

Individual, Nature And Society

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As human beings, according to our inborn qualities, we are complete beings. But we are dependent on two external influences: nature and society. From one major point of view, we depend completely upon nature. Water, sunlight, oxygen, food, all parts of the life-support system are supplied by nature. We cannot afford to dissociate ourselves from these natural resources. Here, dissociation would mean committing suicide. The same is true of our relationship with society. It is said that man is a social animal, not simply in the sense that we live in a society but, more explicitly, that we completely depend upon society. From personality development to civilisational progress, everything depends on society. Here also, dissociation from society would mean committing suicide.

Some people develop a kind of individualism. This kind of individualism may appear to be a beautiful idea but, in the practical sense, it is not advantageous. No individual can afford to live just for himself in this way. This is like self-existence, and self-existence is purely an attribute of God.

Hasn't it been said that no man is an island? No individual can separate himself from society. Every individual—just as the Prophet was—is a part of society and it would be ill-advised for anyone to go against it. However, if society is corrupt, then one can dissociate oneself from it on these grounds. But this aspect of social existence accounts for hardly 1%; the other 99% is not objectionable. Thus, we are seldom obliged to dissociate ourselves from society.

It is not society's concern to change itself to suit an individual. Each individual must attune himself to the norms of society. No one can afford to indulge in individualism. The

problem is that everyone is born as Mr Different and Ms Different and this attitude creates problems. When people try to live together in society, they often feel that they are living in a world of differences. Every difference is like a challenge.

So living in a society means living with constant challenges. This perturbs people and they become individualists. But this kind of individualism is little more than escapism. Differences could be a boon, for if everyone thinks alike, no one thinks very much. So difference means diversity just like different trees enhance the beauty of a garden.

Difference gives us great advantages. Difference activates our minds, compelling us to think more and more. Difference creates an intellectual challenge. Intellectual challenge leads to discussion, and discussion and dialogue result in all kinds of progress. Individual living means living in a limited sphere and as such it is a constant obstacle to future development. Individual or isolated living deprives one of interactive learning, greater experience, and the opportunity to learn lessons. It is like living in a cocoon. This kind of living is correct for the larva living in a cocoon but not for a human being.

We cannot afford to live in a cocoon. For the larva living in a cocoon, it is a life before an impending transformation but for us human beings, it is no less than death. Social living means living through experiences, meeting challenges, learning lessons, teaching and learning. Society is like a living university. One who tries to go against society will commit social suicide. No one can afford to opt for either natural suicide or social suicide. Therefore, complaint is a futile exercise, whether against nature or against society. Adjustment to achieve mutual benefit is the only possible formula.

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