Chapter – III

THE IDEALIST VIEW OF MAN IN SOCIETY

We have seen that even when man enters into a social contract to abide by social laws, mores and customs, he does so only to foster his own well-being in the best possible way and the best condition for this is that his well-being is not in conflict with others. But if this is solely based on materialistic consideration of gains thus accomplished, the so-called feel-good state of mind is bound to be only temporary. Because we have seen earlier, man’s yearning for more is the most basic drive behind all his thought and activities, no matter whether it works consciously or unconsciously. It follows; by the same drive he cannot stop working for the more lasting ones, preferably to the permanent ones.

The permanent and immutable feelings of good can be achieved by an individual only when he listens to the spirit or the ideal man in him trying to find its fullest manifestation through his thought and activities. This strikes a golden balance between the two states taking one to a whole state where one is seen as the supplement of the other. It is a balance between the states of materialistic outlook and the spiritual one. The satisfaction attained by achieving the material goal is considered as temporary. On the contrary, the feeling in union with the supreme soul is the permanent state because it is the real nature of man and he cannot restrain himself from seeking the ultimate goal, cannot be a failure in achieving the ultimate goal.
Thus we may say, the society is not just an aggregate of individuals. It is a spiritual unity based on a conscious effort to find the best for his conscious self. Spiritual beings, that, men alone are capable of such a unity. They are self-conscious beings free to pursue the path of development. They are conscious of themselves as persons pursuing some common-good, and conscious of others who are also associated with him as persons pursuing the same good. But unlike for example, bees who are led by instincts to pursue a common-good, men are led by consciousness, desire and will to pursue their common good so that every individual attains the best of his possible well-being. The clearer is the consciousness to pursue this good for the self through that of all, the greater the unity of the entire social perspective. Let us explain this passage towards unity in further details.

Every person is born with particular attitudes in a particular social environment. His special duties are strictly determined by his particular station in life, and he performs these duties faithfully to realize his highest personal good at the behest of the general good. The determination of a man’s duties depends largely upon his individual in-sight. Every person follows the best of his own genius and determines his duties accordingly in conformity with his station in life. That means, the individual’s ‘special’ duties (aimed to secure his best) are determined by his conscious participation in the society, that is, by his place in the actual social relations. Thus even his steadfast devotion to an ideal of his own is regulated by the imperious claims of his moral station, the call of the spirit in him. The duties of a
teacher, a pupil, a ruler, a subject, a judge, a lawyer, a merchant, a workman, a father, a mother, a child, in short all kinds of people in the society are different so far their pursuit is concerned, but can do the best by remaining in their own kind pursuing the ‘better’.¹

Thus we may say a person performs his duties in three ways. He performs some common duties such as to ensure respect for life freedom of others, of property etc. Along with that, he performs some special duties appropriate to his own station in society, relative to his intellectual growth. A person’s intellectual self tries more and more to rationalize social phenomena to suit his intellectual growth. The power of rational thinking, choice, decision etc. are the basic features of this state where for example, a man replaces any social taboo, a superstition or blind faith obstructing the growth of the society as well as his own by right thinking and rational approach.

Besides these two, he performs some newer duties depending upon the circumstances changing from time to time. For example, a person of the Roman state could follow social tradition and custom in respect of the status of the men and women in the society without much difficulty. They could also take a class of human beings as the slave of the other was as a very normal rule in those days. But with the changing time through centuries a conscious social being learnt that neither there can be any difference of social status based family legacy, nor there can be a class of human being born to be slaves to others. This is the new role of the modern man going with the change of time. In short a person works to realize his own idea of superior living in which all these are taken in the best possible balance.
About why and individual social changes can be called a growth process in his self realization, we have the following argument.

