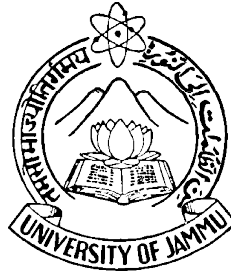


# *Directorate of Distance Education*

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU  
JAMMU



## SELF LEARNING MATERIAL M.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE

SEMESTER-I WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT COURSE NO. POL-101

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE

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**MA POLITICAL SCIENCE, SEMESTER I**  
**WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Western Political thought from the days of its primary stage dating from Greek methodology has been involved in varied diversities of concerns, and each political thinker have experimented them from their own point of view. Admittedly, the political philosophers have, often, differed on the solutions, but what is crucial is the prevalence of the issues which have seized their determinations.

Different political issues have been dominant in different epochs. Classical political thought was primarily concerned with the search for a perfect political order. As such it analysed the basic issues of political theory such as the nature and purpose of the state, basis of political authority, the problem of political obligation and political disobedience. It was more concerned with what the state ought to be i.e. the ideal state. The rise of modern nation-state and the industrial revolution gave birth to a new kind of society, economy and polity. Modern political thought starts from individualism and made liberty of the individual as the basic issue.

In studying classics, we construct our life experience with the aid of experiences of the great thinkers. After all, did not Karl Marx write: "only music can awaken the musical sense in man."

Systematic reflection about politics certainly did not begin with Plato, and Plato himself certainly did not wake up one day, find that he had nothing much on his hands, and begin to write the Republic. Equally, it appears to be the case that politics were not the first thing that the ancients reflected systematically about; nor was it the case that when they did begin to think about politics they had nothing else in their heads.

Political thought or philosophy can be defined as philosophical reflection on how best to arrange our collective life - our political institutions and our social practices, such as our economic system and our pattern of family life. Political philosophers seek to establish basic principles that will, for instance, justify a particular form of state, show

that individuals have certain inalienable rights, or tell us how a society's material resources should be shared among its members. This usually involves analysing and interpreting ideas like freedom, justice, authority and democracy and then applying them in a critical way to the social and political institutions that currently exist. Some political philosophers have tried primarily to justify the prevailing arrangements of their society; others have painted pictures of an ideal state or an ideal social world that is very different from anything we have so far experienced.

In this course, you are going to study the ideas and philosophies of some of the important political thinkers from ancient Greek philosophers Sophists to twentieth century Mao Tse Tung. Divided into four units, the first unit covers classical thinkers of ancient period, the second unit covers the early modern thinkers of medieval and post-renaissance thinkers, in the third unit you will study the modern thinkers of 18th and 19th centuries and in the fourth unit you will be introduced to socialist thinkers.

**Nagendra Rao**

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
**Course Title: Western Political Thought**  
**Unit – I: Classical Thinkers**

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## **1.1 ORIGIN OF WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT, NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

**- Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.1.0 Objectives
- 1.1.1 Introduction
- 1.1.2 Meaning and Nature of Political Thought
- 1.1.3 Significance of Political Thought
- 1.1.4 Emergence of Western Political Thought: The Sophists
- 1.1.5 Sophists: Common Features
- 1.1.6 Socrates and Sophists
- 1.1.7 Central Ideas of Socrates
- 1.1.8 Socrates Refutation of Sophists Ideas
- 1.1.9 Summing Up

### **1.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to:**

- Understand the meaning, nature and significance of Political Thought
- know the emergence of Western Politics thought
- the importance sophists in developing political thought and some of the core or common feature held by sophists
- Socrates contribution to Political Thought and his central ideas
- Socrates refutation of Sophists ideas



### 1.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Man is a rational creature which has been endowed with a speculative faculty. As such he has shown tendency to understand himself and the institutions in which he is living. He has devoted himself to the study of the physical, biological as well as social institutions around him. In this speculation the state, its nature, purpose, functions, organisation, etc. have occupied a prominent position. This speculation about the various issues concerned with the state, or organized life, is generally designated as political thought. Political thought is thought about the state, its structure, its nature and its purpose. According to C.L. Wayper, its concern is with nothing less than “the moral phenomena of human behaviour in society.” It seeks not so much an explanation of the existence of the state as a justification of its continuance. What is the state and why should I obey it? What are the proper limits of its authority and which I cannot dispense to be made compatible with the liberty without which I am less than a human? These are the questions which political thought is for striving to answer. Political thought as a term conveys a sense of systematic reflection upon the practices and institutions of political life. According to Doyle three main aspects are included in the study of the political thought. These include “the nature and functions of man; his relation to the rest of the universe which involves a consideration of the meaning of life as a whole; emerging from the interaction of these two problems of relation of man to his fellowman. The latter is the main concern of the political theory in the narrowest sense and involves a discussion on the nature, purpose and functions of the state.”

The observations of distinguished thinkers and political philosophers regarding the political aspect of our social life largely constitute political thought. It comprehends most of the characteristics of social thought, namely their views on human nature, human predicament, human ingenuity and the possible way to human emancipation and human progress. In addition it focuses on the use of ‘power’ for the realization of a vision of an ideal social order in actual practice. Thus, Political thought comes very close to political philosophy. Traditionally political thought in academic commentary is taken to signify political philosophy. The study of the history of political thought, for example, generally focuses upon classic texts of political philosophy. According to a dictionary of Political Analysis, political thought stands for the “area of political philosophy concerned with the study of the ideas and philosophic systems of those thinkers held to be important, on grounds of their interest, influence, relevance, etc. in relation to the development of politics as a practice or a study.”

Again according to A Dictionary of Political Thought “political thought include the theories through which people attempt to explain each other’s political behaviour, the values by which they judge it, and the mechanisms (such as law) whereby they attempt to control it.” Illustrating the close relation between political philosophy and political thought, Scruton observes: “the concept of justice, which may form a part of ordinary political thought, may also be subject of philosophical analysis, with a view to determining its grounds.” Political thought is an account of the ideas of prominent political thinkers – past and present- about the problems of politics, particularly about the nature and purposes of state and government and the proposed measures for the achievement of those purposes. These ideas are generally presented in a chronological order indicating the historical and geographical setting wherein these ideas were born. A comparative and critical study of these ideas is also included in the study of the political thought. Political thought or political theory/philosophy is a normative project that enables us to judge human action or to prescribe the best course of action. Political thought is the study of values.

Political thought is not primarily concerned with the facts of political life. It is normative in that it is concerned with values, moral codes, social standards and ideals. Normative concepts are most often value judgements. Political thought is concerned with the criticism of bad standards and the search for good, beneficial or defensible ones. Its goal is to discriminate between the good and the bad opinions, practices and ideals that structure the human society. It does this by subjecting the core principles of political and social life to critical scrutiny. In nut-shell we can say that political thought is the general thought comprising of theories and values of all those persons or a section of the community who think and write on the day-to-day activities, policies and decisions of the state, and which has a bearing on our present living. These persons can be philosophers, writers, journalists, poets, political commentators etc. political thought has no ‘fixed’ form and can be in the form of treatise, speeches, political commentaries etc. what is important about political thought is that it is ‘time bound’ since the policies and programmes of the government change from time to time. Thus we have Greek thought or Roman thought of the ancient period or the political thought of the medieval period.

### **1.1.2 MEANING AND NATURE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT**

The meaning nature, purpose, functions, etc., of the state constitutes the heart and soul of political thought. The comprehensive scope of political thought is best illustrated in the

works of thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas, Hegel and Green. Political thought is heavily influenced by existing political conditions. Most political theories or thought arose to explain and justify the authority that men obeyed or to criticize it in the hope of accomplishing change. Sometimes political theories emerged out of the speculation of the political philosophers as per the prevailing political conditions. For instance Plato's *Republic* has little meaning unless viewed in the light of the conditions that existed during the decline of the Greek city states. More's *Utopia* depends upon the background of social unrest during the change from agriculture to sheep raising in England.

Political thought reflects the thoughts and interpret the motives that underlie actual political development. Political theories also influence political development. They are not only the outgrowth of actual conditions, but they in turn lead men to modify their political institutions. Changing conditions create new theories and these in turn influence actual political methods. Magna Carta and the Declaration of the Rights were more than mere statements of principle. They were programs of action whose effects are felt to this day.

Political Theory or Thought is connected not only with the political institutions of its time but also with other categories of thought. Political thought cannot be divorced from science, philosophy, religion, ethics, economic theory and literature, or even from tradition, dogma, prejudice, and superstition. The nature of political thought depends largely upon the stage of intellectual development of man at a particular state or period of time. The primary influence of religious doctrines on the political thought of the Middle Ages, and the connection between economic doctrines and political theories at the present day are at once suggested. Accordingly, the historical survey of political thought must keep in mind not only the actual development of political institutions but also the parallel progress of human thought in other fields, in order that the political principles of any given time may be understood and appreciated.

There are, therefore, two phases in the evolution of the state. One is the objective, concrete development of states manifested in their governments, their administration of law, and their international relations; the other is the subjective development of ideas concerning the state as an abstraction. Political principles, like devices of government, are handed down from age to age, and each state by its experience and in the light of its condition tried to modify certain concepts and devices that in turn influence the states that follow.

Further, political thought is essentially relative in its nature and lays no claims to absolute truth. In the past it grew out of actual condition and existing modes of thought; at present it represents problems with which we must deal. But the solutions to these problems are never unanimous in political thinking. It is this lack of unanimous decision that is leading to the differences of opinions that eventually leads to the creation of new political parties and forms motive forces of the governments. Thus although some of the fundamental principles of political thoughts have been stated and restated, hammered out and refined, and have gained in the process a quality of explanatory power that seems universal, however, no theory of the state can be considered as ultimate truth.

In an analysis be made of the question with which political thought has been concerned, it is found that emphasis was placed at various periods upon widely different types of problems. In the medieval period controversy centred in the contest for supremacy between spiritual and temporal authorities; in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the dominant interest was in the contest between monarchic and democratic theories of political organisations; at present the extant of state activities has come into prominence and the connection between political and economic interests is especially close.

Political conditions have changed so greatly from age to age that the same problem has also had quite different meanings at different periods. Thus eighteenth century liberal thinkers favoured individualism because they wished to limit the activities of the governments controlled by irresponsible monarchs. Today the same thinkers hold a moderate socialistic point of view and to favour the extension of governmental regulation and control. When political power was transferred from king to people, much of the reason for fearing it disappear and government came to be looked upon as servant.

Moreover, few thinkers have attempted to build up a consistent and comprehensive theory of the state. Considerable attention has been given to the origin of the state among the most widely held theories where the divine theory, which consider the state to be established by the authority of god; the force theory, which found the origin of the state in the compulsory subjection of the weak to the strong; and the social contract theory which viewed the state as the deliberate creation of individuals by means of voluntary agreement or consent. It is the modern evolutionary theory that views the state neither as divinely created nor as the deliberate work of men, but as the natural result of the needs of men for order and protection.

Closely allied with the question of origin has been the question of obligation to state authority. The writers have been unable to agree on the nature of this authority. Different thinkers have come up with different answers. Some theorist have rested man's obligation to the state on divine orientation. Some including Aristotle, have considered the state to be the necessary result of the innate political character of men. The Utilitarians have justified it because of its obvious usefulness, holding that obedience to the state secures the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Others, such as Locke and Rousseau, have based its authority on the consent involved in the original compact by which the body politic was created. And still others have found in the state the crystallization of man's real will.

Since the Middle Ages, political thought has also been concerned with the idea of sovereignty. The earliest political philosophers wrote of the sovereignty of the law. Attacks on royal power led to the theory of popular sovereignty, attributing ultimate political power to the entire body of citizens, and associating the ultimate to the entire body of citizens, and associating the concept of sovereignty with the state as a legal person rather than with the ruler as an individual. Similarly, the concept of law has undergone various transformations. Originating as custom, supported by immemorial tradition and the prevailing belief in divine sanction, law was later considered as existing in nature, to be discovered and applied by human reason. When national monarchies were established, the will of the sovereign became a source of law. Finally, modern democracies have attained to the idea that law, as the will of the state, should be formulated and administered by popular governmental organs, and should be modified as occasion demands new rules to meet new social needs. The form of government and the location of authority within the state have been other sources of controversy in political theory.

Also wide differences of opinion have arisen over the proper scope of the state activities. At one extreme is found an individualism that would limit the state to the narrowest exercise of authority and leave to its individual citizens the widest possible sphere of free action. At the other extreme is a paternalistic socialism that would extend state action to the widest limits and submerge the individual in the political mass. Between these extremes all shades of opinion may be found. Finally, a considerable section of political thought has been devoted to relations among states. At first, states held the belief that they owed no obligations to any except peoples of their own race and religion. However commercial activities, diplomatic intercourse, and the waging of war gradually led to the development

of customs and principles. General principles were laid down concerning the independence and the equality of the states, the rights of neutrals, and the methods of carrying on hostilities by land and sea. The nature of treaties, of confederations and of international law gave rise to much political speculation; and ideals of world empire or world federation and of universal peace attracted the best thinkers of all ages.

Thus the political thinkers may be broadly divided into two groups according to their method of attacking the subject. The first group constructs an ideal state of affairs, and using that as a model, criticizes existing conditions. The ideal is based on fundamental assumptions taken from actual experience. The result of this form of inquiry is that the thinkers concern themselves largely with the general principles underlying individual and social action. Plato chronologically and essentially leads the way in this deductive method of approach. The second group, whose first leading exponent was Aristotle, use inductive method of reasoning in their attack on political problems. Their concern is consequently more with the forms of government, their workings and their limitations than with the abstract principles upon which they are based. As each era shifts its ground on the basic assumption, so the trend of political speculation is modified and adjusted to this radical change in outlook.

Further since political thought usually aims either to support or to attack existing political institutions and methods, it may be classified broadly as either conservative or critical. Theories of the conservative types arise from the attempts of men to explain and justify the political system under which they live and to maintain the status quo. Such theories are usually created or supported by the class in power and by those who benefit under the existing regime. Critical theories arise in opposition to the status quo and support efforts to change existing political institutions and methods. Such theories range from philosophical and imaginative utopias that have little apparent connection with actual life and no likelihood of practical application, to the concrete ideals of reformers who are aiming to remedy certain evils or to accomplish desired reconstruction.

Knowledge concerning the political thought of the past must be drawn from many sources. The main source of our knowledge of political thought is the writings of those political philosophers who attempted to put into systematic form the political thought of their times. This includes a long list of conspicuous men from Plato to the present. The writings of

these men not only crystallized the thought of those who preceded them and their own day, but they also frequently marked out new lines of theory that secured general adherence later. Knowledge of the general intellectual background of each period is also essential to an understanding of political ideas. The thought of men in other fields affects their ideas concerning the state; hence the history of philosophy, of science, of religion of ethics, and of economic theory contributes to the history of political thought. A considerable amount of information concerning the theory of the state may be derived from the writings and speeches of men who occupy official positions in government, or who exercise leadership in public opinion. Besides this the official documents of states furnish a most valuable source of political thought. These include written constitutions, statutes and ordinances, court decisions, charters, departmental reports, treaties, diplomatic correspondence, state papers, and the like.

### **1.1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Political Thought or Theory has been accused not only being barren in bringing practical results, but also a disaster with regard to actual politics. According to Edmund Burke, one sure symptom of an ill conducted state was the tendency of the people to revert to theories. Professor Dunning observed that the crystallization of a political system into political philosophy usually sounded the knell of that system. Against these criticisms may be set the fact that revolutions furthered by political principles have usually been of ultimate benefit to mankind, and that progress toward democracy, individual liberty and international justice owes much to the doctrines of a long line of able thinkers.

Political philosophy, like all speculative thought, ignores reality, cannot be applied in practice, and utilizes legal fictions and absolute concepts which are untrue and dangerous. As with all social theory, the complexity of the problems with which it deals prevents exactness. Political theories express tendencies rather than absolute principles, and when applied in practice must take into consideration modifying circumstances. Likewise political concepts, such as the absolute sovereignty of the state or equality of states, useful as working hypotheses, must not be pushed to extremes against obvious limitations in actual facts.

It is also said that political thought is incapable of giving definite answers to disputed questions and that if one holds strong views concerning the rights of the individual or the best form of government, he cannot prove his position with any degree of finality. First

principles in political theory, as in ethical theory, cannot be proved. What the study of political thought can achieve is to bring men together in a common enterprise of reflection and discussion so that they can define their terms and understand one another's view point. If the result is mutual respect and toleration, the study of political principles is justified.

