

is unthinkable, and society without man is a mad man's story. Society is natural to man. Man has a social instinct which is as powerful as other instincts. There is no beginning or end of society. But though there is no beginning or end of society, man can change it and it has also been possible for man to build a richer and more cultured society.

Relation of the individual to society

There are various theories about the relation between individual and society, e.g., individualism, collectivism or socialism, organism, idealism or group-mind theory.

(a) **Individualism**: According to this theory, society consists of several independent members or individuals and as such society is a mechanical and artificial institution. Society consists of individuals. Individual can exist independently of the society but society without individuals is chimerical. An individual, according to this theory, is free. Social ties have been thrust on him to cramp his natural development. An individual is at liberty to throw off this social tie when he feels that it hinders his individual objective. Individual liberty is indispensable for the development of his personality. Society cannot, and has no right to, interfere in his individual liberty. Society exists for the individual. The converse is not true. Such theory has been dubbed as *individualistic*.

Social Contract theory: This theory holds that out of a social contract arises society. In the pre-social state the individual lived in a 'state of nature'. Each individual in this state of nature was an independent unit. He was a law unto himself. Subsequently, they entered into a pact among themselves and established a society. This has been called '*social contract theory*'. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau are its chief exponents.

According to Hobbes, an individual's life in this pre-social state was nasty and brutish. Each individual was a law unto himself and consequently 'might is right' was the principle in vogue. To escape from such chaos he decided to make a contract with his fellowmen to form a society in which he could live in peace. They selected

a king among themselves and left to him the task of establishing peace among the subjects and giving them protection from dangers.

Locke thought that the 'state of nature' was peaceful and there were natural laws which were obeyed by the members. But there was nobody to punish the dissident. Hence, the individual entered into a social contract and established a society; and by another pact they brought state or government into existence.

Rousseau gave a colourful picture of this 'state of nature' where peace reigned supreme and the individuals lived in heavenly pleasure. But growth in numbers of men and consequent problems relating to individual property disturbed the peace of this heavenly state of nature. Men were therefore compelled to make a contract. Out of this contract a '*general will*' emerged which was sovereign and included the individual will of all.

Criticism: The individualistic idea of the relation between individual and society is unacceptable on the following ground:

(1) From the historical viewpoint, the state of nature never existed nor could have ever possibly existed. Moreover, if man possessed no social consciousness when he was living in the state of nature, how was it possible for him to be imbued with social consciousness? It is only in the society that man imbibes social consciousness.

(2) The pre-social state of nature is a myth. The picture of man as depicted in the Social Contract theory is also not true. Man is neither wholly selfish, nor wholly altruistic. He is a mixture of opposites.

(3) In the so-called state of nature man was already living in society, outside of which he could not have developed mentally, nor have acquired those ideas and feelings which led to the social contract. If man possessed no idea of society or state, it would not be possible for him to enter into any contract to form a society. Hence the Social Contract Theory has been discarded.

[b] Collectivism or Socialism: This view is opposite of individualism. According to this view, man exists for the society; society does not exist for man. The development of an individual is impossible without his participation in the life of society. Man cannot exist without society though society, according to this theory, can

exist without man. The society bestows on man certain duties and responsibilities which it is the duty of man to discharge. Society has full control and power over man, but man has no right over society. Plato and Aristotle believed in this collectivistic theory. Man is born in the society and nurtured by society. If there was no society, man could not exist. In the social life, man has no independent existence. Just as in a chemical compound the component elements lose their independence and individual marks, so also in a society the individuals merge with the social life by losing their independence.

Criticism: The socialistic theory, like the individualistic theory, offers an extreme view regarding the relation between individual and society. The view that society is all-in-all and the individual should lose his individuality in this all-engulfing society cannot be accepted. Society cannot exist without individuals. The development of society depends on the development of its members.

The socialistic view does not admit of the independent existence of individual. But such denial of individual liberty cannot be accepted. Individual liberty is a *sine quanon* for social development. The example of chemical compound cannot be applicable to human society. Participation in social life does not mean negation of individuality.

Hence, though society exerts a great influence on its members, there is no reasonable ground to believe that the individual is nothing. The 'social consciousness' is in reality nothing but the 'individual consciousness' taken together.

(c) Organic Theory: A number of social philosophers have described society as an organism. According to this theory, the relation between individual and society is organic, and not mechanical. Most elaborate statement of such organic relation between individual and society is to be found in the works of Leslie Stephen and Herbert Spencer. These philosophers think that the similarity between society and an organism is so great that their resemblance cannot be regarded as mere analogical affinity. They think that society is also a living organism like human body. Human body is made up of innumerable cells. The members of society are the

cells of society. Just as the different parts of the body are interdependent and ultimately dependent on the whole nervous system of the organism, also the different individual members of society depend on one another and on the whole society. The cells cannot exist without the organism, and the organism cannot exist without the cells. Similarly, man cannot exist without society, and society cannot exist without individuals. Social processes are organic in their nature. The structure, growth and functions of a social organism resemble those of a living organism. Both living organisms and social systems pass through identical stages of growth, maturity and decay. Herbert Spencer has compared the society to an animal body whose system of nutrition has its counterpart in society in its industrial and agricultural system; the circulatory system (heart, arteries and veins) corresponds to the communication and transport systems; the nervous system to the government, and so on.

There are other thinkers who have driven this simile to extremes and have held that in reality the individual in society behaves as the cells of the body whose activity and life are meant for the sake of the whole.