Indian philosophy has of ancient heritage of such application of individual’s growth in the society. We can, at the first place, refer back to Lord Buddha, who practiced as he preached. He attained ‘Nirvana’ through a very rigorous process of self-restraint and the history of religion reveals how popular was Buddhism in the then society. It was not a mere ‘ism’ to men; it was a feeling of salvation, which is the ultimate end of an individual self. We can also remember the teachings of the Vedanta. The main tuning of the Vedanta is based on the notation of unity to the supreme soul- ‘Sohaham’. This felling of unity demands a very high level of self esteem, by which one can place him united with the Supreme. The main target of the Vedanta is to establish the self confidence in the heart of men. This confidence enables one to keep him away from any type of wrong deed. Once on believes him as the supreme one, he can never act like an inferior being. Thus the preachers of the idealistic views of the Vedanta like Sri Ramakrishna, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, M.K. Gandhi, Dr, S. Radhakrishnan have fought throughout their lives for the general mental and thus the spiritual upliftment of all the society members. All of them were the viewers of the political as well as the administrative transition period of India. The religions, educational, political, economic and social condition of the society members are deeply interrelated factors for a complete development of the society as a whole. They all have tired their best through their writings and their living to make the society members conscious about their supreme power of overcoming all the narrow
constraints of animal instincts. They all advocated against casteism, untouchability and all other superstitions. They fought for general education, specially for women education, they spent almost all their lives for establishing a harmonious social system free from casteism, ignorance and all other inhumanities. The contemporary thinkers, mentioned above, have proved that the real nature of man is to cross the limits of worldly gains. Man can uplift himself do the highest level of moral action and thus the society as a whole.

Thus, we have one supreme duty which above all immediate gains realizes our true, ideal, rational self, and the values that are maintained in this self realization. All other duties follow from this supreme duty. Particular duties are aspects of this absolute and ultimate duty. The supreme moral law is the law that commands us to realize the ideal or rational self and the supreme values that are implied by self realization. It is so broad, that it should be supplemented by other particular rules of conduct. When these rules seem to conflict with each other one has to resolve it only by appealing to the supreme duty, for that is the most basic and the ultimate goal of man.

It therefore follows that he cannot keep himself confined within the limits of mere social identity. As a human being he always tries to transcend those limits to find an identity with the supreme self or spiritual self. To quote S. Radhakrishnan “Man’s continual striving for perfection in spite of all error and misunderstanding, defeat and disappointment, his perpetual attempt to transform all occurrences into harmony, to make the external express the inward and the
partial success which has attended his efforts show that the task he is attempting is one in line with the genius of reality.”  

This comes from the process of his more and more inward assessment. It works some what like this: - supposing, a man leads an ordinary life. But in course of his day to day interactions and confronting different situations, he soon starts to work for a superior self who can remain unperturbed through all confrontations and continue to pursue his goal for the best. This is conceived as ‘The Superman’ by the idealists. This ‘Superman’ works in him in such way that his real self is not mutilated. The social self continues to work before addressing the social –Vis-à-Vis individual requirement. But the idea or image of that ‘Superman’ maintains its navigating role through different socio-psychological conditions. The realization of the supreme soul within him makes a man mentally so powerful that he strives for those actions which really welcome peace. In such a mental status one never bother for a feedback in terms of material value. Sri Aurobindo observed. “Man is spirit using the mind, life and body for an individual and a communal experience and self-manifestation in the Universe”  

He viewed an individual as much real as the universal or transcendent. Individual has transcendent within him. An individual can be one with the Divine, and at the same time enjoy Him in the world. This is a mystic union with the Supreme and also love and worship. This feeling of union is the force of action which is universal by nature.