On the positive side, political theory may justly lay claim to certain values. It gives precision and definiteness to the meaning of political terms. This is a necessity for every science, but is especially valuable for political science, since its fundamental concepts, such as liberty, independence, democracy, nationality, and the like, are used freely by the average man as well as by the student of politics. Moreover political thought examines the actual meanings behind these terms, and this is conducive to clarity and honesty of thought. It is a common device of demagogues to influence men's minds by the use of words that have acquired desirable or undesirable associations.

Political thought is valuable also as an aid to the interpretation of history. It gives an insight into the intellectual atmosphere of the past, and explains the motives underlying important political movements. In order to understand the past, one must know not only what men did, but also what men believed and what they hoped for. In so far as the events of the past were shaped by the human will, it is necessary to know the ideals which guided the will. Knowledge of past political thought is also essential to an understanding of present day politics and international relations. The problems of the present have grown up out of the conditions in the past political thought. The theory of separation of powers has a great impact on the way the US government functions and the principle of balance of power remains fundamental in international politics.

Political thought is essential for any state. Some general principles will guide the statesman and the citizen; every readjustment of governmental organization and every policy of governmental action will be based on some general scheme, more or less definite and systematic. The study of political thought, therefore, has practical value in that it aids the formation of habits of more thorough and candid examination of the meaning and tendency of our political undertakings. To large extent, the future is in the present, as the present was once in the past, as a hope or ideal. Any successful attempt at constructive political progress must rest upon a sound and comprehensive political theory, applicable to present day conditions and needs.



Finally, political thought represents a high type of intellectual achievement and, like other forms of philosophic thought, has an interest and a value entirely apart from any practical application of its principle. Intelligent men naturally wish to understand the authority under which they live, to analyze its organization and its activities, and to speculate concerning the best form of political existence. The fact that many of the greatest thinkers of all time – Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Mill and others – were concerned with the political aspects of philosophy is an indication of its importance as a form of intellectual effort.

#### **1.1.4 EMERGENCE OF WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE SOPHISTS**

The beginning of western political thought is generally believed to be started with the major intellectual awakening, an Enlightenment, in ancient Greece roughly in the second half of the fifth century BC, when fundamental questions concerning human life, and particularly morality and politics, were critically investigated and traditional ideas were challenged. The Sophists were an important element in this Enlightenment, along with dramatists such as Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, the historians Herodotus and Thucydides, and Socrates. The Sophists forged influential new methods of thinking and rational debating, setting out opposed positions so that they could be systematically tested, and themselves contributed significantly to the discussions.

There are two reasons for beginning one's study of the history of Western political thought with the Sophists. First, they are of interests in themselves. They were the first serious and systematic political thinkers, reflecting on some of the perennial issues of morals and politics, and originating some distinctions of permanent importance. Secondly, the Sophists were very influential on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, usually but not exclusively in a negative way, and consequently some knowledge of their ideas is a necessary background to understanding properly what Socrates, Plato and Aristotle argued and why. In particular Plato and Aristotle inherit the rich debate about justice conducted during the time of sophists.

Sophists were philosopher-teachers who travelled about in Greece teaching their students everything that was necessary to be successful in life including rhetoric and public speaking. These were useful skills, where being persuasive could lead to political power and economic wealth. Athens became the centre of their activity, due to their tolerance of freedom of

speech and the available wealth. The most prominent Sophists were Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, Thrasymachus, Callicles, Lycophron, Antiphon and Cratylus. The Sophists formed a distinctive group principally because they originated charging fees for teaching. There were some similarities in their methods of analysis and argument, and all of them claimed to be able to impart practical skills of communication and to enable men to make a success of their lives (justifying their charges), but they shared no set of beliefs and were not in that sense a 'school' of thought. There were numerous differences among Sophist teachings, and they lectured on subjects that were as diverse as semantics and rhetoric, to ontology, epistemology. Despite this, they did agree, however, on the importance of certain issues. In particular, they examined the moral basis of political life, and debated the question whether or not it was better to be 'just', meaning by that, to follow the moral and legal rules of one's society – rules which they thought man-made, convention created by human agreement, rather than existing by nature. They believed that law was an agreement between people and that justice is non-existent. They differ, however, in their explanations of the origin and function of rules, and they gave widely divergent answers to the question whether one was better off if one followed them.

Sophists became popular following the development of thought and society in Athens, in the fifth century B.C. They offered practical education with teachings that included speculation on the nature of the universe as well as the art of life and politics. They were in great demand, particularly for their lessons in public speaking, which was crucial for anyone pursuing a career in politics since power came to those able to persuade their fellow citizens in the council and assembly (where political decisions are taken) and in the courts (where political scores were often settled, and one's property or even one's life could be at stake).

Early Sophists were well respected but they soon became unpopular and were subject to much opposition and controversy due to their high fees and their radical challenges to convention. The only citizens who had the money to learn from the Sophists came from the aristocratic class, meaning that many citizens were unable to learn from them. The Sophists were, in effect, teaching wealthy young men how to become influential in politics, and that made some of the democrats hostile. Moreover, many of their innovative ideas were controversial or suspect and shocking, and widely viewed as threatening the received wisdom, especially that embodied in customary morality and religion. The ideas of Sophists

were largely challenged by Socrates in the discourse developed by Plato and termed Sophists as showy talkers and muddled, shallow thinkers, peddling dangerous ideas.

### **1.1.5 SOPHISTS: COMMON FEATURES**

***Humanists*** – Though the Sophists did not constitute a school, but had some tendencies in common. They all were humanists; they made man the centre of human thought and study. Earlier Greek philosophers had concerned themselves with the external world; their aim was to discover the unity behind the manifold appearances in nature. Some found it in one element, e.g., water; and others in other elements like fire and air. They did not turn their attention to the world of men. The Sophists were the first to bring about a swing in the direction of humanistic studies like ethics, politics, the art of speech and discussion, and eloquence. They were the first to disengage the study of man and society from the study of nature. It was implicit in their teachings that man and society could be explained by principles different from those operating in nature. This tendency found its culmination in the teaching of Socrates who is said to have brought philosophy from heaven to earth by turning it from physical nature to human affairs. This was a great service rendered by the Sophists. This change in the direction of studies is best represented in the famous saying of Protagoras: Man is the measure of all things. This has been sometime interpreted in an individualistic sense to mean that for each man things are as they appear to him; that is good which appears good to him and that is bad which appears bad. This interpretation does not seem to be justifiable, Protagoras was not an individualist. All that he meant was that no knowledge of the world out of relationship to man was possible; all knowledge is a human enterprise and so depends upon human faculties.

***Sceptical Attitude*** – Most of the Sophists had a sceptical attitude towards the ideals of absolute knowledge. The general application of their teaching is that there is nothing absolutely and universally true; there are no universally accepted principles and canons of thought and conduct. There are no abstract principle of justice which is valid everywhere. This amount to a denial of rationality in nature which had been the basis of earlier Greek thought. Some Sophists, e.g. Gorgias developed a thorough going scepticism from which no branch of the traditional beliefs of the Greeks remained immune. He held that nothing exists; that if it did exist it would be unknowable, and that if it could be known, the knowledge could not be communicated to others. Such a complete scepticism tended to upset the traditional

views about the nature of the state, the nature and origin of laws and the sanction behind them.

***State an Artificial thing*** – In general the Sophists held that the state is an artificial thing designed by men to achieve some end contrary to the natural order of the things.

**Laws contrary to Nature** – The laws vary from state to state, some enjoying what others forbid. Such laws can be neither commands of god nor the manifestation of any abstract principle of justice; they are conventions made by men to suit their particular needs; they make it impossible for the strong to dominate over the weak and expand their powers to the utmost. Laws are therefore contrary to the nature.

***Versatile*** – Sophists were versatile; they were the historical romancers, the theosophists, the sceptics, the psychologists of their day. There was hardly any subject which was not taught by them. The versatilities of Sophists may be understood in another sense also. Sophists hardly confined himself to one subject, he usually professed several. The acme of versatility was reached in the person of Hippias who was at once poet and mathematician, mythologist, and moralists, historian and politician, and also knew music and other art.

***Tutors*** – The Sophists usually, but not necessarily always, accepted payment for the instructions imparted by them.

### **1.1.6 SOCRATES AND SOPHISTS**

It must be mentioned that it is difficult to find out exactly, and in details, what the various Sophists thought. Very little of their original writing has survived, often in small fragments which are hard to interpret. Much of the Sophists' ideas are mainly known from Plato, a philosopher who helped lay the foundations of Western philosophy and science. Plato studied philosophy under the guidance of Socrates. Plato discusses his view on the Sophists' thought, although his attitude is generally hostile. Due to his opposition, he is largely responsible for the modern view of the sophist as a stingy instructor who deceives. He depicts Socrates as refuting some sophists in several *Dialogues*. These texts depict the sophists in an unflattering light, and it is unclear how accurate or fair Plato's representation of them may be; however, Protagoras and Prodicus are portrayed in a largely positive light in Protagoras (dialogue).

Socrates, a teacher of Plato and a son of Athenian sculptor, was born in 470 BC. Though he was given training in the hereditary profession, he devoted most of his time to philosophical discussions. In keeping with the prevailing traditions he took keen interest in the civic duties and fought as soldier in the war of Thrace and Delium. At the ripe age of 65 he became a member of the committee of council. As a member of the committee, he refused to support the illegal activities because he saw a close relationship between politics and ethics. He also acted as the president of the Assembly. At the age of 70 Socrates was tried by the court of Athenians on the charge of corrupting the society by refusing worship the state gods and introducing new divinities, and sentenced to death in 399 BC.

Some of the Athenian considered Socrates a Sophist because of certain common traits with them, specifically because of his interest in humanistic studies. But actually Socrates fundamentally differed from the Sophists and tried to expose the hollowness and pretentious character of the views held by the Sophists. Socrates refuted and challenged many of the ideas propounded by the Sophists. Before taking up the Sophists-Socrates debate it is essential to briefly understand the main ideas of Socrates.

### **1.1.7 CENTRAL IDEAS OF SOCRATES**

One of the main difficulties in understanding the ideas of Socrates is that he wrote nothing and whatever knowledge we possess about him is made available to us by his pupils like Plato, Xenophon, Isocrates etc. through their writings. When we go through the writing of these philosophers, we can get an understanding about Socrates thought and philosophy. Some of the important aspects of Socrates ideas are given below.

***Views on Knowledge*** – Socrates attached great importance to knowledge, which he considered as real and permanent possession of mind. It may be noted that Socrates did not imply by knowledge mere storing up of facts. On the other hand he treated knowledge as identical with morality. He considered all other things as inferior to knowledge and asserted that objective good could be known only through logical investigation. Socrates identifies knowledge with virtue. The identification of virtue with knowledge had far-reaching implications in the field of politics. He held that only those who know should rule. On this premises later on Plato built his concept of rule of philosopher king.

***Socrates on State*** – Socrates considered the state as natural. To him state was the expression of virtue, knowledge and wisdom. It was the result of pre-natal contract and

exists not only for the sake of life but good life. He therefore wanted the government to be the approximation of order and reason. As such he wanted the political affairs to be conducted by persons who possessed expert knowledge and were capable of transmitting their political instincts. In other words, he favoured an aristocracy of intellect.

***Views on Equality*** – Socrates was vehemently opposed to the concept of equality of men and asserted that men could never be equal because inequality was visible all around. He therefore, bitterly criticised the premise of the Athenian democracy that all citizens were equal and equally qualified to take part in the government. He asserted that only those who possess the deepest wisdom and highest virtue should be entrusted with the administration of government.

***Views on Democracy*** – Socrates was a bitter critic of the Athenian type of democracy which was neither a rule by law nor a rule by wise people. He did not approve of the democratic concepts of popular elections for public offices, especially election by lots. As a member of the council of Athens, Socrates strongly opposed the condemnation of the Athenian generals under pressure from the crowd. Lack of faith in the principle of equality of men also contributed to his opposition to the Athenian type of democracy.

***Views on Laws*** – Socrates attached great importance to laws and considered them as next only to God. He insisted on the conduct of the state on the basis of the laws. To him the custom and conventions which provide the base for notion of justice and righteousness also form the basis of laws. As such he considered the violation of laws as both immoral and illegal. As Barker has observed, “He (Socrates) was always and never more than a loyal servant of Athens. Her laws were to him only less sacred than the command of God, and not to be disobeyed except for the righteousness sake; nor would he leave the prison where he lay bound even when escape was easy, lest the laws should rebuke his flight.”

### **1.1.8 SOCRATES’ REFUTATION OF SOPHISTS IDEAS**

Socrates’ mission in his life was to convince those people of their ignorance who claimed to be the wisest. He convinced others that they unwise enough to profess to know they did not know, and that “he was wise enough to confess that he nothing knew save that he nothing knew.” He exposed the hollowness of the Sophists who claimed to be the teachers of Athenians. He refuted them in all their doctrines. He undertook a crusade against sham knowledge, and became the preacher of genuine wisdom.

The method which Socrates adopted in fulfilling his mission, was the dialectic method which consisting in asking a person to define terms like Justice and Virtue and then by means of questions and answers to bring out the inner ambiguities and inconsistencies of the position adopted by the opponent and ultimately convincing him of his ignorance. Dunning described his method as that of “doubt and definition.” Through this method Socrates tried to evolve his philosophy by refuting the contemporary notions. Prof. Barker while criticising Socrates’s method acknowledges its value for the discovery of truth. He says “it was a method unpleasant for the victim and a method which might become merely eristic, turning to argument in any direction for the sake of argument; but it was all the same, in the hands of Socrates, a genuine organ of truth.”

The main ideals of Socrates that come in contrast with that of the Sophists are following:

1. Whereas Sophists had generally used the antithesis between nature and convention to deny the validity of social laws and customs, Socrates was definitely conservative and maintained that they must be observed. Nothing reveals more clearly his loyalty to Athens and her laws than the manner of his death. He would not escape from prison, for to have done so would have amounted to disloyalty to the laws of the state.
2. It should also be remembered that Socrates believed in an objective right and universal justice whose existence was denied by the Sophists, and sought to set up ethical rules on a definitely rational or intellectual basis. He completely rejected the nihilistic ethics of the radical Sophists. He taught that virtue is knowledge and vice ignorance.
3. The instruction imparted by him was liberal and not technical; he did not teach people how to achieve success in the politics; he probed deeper and aimed at conveying what may be called scientific knowledge. For Socrates what mattered was not what a man knew but the way he knew it. He made a fundamental distinction between ordinary knowledge and real knowledge which sets him in a class wholly apart from the Sophists.
4. Socrates went on important step further than the Sophists in effecting a real breach with the earlier Greek philosophers. It is Socrates who constitutes the transition from the age of Anaximander to that of Plato and Aristotle and not the Sophists.

The early Greek philosophers, Ionians as they were called, confined themselves to the mechanical explanation of things; they tried to find out how things were made and did not enquire why they were made. In other words, their point of view was not teleological (explanation of things in terms of their purpose). It was Socrates, and not the Sophists, who for the first time in the history of the thought concerned himself with the teleological explanation of things; he enquired into their purpose or final cause. This attitude was further developed by Plato and Aristotle.

5. The Sophists believed that human conduct could be made into an art, and professed ability to give instructions in it. It can, therefore, be maintained that, like Socrates they were committed to a proposition that goodness is knowledge. There is, however, a fundamental difference between them. Whereas the Sophists held that goodness was a special art which could be mastered like other arts by the attainment of a special knowledge. Socrates believed that goodness was general capacity and thus unique. There can be no special art of goodness comparable to that art of navigation or healing. The knowledge which is essential to goodness is not a special or professional knowledge which can be acquired through special teaching; it is rather the knowledge of the nature of things or ultimate reality. This is connected with the doctrine of two kinds of knowledge.
6. The Sophists demanded fees for the instructions imparted by them. Most of their pupils came from the ranks of the rich. In comparison, Socrates accepted no fee, instead professed a self-effacing posture, which he exemplified by Socratic questioning. He met and talked freely with every sort of person who wanted to listen to him and did not hobnob with the rich. He was thus able to show a greater independence of spirit than the Sophists.

