marriage [acquired relationships].” (25:54)

This verse reveals the purpose of birth relationship and marriage relationship, which together bind individuals with each other, as underlying the design of creation. It is through these relationships that individuals are distinguished from one another.

In Surat al-Zukhruf, verse 32, it is stated:

أَهُمْ يَقْسِمُونَ رَحْمَتَ رَبِّكَ نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سُخْرِيًّا وَرَحْمَتُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ مِمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ

“Is it they who apportion their Lord's mercy? We have appointed among them their livelihood in the life of the world and raised some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take labour from others, and the mercy of thy Lord is better than [the wealth] that they amass.” (43:32)

While discussing the conception of Tawhid (Divine Unity), in the part dealing with the world outlook of Tawhid, I have dealt with the meaning of this verse. Here I will give just the substance of the verse. Human beings have not been created alike in respect of their talents and dispositions. Had they been created so, everyone would have possessed the same qualities and all would have lacked diversity of talents. Naturally, as a consequence, none would have required the services of others, thus making mutual co-operation and mutual obligations meaningless.

God has created man in diversity with different spiritual, physical, and intellectual aptitudes, dispositions, and inclinations. He has given some people special abilities, and has imparted superiority to some over others in certain talents. By means of this, He has made all human beings intrinsically needful of others and inclined to associate with others. Thus He has laid down the foundation of collective and social life.

The above mentioned verse also asserts that social existence is not merely a conventional or selective or a compulsive affair, but a natural one.

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