Rabindranath, the poet philosopher believed that the most admirable attempt of man is to assimilate his personality into the same of the super human being. He felt that attaining bliss though
love is the goal of men. He maintained, “.... But what is most important of all is the fact that man has also attained its realization in a more subtle body outside his physical system. He misses himself when isolated; he finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship..., his multi-personal humanity is immortal. In this ideal of unity he realizes the eternal in his life and the boundless in his love. For Robindranath the main end of religion is the unity of mankind and this unity can be attained through spirituality alone. The Ideal of man, according to Rabindranath is perfection. The attainment of perfection requires spiritual progress. The real progress involves both the progress of individual and the progress of the nation, ultimate of the humanity. Progress, according to him is the harmony between material values and the spiritual values. Human nature is to expand himself beyond the limits of individual body and mind.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan interpreted the sense of unity with the supreme soul from a distinctive point of view. He thought," philosophy is integral experience.” The integral spirit of Vedanta is the essence of his observation. He considered real human freedom as the freedom of will. In the process of evolution; man is distinguished by self consciousness and thus makes him rational. Self realization is the aim of human life. The self is the spirit and thus human nature is essentially spiritual. For the same reason human nature is divine also. Due to this nature, human activities cannot be confined in relation to material gains only. Man naturally acts for the greater interests, performs for the larger society, things for the whole nation and thus unites the individual self with the whole.
K.C Bhattacharjee viewed individual self as the pure consciousness. Though it is conscious of its distinct individuality, it is well aware of its capacity of transcending this 'I' feeling. By this process of transcendence the individual self can attain his ultimate end, that is the realization of unity with the Absolute self. It is a state of non-contradiction, for which individuals feel eager for the actions those are without competition for material gain, these are for total cohesion. He strives not only just to survive, but to have a life of such a stature that is superior to his ordinary social self.

For example, one begins to improve his leaving by earning more money. The aim of it is to secure more worldly pleasure and comfort. But soon he realizes that these are very temporary and can perish any moment. So he turns to things and activities that ensure something more than those temporary pleasure or comfort. May be, he looks for music, for literature, or may be even for a strenuous pilgrimage which has very little or in fact practically no direct connection with bodily comfort and pleasure. That a Hindu goes to Manas Sarovar, a Muslime goes to Mecca, or a Christian goes to Vatican city, are all instances of man's endeavour to have the touch of that state of super manhood dwelling in him. In some form or other, this is the basic drive that works in every human being for universal identity of him.

The idealist view of life, therefore, contends that human progress lies in an increasing awareness of the 'Universal' working in man. Through the exploring his natural self, striving for wisdom and seeking, the individual struggles for a harmony between his search for the ultimate and his environment. He finds his goodness in to achieve or state of life which gives him the feel of The Excellence the Divinity
what is more than in such acts himself doing for. He realizes that his partial targets shall become all inclusive only if he is devoted to the whole. Fullness of life means service to the whole. So he strives after values, frames ideals and struggles to build up a world of unity and harmony. Aiming at such a unified goal, he forms associations, develops common interests by organizing families, tribes, churches and countries and so on. Knowledge art, morality and religion are the devices employed by man to realize his self by which he enters a sort of spiritual fellowship, a kingdom in which each is in the whole and the whole is in some measure in each. S. Radhakrishnan has mentioned in his writings, “That they all may be one as Thou Father art in me and I in thee that they also may be one in us”.10 Such a union based on knowledge, love and service is closer and more than any of the forms represented by the lower orders of existence.

The special privilege, which every individual self enjoys is manifested in two ways. The fact is that, each and every individual is conscious about their attachment to the whole of the humanity and all are trying to give this sense of attachment a concrete form in this way or that. The type of implementation of this feeling of attachment varies from an individual to the other and thus there creates a difference between the souls, some of which we mentioned as superior and some other as inferior. These two elements like the self hood which makes a man inferior, and the universality, which makes one superior, actually works together. The growth proceeds towards the progress until the individual realizes the feeling of universality in him. In short, man’s physical, mental and spiritual growth process takes him to a state of unity with the Universal Supreme.
The western philosophical thinking is generally dominated by the tendency of imposing supremacy on the individual self. We can find such an example in Cartesian Philosophy, where he wants to establish the certainty of the existence of the whole world from the certainty of the existence of the viewer. But such a contention fails to grasp the truth that the individual self too is contained in a greater whole and without the existence of the greater, the smaller becomes futile. As Dr. Radhakrishnan opined, If the self is not widened into the Universal spirit, the values themselves become nearly subjective and the self itself will collapse into a doubtful entity. It may also be noted here that, some western thinkers too differ from the Cartesian view regarding the supremacy of individual self. In this respect Hegel “retained a belief in the unreality of separateness: ...... The apparent self-subsistence of finite things appeared to him to be an illusion; nothing he held, is ultimately and real except the whole\textsuperscript{11}. Hegel maintained that self-consciousness is the highest form of knowledge. In a perfect knowledge situation the subject and the object no longer remain distinct. The highest kind of knowledge is possessed by the Absolute. So, individual self alone cannot be the criterion of the certainty of other being.