### **1.1.9 SUMMING UP**

Socrates occupies a unique place in the history of political thought. He preached the rationality of man and of god, and he urged that unless we believe in these two things there can be no sound education or happy society. He raised the fundamental question of the possible conflict between political and ethical standards of right, and by his death demonstrated his conviction that the individual should be guided by what his reason taught were fundamental precepts, rather than by the laws of the state. He was a strong critic of



the current conventional mores and conventional confusions which passed for wisdom in the market place. Socrates' great concern was the love and pursuit of wisdom, and that seemed to him, too, the chief and fundamental concern of the state. Socrates preached the sovereignty of knowledge; and the doctrine of the sovereignty of knowledge might easily become, in its political application, a doctrine of enlightened despotism. It was the doctrine of enlightened despotism that was adopted later on by Plato in his *Republic*. Such a theory of enlightened despotism was necessarily inimical to democracy; it also becomes inimical to the rule of law. This again is a conclusion which, for a time at any rate, Plato was ready to draw. For the proper guidance of the state, he said, it was necessary that the wise should rule. Politics is a matter for thought, and government is a concern of the wise, he declared. Plato was very much influenced by these Socratic principles. Plato owes greatly to Socrates as some considerable measure of the political principles developed in the *Republic* really belonged to Socrates and were learned directly from him by Plato.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
**Course Title: Western Political Thought**  
**Unit – I: Classical Thinkers**

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## **1.2 PLATO'S REPUBLIC: IDEALISM AND ITS CRITIQUE**

**- Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.2.0 Objectives
- 1.2.1 Introduction
- 1.2.2 Influence of Contemporary Situation on Plato's Philosophy
- 1.2.3 Idealism in Plato's The Republic
- 1.2.4 Justice and Ideal State
- 1.2.5 Ideal State and Education
  - 1.2.5.1 Scheme of Education
- 1.2.6 Ideal State and Theory of Communism
  - 1.2.6.1 Two Main forms of Plato's Communism
  - 1.2.6.2 Partial Application of Plato's Communism
  - 1.2.6.3 Character of Plato's Communism of Property
  - 1.2.6.4 Plato's Communism of Wives
  - 1.2.6.5 Scheme of Communism of Wives
- 1.2.7 Conception of the Philosopher King
- 1.2.8 Platonic Idealism and its Critics
- 1.2.9 Summing Up

## 1.2.0 OBJECTIVES

**After going through this lesson you will be able to understand:**

- Significance of Plato's among the galaxy of thinkers
- Influence of contemporary situation on Plato's philosophical foundations
- The significance of Plato's works, particularly *The Republic*
- Plato's concepts of Justice, Ideal State, Education, Communism,
- Plato's conception of the Philosopher-King

### 1.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Plato, the philosopher, politician, mathematician, poet and reformer was born in 427 B.C and died in 347 B.C. He was born in an aristocratic family of Athens, hence early name was Aristocles which later on was supplanted by the nickname "Plato", because of the breadth of his shoulders and the expanse of his brow. He had excelled as a soldier, and had twice won prizes at the Isthmian games. Plato joined Socratic circle in 407 BC and learn philosophy under his guidance. He became a great lover of wisdom under the influence of Socrates. From the very beginning he had decided to embrace a Political career at Athens; but the death of Socrates drove him from that side to the study of philosophy as a profession. The tragic death of Socrates left its mark on every phase of Platonic thought. It filled him with such a scorn of democracy, such a hatred of the mob, as even his aristocratic lineage and breeding had hardly engendered in him; it led him to firm resolve that democracy must be destroyed, to be replaced by the rule of the wisest and the best. It became the absorbing problem of his life to find a method whereby the wisest and the best might be discovered, and then enabled and persuaded to rule.

Since Plato had tried his best to save the life of Socrates, he was, therefore, marked out for suspicion by the democratic leaders of Athens. Under these circumstances he was urged by his friends that Athens was not a safe place for him and it was a propitious moment for him to see the world. Hence he set out for an extensive journey in 399 B.C. Where he went, we cannot say with any amount of definiteness. Conflicting opinions have been expressed for every turn of his route. For a period of twelve years he wandered, imbibing wisdom from every source, sitting at every shrine, tasting every creed. According

to M.B. Foster, “Some of the travels ascribed to him are probably fictitious”. But he is certain about his visit to Italy and Sicily.

He returned to Athens in 387 B.C., a man of forty now, ripened to maturity by the variety of many peoples and the wisdom of many lands. In a shady garden outside the walls he founded his University – the Academy. The Academy of Plato was both a school and an institute of scientific research. It was visited by nearly all the famous scientists of the time. The purpose of the foundation of the Academy was two-fold. In the first place, it served as an organization of pure research. In the second place, the Academy was also a school of political training, from which statesmen and legislators. Like all the philosophers of Greece, he sought to impart knowledge which should issue in action, and to teach a philosophy which should be a way and an inspiration of life. His philosophy, in the first place, was the conversion of soul, and in the second place, the service of mankind.

### **1.2.2 PLATO’S PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY SITUATION**

Plato, an Athenian aristocrat by birth, had an ambition of a political career in the prime of his life. But Socrates’ cruel death at the hands of Athenian democracy proved to be a turning point in his life. Now instead of aspiring for a political office he started finding out the fundamental defects in Athenian democracy and other sister city states. After studying the Athenian democracy minutely Plato found that the condition of Athens was far from healthy. There were two fundamental flaws in the then Athens: one was excessive individualism and another was amateurish meddlesomeness. Due to these two defects, Plato found that the city was divided into two hostile camps – one of the rich and the other of the poor, one of the oppressors and the other of the oppressed.

Nothing stirred the noble soul of Plato in contemporary politics than the violent spirit of individualism which made men capture the offices of the state to fulfil their own selfish ends. The ruling class, whichever was in power, would always use its political power to advance its economic interests. The political offices had no sanctity behind them. They became, rather, the instruments to promote the financial interests of the ruling class. Such a spirit of excessive individualism which was the result of the teaching of popular Sophist thinkers was Plato’s main target of attack. The greatest opponents whom Plato had to refute were the younger Sophists which had propounded that the state was only a means to

an end i.e. the individual. The state was only a change-congeries of the individuals, according to them.

It is this spirit of excessive individualism which had divided not only Athens but every other city into hostile cities. In actual practice there existed two cities side by side in one city. In other city-states which had oligarchical form of government the condition was even worse than in democracies. The ruling body which was always the representative of the rich people was always in a state of opposition to its subjects – the poorer section of the city. Because their interests clashed, each section was in search for an opportunity to overthrow the other. As Plato found it the root of all evil, was the love of money. Hence while suggesting the remedy for this evil, Plato abolishes the right of the ruler to have money or property or land or house of their own.

Plato still, again, found that the rich, who still sought to be richer, captured the offices of the state for the sake of advantages which its corrupt use might give them in their private enterprise. They seized the authority of the state for the sake of the spoils which it might bring. The state which ought to be impartial between the different classes, itself became an instrument of one class which was opposed to the other. Instead of uniting the various classes by removing their differences, the state accentuated their differences by adding its weight to strengthen one class against the rest. No wonder the state was divided against itself or as Plato says “in every state there were two separate states.”

Such a state of affairs was prevailing not only in oligarchies but democracies also which were not exempted from the vice of political selfishness. Though apparently every man was treated equal to every other, yet the poor sections of the community had an advantage there due to their greater number. As Plato found it, the citizens of a democracy not only paid themselves from the state exchequer for their political service rendered to the state, but also used the authority to exploit the rich, through confiscation of their property or imposition extraordinarily high taxes. They, too, like the ruling class of the oligarchy, made politics into a source of economic gain. It is this confusion of economics and politics alike in oligarchies and democracies that contributes heavily to the furiousness of civic strife or as Barker puts it “social war”.

The other defect i.e. amateurish meddlesomeness was evident through the system lottery. Any ignorant person could hold political office just by a sheer chance of lot. In its place

Plato functional specialization which means that every person in the state should perform only those functions for which he is naturally fitted and is given expert training. He should not interfere in the sphere of the other. The ruler should be specifically trained in the art and philosophy of ruling.

Thus we find that Plato's political writings are the product of the circumstances under which he lived. It is only in order to eradicate the two great evils that he writes the *Republic*. Hence, *Republic* is a polemic against current teachers and contemporary politics.

### **1.2.3 IDEALISM IN PLATO'S THE REPUBLIC**

Plato was a prolific writer and he left a number of philosophical works after his death. Among them *Republic* is the greatest work of Plato. In the *Republic* Plato attempted to establish the philosophical conception of justice, and in so doing he set forth his conception of an ideal state in which justice prevails. The point of view is primarily ethical and idealistic. According to Benjamin Jowett, *Republic* is the greatest of all the works of Plato and "is the centre around which the other dialogue may be grouped." It is a work that deserves to be called Political Science. It applies semantics reasoning and critical inquiry to political ideas and institutions. It is not a utopia but the doctrine that man must fatally and inextricably remain a prisoner of natural and social circumstances, Plato has faith in man's ability to create a community that will correspond to the ideal of knowledge and, therefore, justice.

The *Republic* is universally regarded as one of the greatest works of all times. In this dialogue particularly the conception of the state is closely involved in a general philosophical, ethical and social theory. Plato in the *Republic* describes what a community must be if man within it is to realise fully his highest capacities. Thus, the dialogue is concerned with projecting an ideal condition of society, and it is listed among the political "utopias"; but it is concerned also with criticism of an actual condition of society, and it is a work of great political insight. It is a work in which he inquires into the nature of the firstly ordered state and society. It is still the most fascinating work of political philosophy ever written, and even the most confirmed democrat can still learn a great deal from Plato's profound insights into politics, including his biting criticisms of the basic concepts of democracy. According to Catlin, "The *Republic* is an ethical treatise and, although an example of Socratic dialectic, is dogmatic in its conclusions, involves psychological investigations and contains an educational prospectus and a political constitution." It is an ethical treatise because the

problem that Plato has to tackle is essentially ethical. The aim is to make the life of the citizens good and virtuous. The method adopted by Plato in the development of his theme in the *Republic* is dialectical. Thorough dialectical reasoning which is based on question and answer, Plato tries to discover the ultimate reality. The approach of Plato is essentially psychological, because the construction of ideal state with which Plato is occupied, is based on psychology of the human soul and its essential elements. It contains long and elaborate scheme for the organization of an ideal polity which was to be realized through a detailed, noble and unique system of education.

The *Republic* of Plato has come down to us with a double title – *The State* a name by which it is generally called or *Concerning Justice*. Whether Plato himself was responsible for the title or not does not matter, for it is an accurate description of the contents of the book. Actually, its range of subject matter is such that it may be said to deal with the whole of human life. The subject-matter of *Republic* is complete philosophy of man. As Nettleship says, “the republic represents a dramatized philosophy of human life.” Plato in the *Republic* starts with the question: what is a good man and how is he made good? As an individual could not become good apart from the state, the question naturally leads to the second, what is a good state and how is it made good? Thus Ethics leads to Politics. Now Plato had derived from Socrates that Virtue is Knowledge. This goodness of the state presupposes Knowledge of the good, on the part of its ruler. So the third question arises: What is the knowledge of good which the rulers of the state must possess? This question can be answered by Metaphysics. As a corollary of the third question, the fourth question arises: what is the method by which the state can lead citizens towards the ultimate good? An answer to this question leads to the theory of education. Finally since there must be harmony between the ultimate end of the state in making man good, its educational methods and its social and economic organisation of the state. Thus we find that the *Republic* is at once a treatise on Ethics, Politics, Metaphysics, Education and Sociology. But Plato’s literary craftsmanship must be appreciated in as much as he made it look like a single treatise. The various and diverse subjects are dovetailed into one another in such a way that *Republic* forms a single and organic whole. Briefly we can say that Plato’s view on Justice, Ideal State, Philosopher King, Education, Communism of Property and Wives constituted the central theme of the *Republic*.

#### 1.2.4 JUSTICE AND IDEAL STATE

The Republic of Plato is primarily a treatise on justice. The discussion with which it is started is to enquire into the meaning, nature and habitation of justice. This enquiry is conducted through the medium of a dialogue. The speakers are: Socrates, Cephalus, Polemarchus, Lysias and Euthydemus, Thrasymachus and Plato's elder brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. This long dialogue, which starts out ostensibly as an enquiry into the meaning of justice, turns early into an examination of the life of the just man, which can be read "writ large" in the life of the "just" state.

Before we proceed along with Plato in the search of Justice, we must note the following points:-

- First, that Plato is a deductive thinker who deduces all his political philosophy from certain fundamental assumptions. Incidentally, the most consistent thinker as he is always true to his plan. One cannot accept his premises and reject his conclusions.
- Second, one of his fundamental assumptions is the tripartite division of man's mind into Reason, Spirit and Appetite – and the corresponding division of society into three classes i.e. the Ruler, the Soldiers and the Farmers. In this respect Plato is indebted to Pythagoras.
- Third, the father of Idealist School in Politics and Philosophy as he is, he could conceive of "beauty" without there being a "beautiful thing". Universal carried a greater a meaning for him than the "Particular". His indebtedness to Socrates is evident in this respect.
- Fourth, in another aspect in which Plato was indebted to Socrates was his master's master-idea, that "Virtue is Knowledge". The latter epigram simply meant that there could be no virtue without knowledge.
- Fifth, in his attempt to discover justice, Plato adopts the negative approach. That is, he tells us what justice is not. It is only after exhausting this approach that he gives us his own theory of justice.



Though it is very difficult to resist the temptation of following Plato's dialectical logic with which he refutes the "Prima Facie" theories of Justice, yet we shall console ourselves by giving very briefly the essence of his arguments against these theories.

The first theory is that of Traditional morality which considers Justice to be "giving to every man his due." The latter phrase results in the view that it consists in "doing good to one's friends and evil to enemies." Plato refutes this on three grounds that (1) One's supposed friends may be friends only in appearance. (2) To do evil to anybody, including our enemies is inconsistent with the most elementary conception of morality. (3) This view takes into consideration only the relations between two individuals on the individualistic grounds and ignores the social whole which is the *raison d'état* of any theory of Justice.

The second theory is that of Radical morality held by the Sophists. The latter held two propositions: (1) that Justice is the interest of the stronger. That is, it identifies justice with potential the strongest and the surest is to get what he wants. And as a state the government is the strongest, it will get what it wants. Because if Justice is the interest of the stronger, the justice for the people will be "to seek the interest of the ruler." It will be unjust on the part of the subjects to pursue their own interests.

The second proposition of the Sophists is that injustice is better than justice. Thus Justice consists in obeying authority where one must, and following one's own interests where one can. Injustice is following one's own interests and Justice is conformity to the ruler's interests. The Sophists, individualists as they were, went to the extreme of gross individualism.

It is this gross individualism that Plato wants the Republic to refute. He wants to show that the self is not isolated unit but part of an order with a station in that order.

But here Plato is satisfied with logically refuting the two propositions of the Sophists. To the first he opposes the Socratic conception of government is an art. All art is for the sake of the material it touches and handles and not for the sake of artist. The ruler practises the art of government not in his own interest but to bring about an improvement in the governed.

To the second proposition Plato replies that justice is always better than injustice and that a just man is wiser, stronger and happier than an unjust man for he knows his limitation too.

Third theory is that of Pragmatism which tells in part that Justice is an artificial thing, the product of social convention. Thus theory is the precursor of the Social Contract Theory. In the state of nature there was no justice, or state. Many weaklings combined together and created the state. Thus justice is the child of fear and is based on the necessity of the weaker and not the interest of the stronger.

The common line of error in all the three prima facie theories of Justice as it seems to Plato is that they have all treated Justice as if it were something external, an importation, a convention. Justice, on the other hand, according to Plato is rooted in human mind. It is intrinsically, a virtue. It is something internal. Justice does not depend for its origin upon a chance-convention.

Now a perfect artist as Plato is, he does not out-right give his theory of Justice. Instead of attempting at one an analysis of the human mind, Plato adopts the method of Large Letter, i.e. the method of solving deeper mysteries with the help of more easily understandable mysteries of similar kind and this discovers and defines Justice with the help of Ideal State. Justice exists both in the state and individual. But in the state it is a bigger and easily visible form. Plato proposes to consider Justice first as it exists in the state in its broadest form.