Criticism: Though the organic theory is better than the individualistic and the socialistic theories, it is not beyond criticism. Society resembles a living organism in many respect, but there are important differences as well. Mackenzie says that a society may be said to be a living thing in the sense that it is not mechanical. It is a natural growth. But if such organic relation is overemphasised, it may make us ignore the 'element of choice' that is involved in human society. There is no resemblance in essence between the members of a society and the cells of a living organism. The individual has his independent existence and all his actions are not controlled by society. An individual human being is mainly guided by his free will. The cells on the other hand have no independent existence. Their only function is to work for the maintenance of the whole organism.

A man can exist without society. If a man is expelled from society, he may live without it. But a cell disengaged from the living organism immediately decays.

A living organism has birth, growth and decay. But the human society does not necessarily decay, though it may transform itself.

No living cell can be a member of two different organisms. But one individual can at the same time be member of different social institutions.

A natural organism cannot add a cubit to its stature, nor can it make any radical change in the disposition of its parts. But a society can transform itself out of all knowledge.

Though society resembles a living organism in some respects, the analogy between them should not be extended too far. Society may be regarded as an organism in a metaphorical sense. Mackenzie rightly says, "If it is an organism, it is at least an organism of organisms, each one of which has a life of its own."

Merit of the organic theory: The organic theory rightly points out that the social whole is maintained through mutual adjustment of individuals. In this sense society can be regarded as organic. Social institutions came into existence as the result of interaction between many minds. Society is organic in the sense that it is a *relational unity* of a complex nature.

The organic theory has the merit of pointing out that the society is neither mechanical nor artificial organisation. It is on the other hand a living and growing thing. But it is not wholly like a living organism. Though society cannot reproduce itself like living organism, it has the capacity of adjustment to the demands of the time.

The organic theory makes it clear that no social problem can be viewed and correctly evaluated in isolation from other problems of society.

✓ **Idealism or Group-mind Theory:** Plato, Hegel, Green, Caird etc., are the philosophers who support this view. According to them, social relation is neither mechanical or artificial nor organic. It is *spiritual*. Society is an organisation of *free self-conscious spirit*. Man is a social being. His higher self is his social self. The self-realisation of man is possible only in and through society. A man living outside society cannot attain perfection. His social existence is his real existence. The relation between man and society is spiritual and internal.

Different views

Hegel's view: Plato has called civil society a mind. According to Hegel, society as manifested in the state is a natural organism representing a phase of the historical world process or the Absolute. The state is the real person. The will of the state or society is the manifestation of perfect rationality. The state, according to Hegel, is the *Divine Idea* on earth. An individual has reality only in so far as he is a member of the state. The perfect life consists in living according to the will of the Absolute. It may be mentioned here that according to Hegel, the ultimate reality is an Absolute Consciousness or Absolute Mind from which have evolved the world, mind, and all that world contains.

Durkheim, McDougall and Caird's views: Durkheim also thinks that social mind has an existence distinct from the minds of the individuals and is superior to them. Particular minds exist in the social mind as the atom exists in the molecule absorbed by the higher synthesis of the whole. McDougall, the eminent psychologist, says that society has a mental life which is not the mere sum of mental lives of its units existing as independent units. Caird, an idealist, says that an individual apart from society is an abstract individual. He is not truly man, but only a fragment of humanity. He is devoid of moral and spiritual elements which are of the essence of man's life. So, society is prior to the individual. In determining the nature of the unity that is to be ascribed to human society, Mackenzie says that the term '*spiritual unity*' is best suited. "It is a kind of unity which only spiritual beings, i.e., persons—would seem to be capable." According to Mackenzie, if human society is to be characterised as an organism, then it is 'organism of organisms.'

Criticism: This theory has given rise to many abstruse metaphysical problems. The existence of a 'collective mind' or 'social mind' distinct from the individual mind leads us to metaphysical discussions without having any bearing to the task in our hand. It is very difficult to understand what is the exact relation between individual mind and collective mind, if they are really distinct. Hence it would be better to accept the group-mind as only a metaphor.

Conclusion : The individualistic and the socialistic theories advocate extreme views and as such are unacceptable. Individualistic theory refuses to attach any importance to the role of society. The individual is all-in-all. According to socialistic theory, society is all important and individual has no rights of his own. In the former theory, society is sacrificed at the altar of individualism, while in the latter theory the individual is sacrificed at the altar of society. The former upholds individual liberty and the latter denies any such liberty to the individual. Thus both the theories are unsatisfactory.

The organic theory in so far as it emphasises an intimate relation between individual and society is above criticism. But when it drags too far the analogy between a living organism and society, it has found no favour with many thinkers. All that the organic view of society means for us is that in a society no individual can ever live in isolation from other individuals. If they want to live, then they have to go together. The Group-mind theory is not also above criticism.

We may, however, blend the organic theory with the group-mind theory. Society is not an artificial or physical unity as that existing between the stones of a building or the parts of a clock. Society is neither an organic nor synthetic unity as that of the cells of the body or the atoms of a molecule which are merged in the whole. In reality, the individual cannot live at all without the company of his fellowmen nor can he develop his personality without their help. But even when he is communicating and living with his fellowmen he has a life of his own which is distinct from the lives of other men. Gisbert rightly says, "Social values are in the last resort personal values. Even those qualities or powers which belong to society as such are realised only in its members, present or future ; for the life of society has no meaning except as an expression of the lives of the individuals." ✓

Individualism and Socialism

(a) **Individualism—Its Characteristics:** The question whether the individual is more important than the society or the society is more important than the individual has engaged the attention