Bradley had the view that the reality is one and all the differences are embraced in its positive character. All the appearances must belong to reality; diversity must be at a unity \textsuperscript{12}.

Some western writers believe that this attempt to advocate any theory justifying a unity of the individual self with the non-individual ‘whole’ cannot proceed without destroying individuality in the process. They do not admit that minds arise out of God: not even divine
agency, can give rise to another self-active intelligence by any productive act. But eventually we find that, every mind exists eternally in a society of spirits, with God merely a first among equals, although a first to which other spirits spontaneously make constant references.

The wholeness of man’s life finds a clearer expression in Radhakrishnan’s writings. He says: “The values we strive for are organic to existence. The whole course of nature is an expression of meaning to be understood by man. Interaction with individuals, knowledge of one another and social relations with one another are possible because we all form parts of one system.”

So we may say, the reality of universal spirit is not a postulate of philosophy but the obvious implication of our daily life. At the human level the deep seated tendency of man’s nature do be superman is found at work in different forms. When a painter paints, for example, a landscape, he adds the best colours as far as he can imagine, puts as much details as he can remember for making it a masterpiece; i.e. the best expression of his realization. Again, if the painter does not want to be so realistic, he paints it in such a symbolic way, by which it can imply the best expression he wants to express. So it is a natural human tendency does supersede his apparent projection.

Reality is that the individual self has an inner urge to be united with the Supreme self because the same is his destiny. For this urge we can find the finer works of man, which are the manifestation of the essence of supreme entity within him. These works are the ways to the real nature. For a conscious individual, religion gives faith in higher
values, for the spiritual being it is vital contact with reality of his self, which is the source of all values. So long the human consciousness is on its way to the reality, the spirit is an external element to him. Though it is his destiny to realize the spirit in him and thus to feel unity with the spirit and he is on the way to his feeling too, still there is a difference between to be on the way and to be at the destination. It may be compared to Plato’s ‘ideal’ of another world apparent to our eyes only as a shadow on a wall of a cave for one who is confined in it for life. As the world of shadow is real to the cave man, so is the feeling of spirit to a man who is on the way of realization. Only realization can make the ‘idea’ distinct. This realization demands the rising to a higher level of spirit, from where every object below looks bound in a single unity that is the oneness of Supreme Soul. In the works of S. Radhakrishnan, “But to one who has risen to the level of spirit, it is of the world, present here and now.”  

Let us see how the phrase “One who has risen to the level of spirit” – is applicable to a man encountering innumerable social circumstances, many of which are hostile, many are from lust and greed striking at each one’s interest and so on.

We have seen that man’s life process follows the natural principle of survival. What ever he does the only motive behind that is to do some good to him. Thus it is a journey from gains to more gains. And we have seen that by the same drive he only naturally goes on from all immediate and short-lived gains and success to securing a state of more lasting values. Because all immediate goals are such
that either they lose their value with the change of perspective, or if they are really attractive, they would naturally invite competition from other aspirants from outside. Amassing wealth is one such instance what most people normally target but what brings more anxiety than carefree peace of mind, demanding a constant alert to safe-guard it from all kinds of threat. This kind of thought brings in a sort of awakening in every man. He stars thinking about some values ever lusting, he searches for something else.

According to the idealist the awakened man draws back from his mind, life and body and all else that is not his true being and knows himself to be one with the eternal spirit which is the soul of all phenomena. Spirit is something essentially and purely inward to be known only from within, and yet when it is known it leaves nothing outside. In the language of religion, spirit is God, the ultimate reality which is one and all comprehensive. The spiritualized man is a new genus of man exhibiting a new quality of life. He feels that the one spirit is present in all minds, lives and bodies. The superman, the master of life, enter into conscious possession of this truth and act from it. This according to them represents the eternal norms of humanity.