The constructing the state from which he proposes to illustrate the nature of the human mind, Plato presupposes a certain amount of psychology in advance. The state like human mind is divided into three portions – Rulers, Soldiers and Farmers – representing as it were the three elements of the human mind – Reason, Spirit and Appetite respectively. As pointed out by Barker, “this triplicity of the soul, whatever its source, is the foundation of much of the Republic”. This in part explains the meaning of the often quoted line from the Republic that “state is individual writ large.”

In this construction Plato proceeds by a psychological method in the Republic. He takes up each of the three elements of the human mind beginning with the lowest i.e. Appetite and proceeds to the highest that is Reason and shows how each of these in its turn contributes its quota towards the creation of the state.

The origin of the state, according to Plato, is to be found in the needs of man which can be satisfied only if they supplement each other. Men have many wants and no man is self-sufficient. Accordingly they have helpers and exchange with one another. Wherever there

is society there is some sort of satisfaction of needs and some exchange of services for this purpose.

But exchange of services implies another principle of almost equal importance, the Division of Labour and Specialization. For if needs are satisfied by exchange, each must have more than what he needs of the commodity which he offers, just as he must have less than what he needs of that which he receives. The farmer produces more food than he needs while shoemaker produces more shoes than he can wear. Hence it is advantageous to both that each should produce for the other, since both will be better fed and better clothed by working together than by each dividing his work to make all the various things he needs. This rests, according to Plato, upon two fundamental facts of human psychology, first different men have different aptitudes and so do some kind of work better than others and second, that skill is gained only where men apply themselves steadily to the work for which they are naturally fitted.

Thus the construction of the ideal state culminates as it was planned, in the conception of Justice. Justice is the bond which holds a society together, a harmonious union of individuals, each of whom has found his life-work in accordance with his natural fitness and his training. According to Sabine “Justice is the proper interrelation of the three functions, whether of the classes in the state or of the faculties in an individual.”

This is Plato’s elaboration of the Prima Facie definition of Justice given by Cephalus i.e. “giving every man his due”. But Plato interpretation is diametrically opposed to that of Cephalus because the latter was talking in terms of rights while former in terms of duties. For what is due to him is that he should be treated as what he is, in the light of his capacity and his training, while what is due from him is the honest performance of those tasks which the place accorded him requires.

In the nut-shell Plato’s theory of Justice is based on three principles:

1. The first is the principle of non-interference. No class should interfere with the task of other classes. Each class shall concentrate on its own sphere of duty and shall not meddle with the sphere of others.
2. The second is the principle of functional specialisation.

3. The third is the principle of harmony. Human virtue according to Plato is divided into wisdom, courage, temperance and Justice. The first three, Plato assign to each class. There remains Justice. The task of Justice is to harmonise the three virtues.

The conclusion of the whole matter would seem to be that each person should do his own appointed work in contentment. This in Plato's eyes is Justice, or in other words the true principle of social life. The Justice of the state is the citizen's sense of duty of his station issuing before the world in public action.

Such a conception of Justice is the final and ultimate answer to the individualism in life and in theory which Plato combated. The conception postulated a view of the individual as not an isolated self but part of an order, intended not to pursue the pleasures of isolated self but to fill an appointed place in that order. The individual is not a whole but the state is a whole.

### **1.2.5 IDEAL STATE AND EDUCATION**

No scheme of human life was as important to Plato as education. He himself calls it as "the one great thing". Plato's justice demanded that everyone should do his own according to the nature that entitled him for a particular function or an office. Birth as a criterion for distributing functions had been rejected by Plato. In its place he had substituted 'capacity' or 'nature' as a standard. Plato, therefore, suggested that functions and offices must be distributed after carefully ascertaining of a man's nature. It is a principle of Justice, and to this requirement, Plato's theory of education was an indispensable necessity. It was a positive remedy for the operation of Justice in the ideal state. There is, thus, an organic connection between Plato's theory of Justice and his theory of education.

Plato sees in education the only true way to the permanent stability of the state. Plato's general view of education is most forcibly expressed in Book VII of the Republic. In that book he sets forth the object of education, which is to turn the eye towards the light which the soul already possesses. What he really wants to say is that the whole function of education is not to put knowledge into the soul, but to bring out the best things that are latent in the soul, and to do so by directing it to the right objects. But how is this to be done? Plato's answer to this question is that it can be done by providing the human soul

the right type of surroundings. That is why education in case of Plato means bringing of the soul into that environment, which in each stage of its growth is best suited for its development.

#### **1.2.5.1 Scheme of Education**

Plato's scheme of education represents a state controlled system of compulsory education for both sexes. The education which is imparted in the beginning is equal for all. But, in fact, if it is carefully observed, education in the Republic is exclusively meant for those who are to become the rulers of the ideal state. In such a system of education the art of citizenship is identified with the art of ruling. It is, therefore, on a critical note a lopsided scheme where guardians alone are trained and educated. Plato's system of education is divisible into two parts, namely, Elementary education and Higher education.

##### ***Elementary Education***

The elementary stage itself is divided into three sub-stages; the first sub-stage begins from the very birth and extends up to the age of six year. In this stage the child is to be given lessons by examples and stories. It is to receive the knowledge of simple morals and religious truths. In the second sub-stage which extends from the age of six to eighteen years, Plato does not introduce anything novel. The content of Plato's educational curriculum as the second sub-stage in the elementary stage was typically Athenian, but it was directed to social purpose in the true Spartan spirit. But whereas Spartan scheme aimed at the creation of a powerful military class with a view to victory in war, Plato's aim as much more general and comprehensive. Plato's aims were to enable the intellectual to fit himself in the social setup and to cultivate moral and intellectual virtues in him.

Plato was true to the content of Athenian education, in as much as he thought that the best education would be Music for the soul and Gymnastic for the body. But he gave the two terms – Music and Gymnastic wider and comprehensive meaning. Music included the study of literature, singing and playing the lyre and other fine arts. Similarly Gymnastic meant, for Plato, the general care of body which include exercise, diet and medicine. The training of gymnastic aimed at teaching such qualities as self-control and courage.

In the third sub-stage an exclusive compulsory military training was to be given to both the sexes for two years from the age of eighteen years to twenty years.

### ***Higher Education***

At the age of twenty there was to be a test. Those who showed aptitude for Science and Philosophy were to be given training for fifteen years more. Those who failed were to be included in the Auxiliaries i.e. military class. Thus we find that the distinction between elementary and higher education does not merely rest on differences of age level, but also involves differences of classes. Elementary education is the training of the youth, it is also the training of military class. Higher education is the training of the middle age, it is also the training of the class of perfect guardians. The first is the training of the character through emotions, the second is the training of the understanding through Science and Philosophy.

According to Sabine, "Higher Education is the most original as well as most characteristic proposal of the Republic." Plato's Higher education is divisible in two sub-stages. The first sub-stage extends from the age of twenty to thirty years. The second sub-stage from the age of thirty to forty years. In the first sub-stage – the curriculum is designed with the aim of making the recipient wise. Just as the special virtue of warrior class is courage, the special virtue of the ruling class is wisdom. It is through higher education the perfect Guardians are trained. Hence, the syllabus includes the study of Mathematics, Astronomy, Logic and other Sciences. Plato lays great emphasis on Mathematics. The second sub-stage was to begin after an elimination test at the age of thirty. Those who showed still further aptitude for scientific knowledge were to have still further training in Dialectic for five years up to age of thirty five years. Dialectic was the only item which was included in the syllabus for this stage. Dialectic is the instrument by which knowledge of the pure ideas which constitute the highest reality, is attained. The highest of these ideas is the ideas of the Good which is the cause of all being and is the goal of knowledge. The Philosopher-Rulers are able to comprehend the idea of the Good during these five years. Hence they acquire real wisdom and knowledge and are entitled to rule. Actually, the rulers who according to Plato are the natural rulers of his ideal state are the product of his higher education.

From the age of thirty five, the Philosophers start ruling and continue up to the age of fifty at which they retire and resume study in the contemplation of the Good. Such a study they continue up to the end of their lives. Hence, Plato's education is a life-long process. Plato's scheme of higher education was put into practice in his own Academy which was established in 386 B.C., sometime before the completion of *Republic*.

## **1.2.6 IDEAL STATE AND THEORY OF COMMUNISM**

Like education, Plato's Communism was handmaid of his Justice. If education was a positive remedy for the operation of the justice in the ideal state, his communism was a negative remedy. Plato had an excessive distrust of human nature. In spite of so much education and training Plato could not be convinced that members of the ruling and military class were completely reformed as to work on the altruistic motive. He could not be convinced that education accomplished its task. For the remaining task he advocated communism as a sure remedy. Plato is also convinced that in the face of corrupting influences the rulers and soldiers will be shaken from acting according to those high ideals on which the very success of the ideal state depended. Their continuance in the case of the ruling and defending classes, Plato regarded, as essentially dangerous. So that family and property may not become great impediments in the discharge of their duties, Plato is never weary of criticising them in the *Republic*. As private property and family relationship, say Prof. Dunning, appear to be the chief sources of dissension in every community, neither is to have recognition in the perfect state.

### **1.2.6.1 Two Main forms of Plato's Communism**

Plato's communism takes two main forms. The first is the abolition of private property which includes everything – house, land or money. The second was the abolition of family, what Prof. Sabine has characterised as the abolition of a permanent monogamous sexual relation and the substitution of regulated breeding at the behest of the rulers for the purpose of securing the best possible offspring. All this was done in the name of justice and here again spiritual betterment was the ultimate aim.

### **1.2.6.2 Partial Application of Plato's Communism**

Plato's ideal state consists of three different classes on the basis of natural capacities. The rulers and soldiers make the guardian class. The third class of the ideal state includes all the rest of people – workers, labourers, artisans and clerks etc. communism in the *Republic* is meant only for the guardian class, that is, for the rulers and soldiers, while the persons of the third category are left in possession of their private families, both property and wives. Plato's communism, therefore, has a strictly political purpose.

### **1.2.6.3 Character of Plato's Communism of Property**

Plato's communism of property is entirely different from that of all the modern socialists. There is no mention in the Republic of the socialisation of all the means of production. Plato is only concerned with the product which is to be partly socialised. The guardians who live under a system of communism are distinguished from the rest of the people by being partners in property. The members of the ruling classes do not possess any private property. Neither individually nor collectively do they own a single acre; the land and its products are in the hands of the third class of farmers and cultivators. They have no houses; they live encamped in the common barracks, which are always open and public. Plato deprives them of all gold and silver and tells them that the diviner metal is within them.

But the pertinent question that arises in this connection is, as to what do they live on? The answer is that the guardians are to live on a salary paid to them in kind by farming classes according to a regular assessment, a salary paid year by year, and consisting of such necessaries as will suffice for the year. These necessaries are not to be divided among the guardians for private consumption; they are to be consumed, like the Spartan system, at common tables.

### **1.2.6.4 Plato's Communism of Wives**

Communism of wives is a natural corollary of communism of property. As we have already seen that Plato's communism of property is the logical corollary of his conception of justice. His major aim in envisaging communism was to bring about "greatest degree of unity". According to Plato, "There is no greater good for the state than the bond of unity." But his aim was only half-achieved with the abolition of property. He was shrewd enough to realise that abolition of property alone would not do as family postulate property for its maintenance. If the family retained, the private property will crop up in one shape or the other. The evil consequence would be that the Guardians will have temptation detraction. Consequently, the abolition of property without the abolition of family will defeat its purpose. Hence, Plato laid even greater emphasis on communism of wives.

It must be mentioned at the very outset that like communism of property communism of wives applies only to the Guardians i.e. Rulers and Soldiers. Plato advocated the communism of wives for fulfilling three purposes.



**1) Political Purpose** – Plato felt that family affection is a serious and powerful rival to loyalty to the state. The major aim of Plato in abolishing family is to create the greatest degree of unity in the state. It is for this purpose Plato abolishes the right of each guardian to have a separate family which according to him is the enemy of the unity of the state.

**2) Moral Purpose** – For Plato there is no difference of kind between man and women except in case of sex. Beyond that woman is quite free to do what man can do. Moreover, the family system of Athens was against the principle of justice as envisaged by Plato. Platonic justice means performance of duties by a person for which he is best fitted. Women are fitted to perform even outside the households. Plato, however, makes it very clear that he does not stand for the emancipation of women for its own sake. On the other hand it is only means to an end i.e. service of the state.

**3) Eugenic Purpose** – Plato suggests the communism of wives in order to bring about improvement in the race. This he accomplishes through the reform of marriage.

#### **1.2.6.5 Scheme of Communism of Wives**

There are various facts which must be understood in order to have a clear knowledge of Platonic scheme of communism:

First, all women are to be common to all men and vice versa. No woman is permanently wedded to any man.

Secondly, all guardians including men and women are to live together in common barracks.

Thirdly, the state is to arrange temporary mating between the best of men and best of women for one year. At a particular nuptial season the state would choose a particular number couples for marriage sufficient for producing the requisite number of children taking into view the population of the city.

Fourthly, the mating age for men is to be between 25 and 55 and for women between 20 and 40. Mating beyond this age is to be prohibited.

Fifthly, after the birth of child the male and female are to be separated and united to a different person of opposite sex if age and health permit such a union.

Sixthly, the children immediately after their birth are to be separated from their mother and taken under the custody of state nurses. The weaker child is to be killed immediately after the birth. All the parents married at a given season are to be taught that all the children born in due time after that season are their common children and vice versa.

Such is the Platonic scheme of communism if wives. Now, the major difference between communism of property and communism of wives is that in the former it is common renunciation of property on the part of guardians, which in the latter is a common ownership of woman on the part of guardians.

### **1.2.7 CONCEPTION OF THE PHILOSOPHER KING**

Few thinkers have been as logically consistent as Plato. Plato's Conception of "Rule of Philosophy" is a logical deduction from his first principle (triplicity of human mind and virtue is knowledge) but also induction from the current corruption in the various city-states. Based on this Plato believes that only competent, wise and efficient people should have the right to rule.

The Rule by the Philosopher-King is the most profoundly original conception in the entire political thought of Plato. Plato denounces Athenian democracy as the government of the ignoramuses and suggests a Rule of Philosophy which is by every mean a government by few i.e. elite. At a number of places Plato goes to the extent of saying that if there is only one top-most meritorious person in the state, let him become the Philosopher-King. But if there are more than one fairly equal Philosopher, let it be an aristocracy of intellect.

The Philosopher-king is one who is the lover of wisdom. He is a passionate seeker after truth. He has knowledge of the "Idea of Good". With the help of such an intellectual brilliance he can see and judge better than others can as to what is most beneficial for the community. Hence the role of a Philosopher is best for any society.

The Philosopher Rulers are reason personified. The mentality of selfless service to the state is a derivation from the rational character of the Perfect Guardians. Plato's Philosopher Rulers are the products highly technical training. Hence the government of Plato's Ideal state is the consequence of his system of education.

The Philosopher-Rulers are absolute as far as their powers are concerned. They are absolute in the sense that they are not responsible or responsive to the public opinion or to the custom or written laws. Such a proposition of the despotism of Philosophers on the Part of Plato is quite natural given the first principle with which Plato starts i.e. "virtue is knowledge". Since the Philosopher-Rulers are qualified to become rulers by virtue of the possession of knowledge, the control of public opinion or laws upon their acts are irrelevant.

### **1.2.8 PLATONIC IDEALISM AND ITS CRITICS**

Plato's ideal is not without its critics. In fact, one of Plato's more famous students was highly critical of such political ideals. This student, of course, is Aristotle. He believed that Plato's idealistic plan is contradictory because his state becomes more like a household which may even be reducible to individual instead of a state. The problem is that the state is a collection of individuals who are diverse and complex by nature. Aristotle also disagrees with the way in which children are to be raised in Plato's Republic. He argues that the more common something is, the less cared for it will actually be. And since it is the case that all the adults are to care for the children, and the adults (or parents) care for many children and no unique children, the care provided to the children will suffer substantially. The more owners there are of that which is to be cared for, the more potential for neglect, and children ought to be the last thing in a state that should be neglected. Lastly, he argues that from the family unit, we learn to be patriotic. And since patriotism is an ideal, Plato was mistaken about how to nurture patriotism. It isn't taught in a nursery, military academy or school, it is taught at home.

