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What is Society?

A society consists of groups of human beings who are linked together by means of specific systems and customs, rites and laws, and have a collective social existence. Collective life is that in which groups of people live together in a particular region, and share the same climate and similar foodstuffs.

Trees of a garden also `live' together and share the same climate and the same kind of nourishment. In the same manner, gazelles of a herd also graze together, and migrate together from place to place. But neither trees nor gazelles can be said to have a social life, as they do not form a society.

Human life is social in the sense that it is essentially gregarious. On the one hand human needs, benefits, satisfactions, work, and activity are social in essence, and the social system cannot be maintained but through division of labour, division of profits and a shared common satisfaction of needs within a particular set of traditions and systems.

On the other hand, specific ideas and ideals, temperaments, and habits govern human beings in general, giving them a sense of unity and integration. In other words, society represents a group of human beings, who, under the compulsion of a series of requirements and under the influence of a set of beliefs, ideals and goals, are amalgamated with one another and are immersed in a continuum of collective life.

The common social interests, and particular ties of human life unite human beings together, giving to every individual a sense of unity similar to that experienced by a group of people travelling together in an automobile or an Aeroplane or a Boat, heading towards the same destination, and sharing together the common hope of reaching the destination safely, the dangers of the way, and a common fate.

How beautifully the Prophet of Islam (saws) has described the philosophy of `enjoining right conduct and forbidding indecency' (*al-'amr bil ma'ruf wa nahy `an al-munkar*) by means of the following parable:

A group of people board a ship that sets sail on the sea tearing apart the waves. Every one of them has a seat reserved for him. One of the travellers claiming that the seat occupied by him belonged to none other than him, starts making a hole under his seat with a sharp tool. Unless all the travellers

immediately hold his hand and make him desist from doing so, they would risk drowning not only themselves but would also fail to save the poor wretch from being drowned.

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