Sri Aurobindo views the growth of man from its biological existence to the higher state of superman as a natural irreversible process. According to him the best specimen of evolution in nature is man. He exhibits a variety of evolution, like, inanimate evolution, animate evolution and spiritual evolution, which is meaningful in various ways. Man’s body apparently is an inanimate object but contains life and spirit. It can be called the qualitative development of
a solid mass but it has not come around in a single day. It is the result of evolution that looks place slowly and gradually through millions of years. The various stages of this development can be found in human body. The human body is a miniature form of the universe. The energy evolution of the universe is immanent in human body and it has not reached the final stage yet. Sri Aurobindo in his ‘The Life Divine’ has said, “……….. If the occult or unconscious energy in some type’s answers to the need of the environment, in others remains unresponsive and unable to survive, this is clearly the sign of a varying life – energy and psychology, of a consciousness and a force other than the physical at work making for variation in Nature. The problem of the method of operation is still too full of obscure and unknown factors for any at present possible structure of theory to be definite’.15

Looking at the total life evolution of the world we feel that it is slowly approaching towards an aim. Every step is obvious in itself. But every step has the tendency to go beyond itself. And if we translate it from an idealist point of view, we may say that man passes through a total change from the outward to inward.

Every advancing step of life makes man more and more introspective. During internal evolution, personality develops and this is the result of Nature’s internal development. In a stage of self development there grows the realization of the immortality of soul. This may remind us of the concept of rebirth. The gradual revelation of consciousness through individual’s rebirth and its influence leading to the development of the standard of consciousness – this is the main rule of consciousness evolution. In this way with the awakening of the unique state through the transformation of Nature’s consciousness
takes place and this is the meaning of man’s life of in the world according to the idealists.

About the process of awakening Sri Aurobindo writes — as a result of Nature’s evolution contemplative human being has come into existence. Along with the self consciousness the thinking about science beyond consciousness has developed. This brings the super humanism in human beings in to fore play. The history of human civilization reveals that signs of great future have manifested itself in him. It is something like a developed force trying to manifest itself through him. But it cannot reveal itself as the form is not developed fully through which it can do so. Sometimes it manifests itself through man’s endeavor to transcend himself. This lies at the road of Nature’s evolution. “Man’s urge towards spirituality is the inner driving of the spirit within him towards emergence, the insistence of the consciousness force of the being towards the next step of its manifestation”.

Thus, believes Aurobindo, there is a continuous endeavor in each man to be good and perfect in whatever state he is holding. He wants to be free from of his socio-physical limitations. But this change in attitude is not sudden. It comes through well-thought process. The working of this thought process, as viewed by the idealists takes an individual to a feeling of unity, to love and fraternal feeling. But these feelings are not limited to one specific instance; it encompasses one and all. To quote Sri Aurobindo, “The nature of instrumental mind and the necessity of dealing with the life must itself create an infinite variety according to the stage of development and the individuality of the seeker. But apart from that, even the domain of pure spiritual self-
realization and self-expression need not be a single white monotone, there can be a great diversity in the fundamental unity; the supreme self is one, but the souls of the self are many. Diversity in oneness is the Law of the manifestation”.

With this idealist view of a social being, we shall try to deliberate in the next on how this process of manifestation is viewed by the Gita.
References

1. S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavad-Gita. P. 146
2. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life P.P. 272-273
3. Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga (In ‘Contemporary Indian Philosophy” By. R.N. Sharma) P.P. 717-18
4. R.N. Sharma., Contemporary Indian Philosophy. P. 110
5. Ibid. p. 244
6. Rabindra Nath Tagore, The Religion of Man P.P. 3-4
7. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life. P. 153. (in “Contemporary Indian Philosophy” by R.N Sharma , P. 217
8. Ibid. (R.N Sharma , P. 272)
9. Padmaja Sen, Absolute, Self and Consciousness A Study in K.C. Bhattacharya’s Philosophy, P. 86
10. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life. P. 272
11. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, P. 701
12. F.H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality, P. 124
13. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life, P. 273
14. Ibid. P. 302
15. Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, P. 865
16. Ibid. P. 881
17. Ibid. P. 923.