Aristotle's critiques are valid. Plato removes the necessary diversity that a state requires to flourish. A variety of experiences and opportunity for the citizens of the state allows the state to be rich in culture and influence neighbouring territories as well as have its populace become well-rounded. His critique about the family unit seems to be true as well. Parents have a natural tendency to care a great deal more about their own children than others. This is a good thing because it gives children the attention they need. This specified attention allows the child to understand values; first, the value of the family unit, then that of the local community, followed eventually the state. It's a learning process that must begin somewhere.

Another critic of Plato's political philosophy was Niccolo Machiavelli. He argued not necessarily against the specifics of Plato's *Republic*, but rather of the whole. He believed that idealism was unrealistic. He argued that no such perfect or ideal society has ever existed, and he believed morality should never be a part of politics. When one incorporates morality into their practice as a politician, it will result in ruin. He argued that it is better to be feared than loved, and the only way to be loved perhaps was to be moral. However since this resulted in failure, it leaves only fear as the practical choice. Fear endures time. Love is fickle and people will stop loving their prince whenever they become disappointed with him. Fear ensures that the people will help the politician regardless of good or challenging times. It's universal, so it should be adopted into every politician's arsenal.

Machiavelli takes the opposite extreme of Plato. Instead of idealism, he moves to far realism, taking a much more pessimistic worldview. One may not agree with this position that it is better to be feared than loved, although it is understandable why Machiavelli endorses it. To be truly loved, it would mean that people are loyal to their prince. To be loyal would be to have a devotion to their state and leader regardless of the turmoil it was experiencing. Of course, there are limitations here, but it is far better than being feared.

One of John Dewey's biggest objections to Plato's ideal state is its education system. He argued that Plato's education system was circular because in it, the education system was a product of its society. But then Plato's perfect society can only be brought about by the state's education systems. Thus, a major flaw exposed in Plato's *Republic*. He also criticizes the three classes of the state on the grounds of lack of diversity, much like Aristotle did. Dewey argued that people are naturally diverse and have a wide range of talents and characteristics, and they should be helped to grow. Plato's ideal would prevent this growth, resulting in a stagnant, stale society.

Immanuel Kant on the Rule of Philosophy in Plato's Ideal State says "That kings should become Philosophers or Philosophers Kings, is not likely to happen; nor would it be desirable, since the possession of power invariably debases the free Judgement of Reason." Here Lord Acton's dictum also can come true – "Absolute power corrupts absolutely".

Lastly, Karl Popper objects to Plato's *Republic* on the grounds that Plato's class division results in a totalitarian regime. He argues that the ruling class has far too much power because they control education, communication, military and many other aspects of society

that give the few a significant advantage while at the same time ultimately oppressing the majority. There is no freedom to express alternative ideas; there is no free economy to allow a free market. It is, according to Popper, a dictatorship. Moreover, Plato's Education Scheme and Rule of Philosopher-Kings are incompatible as Karl Popper says, "For if Philosophers were needed as permanent rulers, there would be no need for the Educational system to produce new ones."

Because freedom is a virtue, one may agree with Popper's objection. Plato doesn't seem to place much value on freedom in the sense of opportunity. He seems to argue that opportunity is a cause for the unjust and unwise. And by removing opportunity (and certain freedoms), only can the just and ideal state be created. But freedom of expression is an ideal, as are freedom of opportunity and diversity. Plato doesn't recognize these as virtues but hindrances and mechanism for unjust acts that arise from men's passions and appetites for power. While it is true that some may abuse such ideals, it doesn't change the fact that they are ideals. So to hinder them, to restrict them or even eradicate them, is to commit an unjust act, something that Plato opposes. So it would appear that Plato's ideal is self-contradictory on many grounds. It is a fun thought experiment perhaps, but it can never be anything more. For once it becomes realized, it because not an ideal state, but a horribly flawed state, the very type of state Plato sought to prevent.

### **1.2.9 SUMMING UP**

Plato was born into an aristocratic Athenian family. In *The Republic*, he analyses the main psychological and socio-political pillars of the ideal person and the ideal city. His analyses are affected by such contemporaneous socio-political crises as the Peloponnesian War and Socrates' execution by popular decision. Believing that these problems have individual and systemic causes, he considers both the just person and the just city as an indispensable whole. In other words, a good individual life can be lived in a good city and good people can create a good city.

According to Plato, absolute truths are objective facts beyond relativistic opinion. Things have ideal Forms, whether they differ from the real ones or not. He emphasizes that things are good or bad by nature, and thereby accepts psychosocial phenomena as primordial instead of socially constructed.

Justice, the pillar of the ideal individual and social life, is a crucial good value. Plato rejects the idea that “justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger.” On the contrary, justice, regardless of power, is based on virtue and is the main source of happiness. Justice is awarded in this life and the Hereafter, and injustice is punished.

Plato’s political ideas remain influential. His idealist philosophy emphasizes ideas and ideals (independent of material and historical contexts), virtue vs. vice, and essential human values, and thus challenges modern philosophy’s general dependence on materialism, excess “objectivism,” and relativism. His search for the ideal person and the ideal city based on justice and harmony still motivates us. However, Plato is criticized for the totalitarian nature of his ideal city and his idealism.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
**Course Title: Western Political Thought**  
**Unit – I: Classical Thinkers**

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## **1.3 ARISTOTLE'S POLITICS: METAPHYSICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT**

**- Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.3.0 Objectives
- 1.3.1 Introduction
- 1.3.2 The Metaphysical Assessment
  - 1.3.2.1 Conception of Human Nature and State
- 1.3.3 Aristotle's View on Household (Slaves and Women)
  - 1.3.3.1 Nature and Justification of Slavery
  - 1.3.3.2 Women and Family
  - 1.3.3.3 Property
  - 1.3.3.4 Distributed Justice
- 1.3.4 Theory of Constitutions and Citizenship
- 1.3.5 Scientific Assessment of Politics
- 1.3.6 Theory of Revolution
  - 1.3.6.1 What is Revolution?
  - 1.1.6.2 Causes of Revolution
  - 1.3.6.3 Remedies of Revolution
- 1.3.7 Summing Up

### 1.3.0 OBJECTIVES

**After going through this lesson you will be able to understand:**

- Aristotle's propositions about Human Nature and State
- Aristotle's views on Household, particularly women and slaves
- Aristotle's theory of constitutions and citizenship
- Aristotle's views about Revolutions
- How Aristotle balanced his metaphysical ideas with scientific assessment

### 1.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Aristotle was born in Stageira in Macedonia, the son of the court physician to the king of Macedonia. At the age of 17 he went to Athens to study at the Academy under Plato. When Plato died, in 347 BC, Aristotle left Athens. He returned to Athens 335 BC to set up his own school, the Lyceum, as a competitor to the Academy. Aristotle spent much of his life attempting to establish a critical distance between his own philosophy and that of Plato. The popular understanding of the intellectual relationship between Plato and Aristotle is best symbolized by the Raphael's painting *The School of Athens*, in which an 'otherworldly' Plato is depicted gesturing towards the heavens, while his rebellious pupil Aristotle is seen insistently pointing towards the ground. In the sphere of metaphysics the suggestion in Raphael's painting is that Plato is a rationalist and an idealist, concerned only with universals, the ideas and concepts that constitute the world of the Forms, whereas Aristotle is an empiricist and a materialist who is interested exclusively in particulars, or the individual things that are observable in the world around him.

The monumental work of Aristotle is *Politics*. Unfortunately, the *Politics*, as it has come down to us, is an incomplete and imperfect work and lacks unity and system. The *Politics* has come down to us historically arranged in eight books whose order differs in different editions. These eight books can be roughly divided into three distinct groups, related to each-other on doubt, but differing greatly in point of view and in manner of treatment of the subject matter. Book I, II and III constitutes one group; they may be said to form the common foundation upon which two different constructions which are quite independent of each other have been built. One of these constructions deals with the ideal state and the



principles underlying it. It is found in Books VII and VIII. The second construction contains an explanation of the nature of constructions, the distinctions between them and the changes taking place within them. These topics are dealt with in Book IV, V and VI. Some commentators would put Books II, III, VII and VIII in one group, and Books IV, V and VI in the second group, and regard Book I as a general introduction to the treatise as a whole.

According to Jeagar the *Politics* represents two states in the development of the political thought of Aristotle, and its text falls into two main strata. One deal with the ideal state and a study of the earlier theories together with a criticism of Plato; it comprises Book II, III, VII and VIII. Of these the last two contain Aristotle's attempt at a construction of the ideal state, while Book III is a study of the nature of the state and citizenship; it forms, as it were, a sort of introduction to the construction of the ideal state. Book II is a preparation for Books III, VII and VIII. It was characteristic of Aristotle to first examine the views of earlier writers before stating his own view on a subject and to develop his own ideas through a criticism of them. Books II, III, VII and VIII seem to have been written not long after Aristotle's departure from Athens following the death of Plato. In no other part of *Politics* Aristotle is more Platonic than in Books VII and VIII. Here he adopts the view of his master that the main task of political philosophy is the construction of the ideal state: and his ideal state is not much different from the sub-ideal state of the *Laws*; his prevailing interest is ethical in this part; the end of the State is conceived in moral terms as being none other than the production of the highest type of virtue in the citizens. The good man and the good citizen are considered to be identical, at least in the ideal state.

Sharply, contrasted with these Books and greatly differing from them in their tone and subject-matter are Books IV, V and VI. They do not deal with the nature of the state and the construction of the ideal state, but treat of actual constitutions, their distinctions and divisions. Oligarchy and democracy and their sub-divisions, of the causes of their decay, and the best ways preserving them engage Aristotle's attention. They are more practical and less idealistic in tone than the other Book and contain a great mass of historical detail. Aristotle's approach in this part is almost entirely empirical; ethical considerations recede in the background. It is in these Books that politics and ethics are divorced and Aristotle seems most modern. They were inserted in the middle of the original draft (Books II, III, VII and VIII) with the result the original work dealing mainly with the nature of the state

and the construction of the ideal state became enlarged into a general treatise on political science dealing with both ideal and actual states. Book I constitutes a general introduction to the whole work. Thus *Politics* of Aristotle is a blend of metaphysical and scientific enquiries. Here we shall briefly discuss the metaphysical and scientific contours of *Politics*.

### **1.3.2 THE METAPHYSICAL ASSESSMENT**

#### **1.3.2.1 Conception of Human Nature and State**

The state, according to Aristotle, is the highest form of political union, for it represents the pinnacle of social evolution. It is necessary, for it provides a framework for the satisfaction of basic wants and also ensures a means to secure and realize good life in a uniquely human sense. An individual finds fulfilment from the advantages made possible by a state through its common endeavours, and one who does not feel its need is either an “angel” or a “beast”. The state is prior to the individual, in the sense that it provides opportunities for the achievement of full humanity; social affiliation gives to individuals their species identity.

The state is an instrument for an individual’s self-perfection. Far from being artificially or contractually created, it evolves naturally. Aristotle contends that man by nature is a political animal, making the state necessary and desirable

Like Plato, Aristotle asserts that education is an effective way to produce political unity, though he criticises his mentor for not recognising its economic significance. Education to Aristotle, symbolises a way of life, for individuals learn largely by doing. Its goal is not unity, but to foster and protect a way of life that encourages and sustains diverse social and political activities.

Aristotle is convinced of the individual’s innate sociability and the natural desire to congregate and remain in society, by virtue of the fact that a human being enjoys a unique capacity for moral choice and reasoned speech.

Not only does reason distinguish humans from other social species, but they alone have a perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust, implying that these faculties can be developed only in company with others, and not in isolation. Not only is social cooperation necessary, but also desirable.

For Aristotle, the good of a community is clearly the greater, the perfect thing to attain and preserve, than the good of a single individual. The individual's social nature and the implied "political" content results in various public behaviour necessary for the pursuit of private happiness. For Aristotle, private life is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for enjoying a full human existence.

For Aristotle, the state is an association of persons for the sake of securing the best moral life. The quality of life within a state would depend on those who constitute it and the end they wished to pursue. Accordingly, the end of the state depends on who can be its members, and how they wish to lead a life that is individually satisfying. In order to answer these questions satisfactorily, Aristotle define a constitution not just as a form of government or a set of norms, but as a way of life, for *that* determines the moral character of a state. A state exists as long as its form of government endures, and any change in its constitution signifies a change in its way of life too. Only within an Ideal State is a good person and a good citizen identical. In Aristotle's thought according to Sabine, "law, constitution, state, form of government all tend to coalesce, since from a moral point of view they are all equally relative to the purpose which causes the association to exist."

Aristotle points out that the state evolves from lower associations. The first association is a household or the family, which arises to satisfy individual's biological urges and everyday wants. A cluster of households becomes a village, and a group of village constitutes a political community or the *polis*. Each of these – household, village and the state – indicates different levels of self-sufficiency or autarchy.

The nature of an association is in its end, namely self-sufficiency, which means not only the satisfaction of economic needs, but also the realization of the full human potential. This is possible only within the polis. The polis is the most sovereign and inclusive association offering a framework for a full and true life.

Aristotle specifically states that a polis should be large enough to guarantee self-sufficiency, and a small enough to ensure good government. He defines a state as "a union of families and villages in a perfect and self sufficing life by which we mean a happy and an honourable life."

### **1.3.3 ARISTOTLE'S VIEW ON HOUSEHOLD (SLAVES AND WOMEN)**

Since the state grows out of the primary association known as the family or household, Aristotle examines its nature and constituent elements. In the course of his analysis of it he sets forth his views on many fundamental economic questions.

The first point on which he insists is that the family is an institution established by nature for the supply of every day wants. It is the natural result of the sex instinct and the impulse for self-preservation and self-propagation. It is also necessary for the economic security of the associates. It would be, however, wrong to view it exclusively in economic and biological terms; it is also an indispensable school of human affections. As such, the family should be preserved. Plato was wrong in abolishing it. An institution which has stood the test of time for ages has proved its utility should not be discarded.

Aristotle is not blind to the evils which family shields; he does not regard private family and private property as too sacred to be touched and controlled by the state. He recognises that regulation of property is an important problem and is not averse to its regulation by legislation. But he also realises that the evils accompanying property cannot be solved ultimately through legislation, because the root of the evil is not property but the inordinate love of man for it. The evil lies in the wickedness of man. The remedy lies in a proper system of education. It is through philosophy and good habits that the two institutions of property and family can be made instrumental to the ends of moral life.

Aristotle's household differ from the State not merely in degree but also in kind. He rejects the view of Plato that the state is household writ large; that a small state and a great household are essentially the same and the government of both is but one science. In a state there is only one kind of relationship, that of the ruler and the ruled; in the household there are three different relations; namely, those of husband and wife, parents and children and master and slave. It may, however, be added that Aristotle finds the model for monarchic rule in the relation of father and son, that for aristocracy in the relation between husband and wife and for democracy in that between brothers. Aristotle lays stress that the family needs property for its existence and working.

#### **1.3.3.1 Nature and Justification of Slavery**

One of the important questions discussed by Aristotle in connection with the household is

the nature and justification of slavery. He holds that the management of a household which is an art requires proper instruments. Property is a part of the household, and therefore the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he be provided with necessities. The instruments may be either animate or inanimate. Slaves are the animate instruments and property inanimate. He considers a slave as a domestic servant to do the menial type of works in a family. In inanimate property he includes utensils, furniture, etc.

Aristotle seeks to justify slavery against the radical Sophists like Antiphone and Alcidamas who maintained that the institution is unjust because it exists by convention and not by nature. The rule of master over slave is contrary to the nature because by nature all men are equal.

Aristotle tries to justify slavery by basing it on the universal principle that 'some should rule and other should be ruled is a thing, not only necessary, but expedients; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, other for rule. Aristotle feels that nature is universally ruled by the contrast of the superior and inferior and when several parts combine to form a whole, the inferior in nature must be subordinated to the superior for the attainment of the end or purpose of the whole. Thus, the soul rules over the body and reason over appetite in the constitution of man. Similarly, in a human association like family or the state those people who are endowed with a high degree of reason and capacity for virtue must command and direct those who possess little or no such capacity. The former are by nature masters and the latter slaves. Those designed by nature to be masters have intellectual strength; those who are meant to be slaves by nature possess physical strength only. The combination of the two is essential for the purpose for which the house hold exists – namely, the development of the intellectual and moral qualities of householder which is incompatible with the performance of manual and menial work on his part. Slavery is thus justified from the point of view of the master by the fact that it gives him leisure necessary for the exercise of virtue.

It is equally justified from the point of view of the slave also. A slave who lack the capacity of virtue and possess only physical strength can benefit from the exercise of intellectual and moral qualities at second-hand by being subordinated to a master who possesses them. In short, slavery is for the good of the slave because it enables him to share in the virtuous life of the master.

It is important to mention here that Aristotle's defence of the institution of slavery is not disinterested. It is not a logical deduction from the first principle but a laboured justification of an existing institution which was assailed by the Sophists and others. Aristotle found it necessary to defend it not only because it was a recognised and useful institution, but also because it was necessitated by his conception of citizenship. Secondly, Aristotle describes a slave as an instrument of action and not as an instrument of production. For Aristotle slavery loses its rationale and justification if slaves are treated as instrument of production and not as instrument of action. The instrument of production is an industrial worker who produces wealth for his various masters. Aristotle does not support industrial slavery. An instrument of action is domestic servant who derives some moral benefit as a result of his contact with his master, whereas, industrial worker derives no such benefit. Despite this strong justification for the institution of slavery given by Aristotle, it has been severely criticised for its indefensible assumption on which it is based i.e. the division of mankind into two classes, one endowed with the capacity for virtue and other lacking it.

#### **1.3.3.2 Women and Family**

Aristotle provides a common-sense defence of the family. He does not abolish private households, for the family is a source of pleasure for both men and women, since it creates and establishes a bond that united members, allowing them the space for the exercise and development of their individual talents.

Aristotle is critical of the Socratic-Platonic conception of communism, on the premise that to abolish the family would mean its destruction as a school of moral and civic virtues for the young. For Aristotle, the private sphere was the foundation on which the public was organized. Aristotle is equally critical of the Spartan model, which grants unrestricted freedom to its women, resulting in divisiveness and disunity. By emphasising virile power, men are made martial and ascetic, while women are left uncontrolled by both traditions and the laws of the state making them self-indulgent and luxurious. As a result women cannot be trained in the art of courage, nor do they learn to submit to authority, thus leaving them to pursue their private interests rather than common good. He concludes that to ignore women is to overlook one-half of the happiness of a society, making the latter unstable and vulnerable. Aristotle is emphatic that women should be made a part of the city and its educational process, but can be left out of the political process.

For Aristotle, women and the family belong to the private realm, which is really the world of the particular rather than the universal. The male being superior, stronger and better, ruled over the female – a defective, incomplete male. He describes a “woman as an infertile male”, a male is male in virtue of a particular ability and a female in virtue of a particular inability”. The male is the active partner and the female passive, required primarily for sexual reproduction. In marriage, the husband by his superior virtue is the more useful, and hence the dominant partner. Though the husband and wife are interdependent, they are not equal.

A well-ordered family is one that takes into account differences between its individual members, and ensures that each works in a manner so as to contribute to common good. Accepting this differentiation make it easy to distribute tasks and authority that are naturally ordained and readily accepted.

A husband-wife relationship differs from the one between a governor and the governed, which keeps changing. In a political community, the position of the ruler and the ruled interchanges depending on circumstances and the dictates of justice. But in a husband wife-relationship, the former is endowed with a natural gift of command, and the latter for obedience. The husband–wife relationship is exercised in the interests of the members of the household to enable the husband to engage a winner, reinforcing his as the “head” within the household.

The woman, however, is not a slave. She is free being, a complement to the man. Though women constituted half of the free population, they are confined to the private sphere of the household since personal family ties are natural.

A women’s rightful place is her house because of her special abilities as a wife, mother and a householder. A woman as a mother spend a great part of her youth and time in bearing and rearing children, unable to enjoy leisure that a man has and therefore, is decisively disadvantaged. Women are to be excluded from the public realm because their deliberative faculties are inconclusive and lack authority. Political life for Aristotle requires participation by those who are equal both with regard to leisure time and possession, for they had to engage themselves in reasoned discourse about (un)just issues. Women do not have these so they cannot play a direct political role.

Aristotle does not, like Plato, advocate equality of the sexes. But this does not mean that he does not accord any role for women. He grants a woman distinct role in society, a position within her family and the home. It is here that can demonstrate her unique abilities as a wife, mother and a homemaker, preserving and stabilizing the family and home, and giving birth to and educating the young. The woman, though free, is like a slave, for she lack reason, which is why she should submit to the superior wisdom of men. While a slave helps in the orderly functioning of a household, a woman manages her family and home.

From the point of view of feminists, both Plato and Aristotle raise a crucial issue. Plato assumes that women can be free only if the institutions of monogamous marriages and private families are abolished. Aristotle, on the other hand, defends the private family vigorously on the ground that it makes possible for the moral development and the position of women within the household, for which they are best suited, and for training of children as future citizens.

### **1.3.3.3 Property**

Both Plato and Aristotle regard economic activity as highly significant for the purpose of political analysis. Economic activity has to be subordinated to political, since the former is concerned with a single good, while political is concerned with good life as a whole in its multidimensional sense. In discussing acquisition of wealth, Aristotle distinguishes two modes; natural, and unnatural. The natural includes hunting, grazing and husbandry. It is natural because nature not only gives them to all individuals for fulfilment of their needs, but also fixes a limit on its consumption in accordance with subsistence.

The use of money, however, leads to other forms of acquisition. Retail trade is one form with no limits on acquisition, and hence is an illiberal occupation. Aristotle, following the Greek prejudice, rejects retail trade on moral grounds, for the end of wealth, whether household income or that of a state, should be good life. He is critical of small businessmen shopkeepers and petty users, for they are corrupted by a desire for financial gains. He prefers landed property to trade and commerce. The important thing is not the greater or unlimited, but the right amount of wealth. Aristotle remains sufficiently ambiguous about what can be regarded as the right amount of wealth. Good life is his main focus. He stresses that material goods are necessary for leading a good and happy life, though they



are not an end in themselves. In its scale of values, happiness of the soul is infinitely superior and higher than any other pleasure in the world.

The most basic form of good economic activity is directed towards the use of the product. In this context, Aristotle cites activities like fishing, shoemaking farming. In activities where the producer and his family directly benefit, in the sense that their needs are fulfilled, it will have use-value. However, as society becomes more complex, trade increases and specialization of labour becomes the organizing principle, products are made for the purpose of exchange. Thus, products assume an exchange value in addition to a use-value.

Aristotle is the first to pay attention to the economic basis of political institutions by focusing on the character and distribution of wealth and its influence on the form of government. He considers extreme inequality of wealth as an important cause for revolutions. He defends private property, but is a great believer in well-distributed wealth.

#### **1.3.3.4 Distributed Justice**

Justice, for Aristotle, is a complete virtue, though not absolute. It is in relation to one's neighbour. The social character of virtue is "universal" justice or lawfulness. Both Plato and Aristotle believe that the primary task of a state is to ensure justice. Aristotle distinguishes between distributive, and corrective or rectificatory or remedial justice.

Distributive justice means that offices and wealth, rewards and dues are distributed among different social classes according to their contributions based in merit, defined in accordance with the spirit of the constitution. In an oligarchy, merit means wealth, while in aristocracy, it is related to virtue. In an ideal state, merit means virtue. Since in Aristotle's perception the objective end of the state is to ensure and promote good life, the group that contributes most to this end can legitimately claim most of society's honours. On this premise, he believes that a virtuous minority or an aristocracy supply the most direct and significant benefits to society. In the last resort, it will also mean that enthronement of one person with supreme virtue, or an absolute divine monarchy. Beside virtue and wealth, Aristotle recognizes freedom as an important criterion with regard to the end of the state. Freedom means free birth, and also being independent of others.

Aristotle agreed with Plato's assertion that only virtue and wisdom ought to be criterion of who will rule and exercise political power but wonders how to approximate it in practice.

Although Aristotle identifies virtue as the ultimate qualification for office, he allows for the enfranchisement of popular and oligarchic elements as well. He tries to assimilate the two doctrine of distributed justice that prevailed during his time. One is the democrats' assertion that equality derives from free birth, or that each will count for one, and no one for more than one. The other is oligarchs' view that superiority in one represents superiority in others as well. The two principles of equality and superiority can be made compatible, if both are subordinated to justice.

Distributed justice means proportionate equality, and is linked to a theory of just rewards to equal shares according to the merit of its recipients. Each person will be awarded responsibilities as well as financial benefits in proportion to one's just deserts.

#### **1.3.4 THEORY OF CONSTITUTIONS AND CITIZENSHIP**

Aristotle states that the politician and lawgiver are wholly occupied with the city-state, and the constitution is a certain way of organizing those who inhabit the city-state. His general theory of constitutions is set forth in *Politics* III.

Aristotle begins with a definition of the citizen, since the city-state is by nature a collective entity, a multitude of citizens. Citizens are distinguished from other inhabitants, such as resident aliens and slaves; and even children and seniors are not unqualified citizens (nor are most ordinary workers). After further analysis he defines the citizen as a person who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office. In Athens, for example, citizens had the right to attend the assembly, the council, and other bodies, or to sit on juries. The Athenian system differed from a modern representative democracy in that the citizens were more directly involved in governing. Although full citizenship tended to be restricted in the Greek city-states (with women, slaves, foreigners, and some others excluded), the citizens were more deeply enfranchised than in modern representative democracies because they were more directly involved in governing. This is reflected in Aristotle's definition of the citizen (without qualification). Further, he defines the city-state (in the unqualified sense) as a multitude of such citizens which is adequate for a self-sufficient life.

Aristotle defines the constitution as a way of organizing the offices of the city-state, particularly the sovereign office. The constitution thus defines the governing body, which takes different forms: for example, in a democracy it is the people, and in an oligarchy it is

a select few (the wealthy or well born). Before attempting to distinguish and evaluate various constitutions Aristotle considers two questions. First, why does a city-state come into being? He recalls the thesis, defended in *Politics* that human beings are by nature political animals, who naturally want to live together. He then adds that the common advantage also brings them together insofar as they each attain the noble life. This is above all the end for all both in common and separately. Second, what are the different forms of rule by which one individual or group can rule over another? Aristotle distinguishes several types of rule, based on the nature of the soul of the ruler and of the subject. He first considers despotic rule, which is exemplified in the master-slave relationship. Aristotle thinks that this form of rule is justified in the case of natural slaves who (he asserts without evidence) lack a deliberative faculty and thus need a natural master to direct them. Although a natural slave allegedly benefits from having a master, despotic rule is still primarily for the sake of the master and only incidentally for the slave.

Aristotle next considers paternal and marital rule, which he also views as defensible. The male is by nature more capable of leadership than the female, unless he is constituted in some way contrary to nature, and the elder and perfect is by nature more capable of leadership than the younger and imperfect. Aristotle is persuasive when he argues that children need adult supervision because their rationality is imperfect or immature. It is noteworthy, however, that paternal and marital rule is properly practiced for the sake of the ruled (for the sake of the child and of the wife respectively), just as arts like medicine or gymnastics are practiced for the sake of the patient. In this respect they resemble political rule, which is the form of rule appropriate when the ruler and the subject have equal and similar rational capacities. This is exemplified by naturally equal citizens who take turns at ruling for one another's advantage. This sets the stage for the fundamental claim of Aristotle's constitutional theory. Aristotle in his *Politics* argued, "constitutions which aim at the common advantage are correct and just without qualification, whereas those which aim only at the advantage of the rulers are deviant and unjust, because they involve despotic rule which is inappropriate for a community of free persons".

The distinction between correct and deviant constitutions is combined with the observation that the government may consist of one person, a few, or a multitude. Hence, there are six possible constitutional forms.

	<b>Correct</b>	<b>Deviant</b>
<b>One Ruler</b>	Kingship	Tyranny
<b>Few Rulers</b>	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
<b>Many Rulers</b>	Polity	Democracy

This six-fold classification sets the stage for Aristotle’s inquiry into the best constitution, although it is modified in various ways throughout the *Politics*. For example, he observes that the dominant class in oligarchy (literally rule of few) is typically the wealthy, whereas in democracy (literally rule of the people) it is the poor, so that these economic classes should be included in the definition of these forms. Also, polity is later characterized as a kind of “mixed” constitution typified by rule of the “middle” group of citizens, a moderately wealthy class between the rich and poor.

Aristotle’s constitutional theory is based on his theory of justice. Aristotle distinguishes two different but related senses of “justice” — universal and particular — both of which play an important role in his constitutional theory. Firstly, in the universal sense “justice” means “lawfulness” and is concerned with the common advantage and happiness of the political community. The conception of universal justice undergirds the distinction between correct (just) and deviant (unjust) constitutions. But what exactly the “common advantage” entails is a matter of scholarly controversy. Some passages imply that justice involves the advantage of all the citizens; for example, every citizen of the best constitution has a just claim to private property and to an education. But Aristotle also allows that it might be “in a way” just to ostracize powerful citizens even when they have not been convicted of any crimes.

Secondly, in the particular sense “justice” means “equality” or “fairness” and this includes distributive justice, according to which different individuals have just claims to shares of some common asset such as property. Aristotle analyses arguments for and against the different constitutions as different applications of the principle of distributive justice. Everyone agrees, he says, that justice involves treating equal persons equally, and treating unequal persons unequally, but they do not agree on the standard by which individuals are deemed to be equally (or unequally) meritorious or deserving. He assumes his own analysis of

distributive justice. Justice requires that benefits be distributed to individuals in proportion to their merit or desert. The oligarchs mistakenly think that those who are superior in wealth should also have superior political rights, whereas the democrats hold that those who are equal in free birth should also have equal political rights. Both of these conceptions of political justice are mistaken in Aristotle's view, because they assume a false conception of the ultimate end of the city-state. The city-state is neither a business enterprise to maximize wealth (as the oligarchs suppose) nor an association to promote liberty and equality (as the democrats maintain). Instead, Aristotle argues, "the good life is the end of the city-state," that is, a life consisting of noble actions. Hence, the correct conception of justice is aristocratic, assigning political rights to those who make a full contribution to the political community, that is, to those with virtue as well as property and freedom. This is what Aristotle understands by an "aristocratic" constitution: literally, the rule of the best persons. Aristotle explores the implications of this argument in the remainder of *Politics* III, considering the rival claims of the rule of law and the rule of a supremely virtuous individual. Here absolute kingship is a limiting case of aristocracy. Again, in books VII-VIII, Aristotle describes the ideal constitution in which the citizens are fully virtuous.

### **1.3.5 SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT OF *POLITICS***

As pointed out earlier that all the eight Books into which *Politics* is divided are not homogenous in their tone and spirit, but fall into two groups. Books IV, V, and VI belong to the latter period and they breathe a different spirit from that of the other Books and are more practical and in their tone. It has been maintained that Aristotle's most abiding contribution to political science lies in the application of the empirical method to the study of the phenomena of the state. Aristotle's point of view in these books is sociological and not ethical is further indicated by the statement that there is not one form of democracy or oligarchy but several variety of each, and by the way in which he distinguishes them. Out of the six forms of government mentioned by him in Book III Aristotle concentrates attention on democracy, oligarchy and tranny, in the Books IV and ignore monarchy and aristocracy which he regards as belonging to the class of ideal states.

#### **1.3.5.1 Study of Specific Constitutions**

The purpose of political science is to guide "the good lawgiver and the true politician". Like any complete science or craft, it must study a range of issues concerning its subject

matter. For example, gymnastics (physical education) studies what sort of training is best or adapted to the body that is naturally the best, what sort of training is best for most bodies, and what capacity is appropriate for someone who does not want the condition or knowledge appropriate for athletic contests. Political science studies a comparable range of constitutions: first, the constitution which is best without qualification, i.e., “most according to our prayers with no external impediment”; second, the constitution that is best under the circumstances “for it is probably impossible for many persons to attain the best constitution”; third, the constitution which serves the aim a given population happens to have, i.e., the one that is best “based on a hypothesis”: “for [the political scientist] ought to be able to study a given constitution, both how it might originally come to be, and, when it has come to be, in what manner it might be preserved for the longest time; I mean, for example, if a particular city happens neither to be governed by the best constitution, nor to be equipped even with necessary things, nor to be the [best] possible under existing circumstances, but to be a baser sort.” Hence, Aristotelian political science is not confined to the ideal system, but also investigates the second-best constitution or even inferior political systems, because this may be the closest approximation to full political justice which the lawgiver can attain under the circumstances.

Regarding the constitution that is ideal or “according to prayer,” Aristotle criticizes the views of his predecessors in *Politics* and then offers a rather sketchy blueprint of his own in *Politics* VII and VIII. Although his own political views were influenced by his teacher Plato, Aristotle is highly critical of the ideal constitution set forth in Plato’s *Republic* on the grounds that it overvalues political unity, it embraces a system of communism that is impractical and inimical to human nature, and it neglects the happiness of the individual citizens. In contrast, in Aristotle’s “best constitution,” each and every citizen will possess moral virtue and the equipment to carry it out in practice, and thereby attain a life of excellence and complete happiness. All of the citizens will hold political office and possess private property because “one should call the city-state happy not by looking at a part of it but at all the citizens.” Moreover, there will be a common system of education for all the citizens, because they share the same end.

If (as is the case with most existing city-states) the population lacks the capacities and resources for complete happiness, however, the lawgiver must be content with fashioning a suitable constitution. The second-best system typically takes the form of a polity (in

which citizens possess an inferior, more common grade of virtue) or mixed constitution (combining features of democracy, oligarchy, and, where possible, aristocracy, so that no group of citizens is in a position to abuse its rights). Aristotle argues that for city-states that fall short of the ideal, the best constitution is one controlled by a numerous middle class which stands between the rich and the poor. For those who possess the goods of fortune in moderation find it “easiest to obey the rule of reason”. They are accordingly less apt than the rich or poor to act unjustly toward their fellow citizens. A constitution based on the middle class is the mean between the extremes of oligarchy (rule by the rich) and democracy (rule by the poor). “That the middle [constitution] is best is evident, for it is the freest from faction: where the middle class is numerous, there least occur factions and divisions among citizens”. The middle constitution is therefore both more stable and more just than oligarchy and democracy.

Although Aristotle classifies democracy as a deviant constitution (albeit the best of a bad lot), he argues that a case might be made for popular rule in *Politics* III. 11, a discussion which has attracted the attention of modern democratic theorists. The central claim is that the many may turn out to be better than the virtuous few when they come together, even though the many may be inferior when considered individually. For if each individual has a portion of virtue and practical wisdom, they may pool these assets and turn out to be better rulers than even a very wise individual. This argument seems to anticipate modern arguments for “the wisdom of the multitude”.

In addition, the political scientist must attend to existing constitutions even when they are bad. Aristotle notes that “to reform a constitution is no less a task [of politics] than it is to establish one from the beginning,” and in this way “the politician should also help existing constitutions”. The political scientist should also be cognizant of forces of political change which can undermine an existing regime. Aristotle criticizes his predecessors for excessive utopianism and neglect of the practical duties of a political theorist.

### **1.3.6 THEORY OF REVOLUTION**

Decay and disturbance in political life brought crucial changes in the Governments of the city-state in Greece, made Aristotle to contemplate deeply and to stress the causes of the Revolution and its remedies.

### 1.3.6.1 What is Revolution?

To Aristotle, if any change occurs in the existing system or constitution of the state, it means revolution. For example, if in the state the constitution has changed from monarchy to democracy, it is a revolution. Aristotle was of the view that if the constitution remains the same, but the ruling party has been transferred from one man to another, it is also a revolution.

Book V of *Politics* discusses about the nature and causes of revolution, as well as how to prevent revolution. Aristotle argues that factional conflict results from disagreements about justice, because different parts of the city have different ideas of equality and each has a partial claim to justice. Those outstanding in virtue would be most justified in engaging in factional conflict but are the least likely to do so. Factional conflict can be about a desire to change the type of regime or simply to change specific elements or specific rulers in the regime.

The main feature of revolution is to be the craving of men for equality. Equality has two characters – absolute and proportional. The proletariat are passionate to secure absolute equality for the availability of the same rights that are possessed by few. The few struggle for proportional equality for perpetual upgrading superiority in power and privilege. Aristotle argues neither pure democracy nor pure oligarchy is lasting because they each have an extreme view of equality which excludes one of the two types. Therefore, he says a regime with a large middling element will be more stable.

Aristotle argues that people engage in factional conflict over issues of profit and honour, and are further stirred up because of fear, contempt, and dissimilarity. He further says when office-holders are arrogant and aggrandize themselves, factional conflict arises. When a few people are preeminent to a great extent factional conflict may arise in reaction against them. When someone is frightened of paying a penalty for an injustice he has committed, he may engage in factional conflict through fear. Factional conflict may also result from disproportionate growth of one part of a city. A great shift in the regime could occur from overlooking small gradual changes. Dissimilarity of the city's inhabitants could be a cause of conflict until cooperation develops, and a poor location could cause conflict as well.

Factional conflict resulting from petty disagreements among the rulers can affect the whole regime. If one group in the city gains a certain acclaim for some reason, the regime may



shift in order to give that group more power. When opposing parts of the city like the rich and the poor are equal in number they are more likely to engage in factional conflict than if there are only a few in one group and many in another.

#### **1.3.6.2 Causes of Revolution**

Aristotle then goes on to discuss the specific causes of revolution. He examines the causes of revolution specific to democracy. In democracy revolution often occurs because of the irresponsible behaviour of popular leaders. In democracies where the popular leader was the general, the democracy often turned into a tyranny.

There are also specific causes of revolution for oligarchies. The first cause is unjust treatment of the multitude. Sometimes even the well-off themselves begin a revolution in an oligarchy if office-holding is limited to very few. Revolution may also occur from the rise of a popular leader either with the well-off or with the masses. If the wealthy expend all their resources in wanton living, or if the type of rule is too much like masterly rule rather than political rule, a revolution may result. If offices are allotted on the basis of property assessment, revolution could come about because the assessments were arranged with a view to the situation when the regime was founded and that situation could change.

In aristocracies, revolutions occur because few share in ruling prerogatives, much like in oligarchies. Above all, however, revolutions in polities and aristocracies are the result of a deviation from justice in the regime. For the most part, revolutions in aristocracies occur gradually.

In monarchy, the causes of revolution are as follows. Kingship and tyranny are distinguished from one another in that the tyrant seeks his own pleasure while the king seeks noble goals. Tyranny encompasses the evils of both democracy and oligarchy. Attacks on monarchs occur sometimes because of their disgraceful behaviour to others, or because of fear, contempt, ambition, or desire for profit. Tyranny is often destroyed from the outside by a superior regime. It is also destroyed from within when the rulers fall into factional conflict. Kingship is rarely destroyed from outside.

#### **1.3.6.3 Remedies of Revolution**

There are several methods by which regimes can be preserved from revolution. First of all, it is necessary to ensure that the laws are enforced. Also, in aristocracies and oligarchies,

it is necessary that the rulers act justly toward the multitude, which has no share in ruling. It is also helpful to avoid factional conflicts within the ruling class itself. To prevent revolution in oligarchy or polity where offices are based on assessments, there should be a mechanism for adjusting the assessments when the economic conditions of the citizens change. For all regimes, it is important to prevent any one person from becoming overly powerful in a short period of time, or else he will surely be corrupted. It is excellent if a regime arranges its laws and offices in such a way that it is impossible to profit from the offices. In such a case, the poor will not want to rule because they will make no money from it, and thus the well-off will rule and the poor will be able to spend their time at work and become well-off. In a democracy, the rich should be treated well, their property should not be redistributed. In oligarchies, it is important to treat the poor very well, such that there is an opportunity for the poor to become well-off. It is advantageous to assign equality or precedence to those who participate least in the regime, the well-off in democracies, and the poor in oligarchies.

Kingships are preserved by limiting the king's authority. Tyrannies are preserved by eliminating all potential rivals to power. Extreme democracy is basically the same as tyranny. A tyrant above all needs military virtue, and should command awe but not fear. He should be moderate in his dealings with women and strong drink, and he should show himself to be attentive to the gods. He should honour the good citizens personally and make other officials punish the offenders. The tyrant should not give preferential treatment either to the poor or the well-off. If a tyrant does these things his rule will be long-lasting and not completely vicious.

Rulers need affection for the regime, a capacity for ruling, and virtue and justice relative to the regime. Advantageous laws are laws that help to preserve the regime. The middling element should also not be neglected in this discussion, because they can act as a stabilizing force.

The greatest thing that helps to make regimes lasting is education relative to the regime. This means not that democratic people should be educated democratically, but rather that they should be educated oligarchically, and vice versa, to counteract the natural tendency of the regime toward its extreme form. The problem with democracies is that they define freedom badly.

Oligarchy and tyranny are the most short-lived regimes. Socrates is wrong when he argues that there is a cyclical pattern of revolution for regimes. Why should the best regime ever undergo revolution? Also, it more frequent for regimes to undergo revolution into their opposite than into a similar type of regime.

Aristotle put the security of the state above everything else. He even permitted interference in the privacy of individual's life when necessary in the interests of the state. According to Aristotle "A revolution constitutes more a political than a legal change. It had the effect of reversing ethical, social and economic standard."

### **1.3.7 SUMMING UP**

Aristotle is rightly been called a political scientist, for he defined the subject matter of politics and identifies its core elements , namely sovereignty of law, constitutionalism, faith in moderation, conception of proportionate equality and just rewards, causes and remedies of revolution and polity or the middle class state as the best practicable and stable political system. All these topics are scrutinized and analysed in the *Politics*. Aristotle's treatment of the various themes in the *Politics* *reflects* his empirical and inductive method. However, Aristotle never denounces ethics in the study of state. For Aristotle ethics and politics are complementary. Ethics studies the virtues that made up a good individual, whereas politics studies institutions than enables individuals to finds their potential. Though contemplation for Aristotle was the highest form of activity, he still probes into the practical good of an individual's social relation and existence. Like Plato, the societal dimension was never lost in his theory.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
**Course Title: Western Political Thought**  
**Unit – I: Classical Thinkers**

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## **1.4. ST. AUGUSTINE: CHURCH AND STATE, DOCTRINE OF SIN AND SALVATION**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

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*“St. Augustine sought to interpret the course of mundane affairs, including the catastrophes of his own day, in terms of the eternal will of God. In his hands the story of mankind became a narrative of the unfolding in time and space of the eternal purpose of the creator.”* (F. J. C. Hearnshaw)

#### **1.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The downfall of the Roman Empire was marked by the rise of Christianity. The early fathers of the Church, and particularly St. Paul, regarded the Roman discipline as necessary to prepare men for Christ. He considered Roman justice as a “defense against the fury of the unbelievers”. But, however, later on, the Roman Emperors developed an attitude of hostility towards the Christian religion. The dual loyalty involved in the Christian conception of man’s two fold destiny, and the insistence of the Roman Empire on the performance of rights and services inconsistent with the teaching of the Church, led to increasing friction and ultimately to open antagonism. It resulted in the general persecution of the Christian Church and its adherents. All attempts were made to suppress it, but the Church stood like a great wall of faith. The Christians, on the other hand, adopted subversive activities and organized many conspiracies against the Roman Emperors. The weak emperors of the withering empire proved to be too weak to crush the Christian movement. This furious conflict of the two rival authorities reached its climax in the days of Emperor Decius and ended with Emperor Diocletian (250 A.D.-304 A.D.). The pagan state exerted all the power to wipe the Christian Church out of its existence, but it miserably failed to do so. The emperors, who needed internal peace and unity, were profoundly disappointed and disgusted in the presence of this situation. ‘The Church victorious, instead of becoming, as had been hoped, a new source of strength and bond of union to the Empire, became a fresh cause of dissension, disintegration, and disaster’. When this state of controversy and confusion prevailed within the Empire, the barbarian invaders were attracted to enter the Roman territory and to carry their ravages and depredations. The Huns, the Vandals, the Teutons and the Visigoths fell like a hurricane upon the already dying and disintegrating

Empire. In 410 A.D. they completely sacked the great city of Rome. These barbarians had no civilization of their own, which they could substitute for, or mingle with that of the Roman world. 'There was no recorded history of the West which knows of similar catastrophe, when a way of life was so thoroughly destroyed, that men forgot what their ancestors had known for centuries, and had to start all over again, groping toward a new existence'. The sack of Rome was a very painful experience. As for Rome, for eight centuries she had been inviolate. She had become the centre of the vastest and most powerful empire, which had ever been established among mankind. The wealth of the world had been poured into her lap, and it had been used to adorn her with temples and palaces, which were among the marvels of the earth. All roads led to her; all men looked to her for guidance and control; she was regarded as the symbol of all that was most potent. No city in the world had ever risen to such eminence and endurance.

After the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 A.D., a popular explanation was offered that the faults of Christianity were responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire. For eighty years from 313 A.D. to 393 A.D., both Christianity and paganism were allowed to live side by side in the Roman Empire. All harsh and discriminatory legislations against it were abandoned. Then came a long series of religious enactments, which were increasingly favorable to the Christian faith. In 393 A.D. it became the official religion of the state through an edict of Emperor Theodosius I. Since the fall of Rome occurred so soon after the triumph of Christianity, many pagans and even some Christians were led to establish a connection between the rise of Christianity and the weakening of the Roman Empire. According to pagans, 'the Christian qualities or otherworldliness, meekness, pacifism, disregard for public affairs, and contempt for revered national deities had been persistently sapping the strength of Rome'. The devotees of the old gods -exasperated, disposed, persecuted, humiliated, raised a huge cry that 'Rome has perished in the Christian days'. They attributed all the calamities of their own dark days to the abandonment of the old faiths, and to the consequent anger of the deserted and insulted deities. The Christians repudiated the pagan charge, but they were equally troubled to think, that the conversion of the Empire had not sufficed to save it from this overwhelming and spectacular disaster, and were still more perturbed to realize that the imperial power, in which they had trusted

for temporal security and worldwide dominion, was unable to save even itself from destruction. St. Augustine heard both the cry of the pagans and the Christians. And since he knew both paganism and Christianity, came forward to defend the tender plant of Christianity and meet the pagan charge; that the victory of Christianity was responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire.

#### **1.4.2 ST. AUGUSTINE (354-430 A.D.)**

St. Augustine is generally called the 'greatest of the Fathers of the Church'. He was a native of Roman North Africa. His parents were the inhabitants of North Africa. His father was a pagan; but his mother was a devout Christian. In his early thirties, he was converted to Christianity by St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. St. Augustine rose very rapidly in the hierarchy of the Church. In his forty-second year he was made Bishop of Hippo in North Africa in 395 A.D. and he held this office until his death in 430 A.D. He was a celebrated writer. Aside from his very famous 'Confessions', he wrote a number of treatises on general philosophical questions. His writings were quoted mainly to an interpretation and defense of the Christian religion. He wrote several other works in criticisms of other religious sects of his day. But his most important work, which gave him name, fame and glory was the 'De Civitate Dei' (The City of God), written in the year 413 A.D. He took more than a dozen years to complete this work. This work is composed of twenty-two books. The first ten are devoted to the defense of Christianity. They are concerned with rebutting pagan charge that Rome had perished in the Christian days. In the other twelve books he set forth more positively and comprehensively his own conceptions of man and society. In these books he argued that the "fall of Rome was a vivid illustration of the principle, that all earthly kingdoms are transient and unstable, and that security and permanence must be found in a spiritual commonwealth. Thus, he distinguished sharply between the city of God and the city of this world. The city of God consists of the redeemed in this world and the next. The city of the world is the kingdom of the devil, and of those who follow him. The 'De Civitate Dei' of St. Augustine is one of the most difficult works which have been bequeathed to posterity. Its definitions are vague and variable, its argument is obscure, and its conclusions are still a subject of interminable controversy. But in spite of these grave defects, both in design and in execution, its ground philosophy is quite clear. The

book has exercised ‘a profound influence over later medieval discussion of questions concerning the origin of political society; the relations of civil government to divine law, natural law, and justice; the qualities of a just ruler and of his opposite-the tyrant and the Christian attitude towards slavery and private property. Prof. McIlwaina admits that St. Augustine’s city of God probably, had a greater influence on subsequent medieval political thought than any other book written in the early Middle Ages.

### **1.4.3 CHRISTIANS AND THE STATE**

The attempt by Christian thinkers in the West to provide an account of the nature of political society draws upon a number of different sources. Christianity was born into a world dominated by Roman institutions, including Roman law, and by Greek philosophical concepts. Roman ideas on the nature of the ‘civitas’ defined political society as a community under the rule of law’; Plato and Aristotle, on the other hand, saw the ‘polis’ as an agency of moral education and formation, since for them it was impossible to live a fully human life outside society. Only beasts and gods, Aristotle said, live outside the ‘polis’; beasts, because they are sub-human and gods; because they are superhuman. For the Greeks, the civil law must always be in accordance with the moral law, otherwise tyranny ensues. Tyranny is that form of government where the naked will and power of the ruler (be the ruler one or many) prevails, in other words, where might is right. The Christians of the first three centuries took an ambivalent attitude to the Roman State. Some were convinced that the end of the world and the advent of the kingdom of God were approaching, so that for them it was not a pressing concern to elaborate a Christian theory of the State. Others identified the State with the anti-Christian and pagan Roman State and rejected it completely. For them, the Church; the community of believers, was the only ‘true society’. Just as the Christian philosophers had no need of pagan wisdom since the Scriptures were sufficient for them, so also Christians had no need of Greek and Roman political concepts and institutions. The “City of God”, the Church, was sufficient for them. Theocracy (the view that the Church is the only authentic political authority) and fideism (the view that faith is the only authentic avenue of knowledge) tend to go hand in hand. Other Christians recognized the role of the State and groped tentatively towards some kind of theory about the relationship that ought to obtain between the Church and the State, the supernatural society and the



natural society -just as in the sphere of knowledge, certain Christian thinkers attempted to define the relationship between what is known by faith' through revelation and what is known by 'natural reason' alone.'

#### **1.4.4 PHILOSOPHY OF ST. AUGUSTINE:**

Prof. G. H. Sabine, writes that "His philosophy was only in a slight degree systematic, but his mind had encompassed almost all the learning of ancient times, and through him, to a very large extent, it wa--s transmitted to the Middle Ages". In the elaboration and illustration of the main themes of the City of God, Augustine blended certain basic ideas of Greek and Roman authors (particularly Plato and Cicero) with the emerging Christian ideas on the essential nature and functions of a political community. Prof. Sabine says that, "His writings were a 'mine of ideas' in which later writers, Catholic and Protestant, have dug. . .His most characteristic idea is the conception of a Christian commonwealth, together with a philosophy of history, which presents such a commonwealth as the culmination of man's spiritual development. Through his authority, this conception became an ineradicable part of Christian thought, extending not only through the Middle Ages but far down into modern times." Similarly, Prof. Dunning has observed that the 'De Civitate Dei' of St. Augustine, 'though covering substantially the whole realm of human history, theology and philosophy, has for its central theme, the concept of God's elect, as constituting a commonwealth of the redeemed in the world to come- a commonwealth, of which the Church is a symbol on earth. In developing this idea, he works consciously on Plato's lines and formulates from the political philosophy of that master, and of Cicero a system in which, the leading dogmas of the Christian faith assume a controlling part'.

#### **1.4.5 ST. AUGUSTINE'S CONCEPTION OF TWO CITIES**

Examined in the historical context, St. Augustine's 'De Civitate Dei' was conditioned by the circumstances of his own time. It is thus obvious that political philosophy and history have always gone hand in hand. In the 'De Civitate Dei', he was led to develop the conception of two cities, the city of God and the city of the Devil, primarily to explain the downfall of the Roman Empire. The argument that he puts forth in his conception is that all earthly cities are bound to perish, but there is one city, which is eternal and imperishable,

and it is the City of God. According to him Rome perished away, because it was an earthly city, and all earthly cities meet the same fate. He attributed the fall of Rome to the vices which paganism bred; cruelty, extortion, pride, luxury and debauchery. Thus, he ended his argument by carrying the controversy into the pagan camp, and defended Christianity against the pagan charge, that it was responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire. He developed his philosophical ideas, including his theory of the significance and goal of human history, by which he sought to place the history of Rome in its true perspective. Writing about the nature of the two cities, the Earthly and the Heavenly, St. Augustine says that, both have been formed by two loves; the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former glories in itself while the latter in the Lord. For the one, it seeks glory from men, but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lit up its head in its own glory, the other says to its God, "Thou art my glory; and the lifter up of mine head". In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling: in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength". The one, the Civitas Dei, had its origin with the creation of the angels; the other, its rival, the Civitas Terrena, commenced with the fall of Satan. One was founded on earth by the pious Abel, the other by the impious Cain. The one is founded in the hope of heavenly peace, and spiritual salvation, the other is founded on earthly, appetitive and possessive impulses of the lower human nature. The one was founded on the love of God and the other on the self-love. The former existed for the promotion of good and the other pursued evil. The one aimed at justice and the other at power. The first was the kingdom of Christ, which manifested itself first in the Hebrew nation, and later in the Church and the Christianized state. The second was the kingdom of Satan whose history began with the disobedience of the Angels and which manifested itself particularly in pagan empires of Assyria and Rome. According to St. Augustine, all human history is a dramatic story of the struggle between these two cities, and he is convinced that the ultimate victory must fall to the City of God; it was, in this way that St. Augustine interpreted the fall of Rome. According to this interpretation, all earthly empires must pass away. They must

pass away, because they are mortal and unstable, and built upon those aspects of human nature, which are connected with his instinct of war and the greed of domination.

But what does St. Augustine really mean by the *Civitas Dei* (the City of God), and the *Civitas Terrena* (the city of the earth)? His ideas in this connection are most significant, but most obscure, at the same time. Prof. G. H. Sabine is quite justified when he says that a certain caution is needed in interpreting this theory, and especially in applying it to historical fact. It was not St. Augustine's meaning that either the earthly city or the City of God could be identified precisely with existing human institutions". The heavenly city for him, perhaps, was the communion of their deemed in this world and in the next. The earthly city was the kingdom of the Devil and of all wicked men. If by the City of God St. Augustine means the Church, Prof. F. J. C. Hearnshaw asks, "What does St. Augustine mean by the Church"? Is it the visible and indeterminable society of the predestined elect, known only to God? It is impossible to be sure which of the two he has in mind". Prof. Hearnshaw again asks, what does Augustine mean by the *Civitas Terrena*? Is it the state, as such? Is it to be identified in any way with the Roman Empire? Here, also, it is hard ascertain what Augustine thought. Of this, however, there can be no doubt, that Augustine was fighting a winning battle. He saw that the future of the world lay in the Christian Church, and he was confident that it would move on from triumph to triumph until the primal purpose of God was fulfilled.

According to Prof. William Ebenstein, St. Augustine 'was primarily concerned with ways of life and not with organizations of life. The great struggle in the universe is, then, not between Church and State, but between two opposing ways of life; in the earthly city, the love of self, the lust of power predominate, whereas in the heavenly city, the love of God is the foundation of order. Augustine therefore divides the human race into two parts, the one consisting of those who live according to man, the other of those who live according to God. These we also mystically call the two cities, or the two communities of men, of which the one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil. This interpretation of Prof. Ebenstein is understandable and very much appeals to the commonsense. St. Augustine himself emphasizes that the two communities of the heavenly and earthly cities can be called cities only in a mystical or symbolic sense.

#### **1.4.6 THE CITY OF GOD**

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the first Christian thinker to grapple with these questions about the respective roles of the ‘two societies’; Church and State in an explicit way. It needs to be remembered, however, that St Augustine was not a political philosopher in the way that both Plato and Aristotle were. Augustine was primarily a theologian expounding the content of the Christian faith and his remarks on the nature of political society. Thus the ‘De Civitate Dei’ (The City of God) is not a book on political philosophy in the same sense as Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s ‘Politics’. The City of God is a general apologia or defense of Christianity against the charges of those who attributed the fall and decline of the Roman Empire (Rome was sacked in 410 A.D.) to the influence of Christianity, and Augustine’s reflections on Church and State are incidental to his apologetic purpose. For all that, it is not difficult to construct from what Augustine says in The City of God a theory about political society and the inter-relations between society and the Church.

As we have already remarked, for Augustine the Church is not just a group of people with a common set of religious beliefs and practices; it is a society in the strict sense, that is a community of believers, with its own organization and its own laws and its own ‘common good’, The very title of his celebrated work, The City of God makes that clear. (‘Civitas, it might be remarked, does not mean ‘city in the modern sense: it is rather the body of ‘cives’ (citizens) and has much the same sense as the Greek ‘polis’ and our Society.) For the Greeks the ‘polis’ was the supreme form of society (superior to the family and the clan), but for Augustine political society is subordinated to the higher form of society brought into being with the Christian church. One can see from this how radically different Augustine’s perspective is from that of Plato and Aristotle. The supernatural society, that is the Church, is in effect founded by God, and it is sustained by ‘His’ spiritual help or grace; it is only in this society that people can be saved and made fully happy through union with God; again, this society is based upon the altruistic love of its members for God and for each other.

##### **1.4.6.1 The Church**

Augustine’s views on the Church are very significant. His argument is that for man’s entry into the eternal kingdom of heaven, ‘the city of God, there must be some visible agency on

earth, which may lead him in the right direction. Such a visible agency, according to Augustine is the Church. Augustine considers the Church as a part of the heavenly city that ‘sojourns on earth and lives by faith’. According to him “it lives like a captive and stranger in the earthly city”. He regarded it to be a scheme of human salvation. It is through this social union of all true believers that the grace of God works in human history. He regarded the history of the Church as the ‘march of God in the world’. The orders of the state should be obeyed because they are meant for the establishment of peace and a good social life. But St. Augustine makes it quite clear that if the laws of the state are in conflict with the laws of religion and morality, they should not be obeyed. According to St. Augustine, ‘The life of the wise man must be social’ and that there is no man who ‘does not wish to have peace’. To him, the state has a great utility, because it provides for the establishment of social peace. He repeats the Greco-Roman ideas when he says that the state is ‘in its own kind, better than all other human good. For it desires earthly peace for the sake of enjoying earthly goods’. According to Prof. Ebenstein, the peace that the state provides is not an end in itself, but only a means, a condition that makes the service to God possible. The ‘peace’ of the state is the temporary tranquility that enables man to work for the heavenly city, which is ‘peace never ending’. What he actually wants to say is that ‘the state must be a Christian State, serving a community, which is one by virtue of a common Christian faith, ministering to a life, in which spiritual interests admittedly stand above all other interests and contributing to human salvation by preserving the purity of the faith’.

#### **1.4.7 THE STATE**

By way of contrast with this supernatural society, the city of God or the Church, Augustine describes the ‘earthly society’ (*civitas terrena*), that is the secular society, with its laws and institutions, which exists outside the Church. Augustine’s attitude to the ‘earthly society’ is ambivalent; thus at times he appears to admit, that it has its own proper place and role in providing for our non-spiritual welfare, and that from this point of view it is good in itself; at other times, he appears to suggest that the earthly society only comes into being, because of human sinfulness after the ‘Fall’, so that if the Fall had not taken place, then the State would not have been necessary and the Church would have been sufficient; at other times again, he says quite explicitly that secular society originates in human selfishness or self-

love, and that it is typified by conflict and power. Augustine says that these two cities derive from two different loves - the earthly city derives from the love of self which rejects God; the heavenly city derives from the love of God which rejects love of self. The first seeks human glory; the second desires only to bear witness to God, the greatest glory. The first is governed by ambitious tyrants led by the lust for power, the second is one, in which all work together in love, both the rulers in ruling and the subjects in obeying. At times indeed Augustine's view of political society outside the Church seems to be a theological version of Hobbes' theory of the State, that is to say, political society is defined as that form of human society in which there is a locus of absolute power or 'sovereignty'.

In one of the famous passage in 'The City of God', Augustine writes 'Without justice, are kingdoms anything more than the results of robbery? Robber gangs are in fact little kingdoms, for they are under a 'Commander' and sworn together in a confederacy, the 'pillage' being shared out among them. And if these gangsters become powerful enough to build forts and conquer cities and neighboring countries, then their confederacy is no longer called a gang, but is adorned with the high-sounding title of kingdom', not because they have ceased to be really gangsters, but because they may now continue to be so with impunity. The pirate's retort to the great Alexander of Macedon was very much to the point: when the King asked him what right he had to lord it over the seas, the pirate replied cheerfully, Well what right have you to lord it over the whole world? I am called a pirate, because I happen only to have a small ship, you are called a King simply because you have a navy behind you. Augustine's final position appears to be that in principle that the State does have its own proper autonomy and purpose; the preservation of peace and order, and that the Church must respect the independence of the State and not interfere directly in the political order. As he says that 'The spiritual society, while it is here on earth, is made up out of people from different temporal societies and does not concern itself with the laws made by those societies. It does not go against these laws, but rather observes them. So long, as they have as their purpose; the preservation of the temporal order and do not oppose the worship of the One True God.

However, in practice human beings are so corrupted by the effects of sin that they are incapable of acting altruistically if they are left to their own devices. Unless they are helped

by God's grace, mediated through the Church, they will tend to follow their own individualistic self-interest, and political society will be very much as Hobbes described it, a mechanism of power and coercion for regulating conflicts between self-interested individuals. From this perspective Augustine's view of the State is that he thinks, that politics is basically a power-game and that we ought not to expect too much from politics and politicians. In the last resort 'the State is a necessary evil'.

Again, while in principle Augustine's view of Church and State is not a theocratic one, where the State becomes absorbed into the Church, in practice Augustine's position lends itself to a theocratic interpretation. This is in fact what happened in Western Christian thought from the sixth century onwards. Thus Gregory the Great, in the late sixth century, under the influence of Augustine, sees the State and the political order as the instrument of the Church. Isidore of Seville at the end of the seventh century argues that the State is simply the 'secular arm' of the Church employing force to establish and maintain Christian beliefs and morality. The religious ceremony of the coronation of kings and queens in Western Europe was in fact a symbol of the dependence of the secular political power upon the spiritual power of the Church. In other words, the king or the queen or the emperor held their power from God through the intermediary of the Church. Augustine's influence continued in Calvin's theocracy in Geneva, and in the early Puritan settlements in the United States, which for the most part were theocratic in outlook. His position also echoes in some modern Christian views, which claim that the Church can and must interfere directly in politics in order to secure its spiritual and moral ends.

The debate about the relationship that ought to obtain between the Church and the political order continued right through the middle ages, both at the practical level in the struggles between popes and kings and emperors, and at the theoretical theological level. By the thirteenth century, partly due to the realities of politics and partly due to the introduction of Aristotelian thought into the new universities, a new view began to emerge in which the State (the temporal power) was seen as having complete independence in its own sphere, and the Church (the spiritual power) was like wise seen as a perfect society, with its own proper autonomy. Christ's injunction 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's', was constantly invoked to give Biblical justification for this new dualistic view.

#### **1.4.8 VIEWS ON JUSTICE:**

In his conception of justice, St. Augustine was very much influenced by Plato. But to Plato's concept of social justice, St. Augustine gives a religious turn. According to him, justice and peace are the cardinal virtues of the City of God. He emphatically declares that it is justice alone, which holds a society, ethically together, and no justice can be imagined in a society, where men are seeking only paltry interests and have no grasp upon eternal values and the true Christian faith. Where there is no justice, there is no peace. St. Augustine has conceived peace in

terms of justice, and justice, according to St. Augustine, is another name of the 'right relation of man and God'. Peace is not the absence of social strife and conflict. Without justice there can be no peace, because where there is no justice there can be no jus (Law). In his 'De Civitate Dei' he clearly mentions at one place that without justice there is nothing to distinguish a state from a band of robbers. Justice to St. Augustine is conformity to order and respect for duties arising from this order. An individual is just if he fulfills these duties, as Plato had said. In the case of Plato, duties to individuals were assigned by the authority of the state and they were to satisfy the needs of all; it was greed which created rights of private property. It is therefore just the man, who claims for his private ownership, that, which was given to the human race in common, should at least distribute some of this to the poor.

#### **1.4.9 ST. AUGUSTINE'S VIEWS ON SIN**

St Augustine (354–430) is the father of Western Christianity. He accomplished for religion in the West what St Paul had begun for the faith as a whole; the creation of a cohesive and binding set of teachings from diverse and disputed traditions. He was also a faithful lover and doting father, who famously struggled with sex. Much of Augustine's extraordinary theological output of some ninety books and eight thousand sermons (distributed by relays of stenographers and teams of copyists across the Roman Empire) was highly original, but his struggle to achieve celibacy, as he documented in his autobiography, 'Confessions', was standard fare in the saintly struggle. The distinctive aspect of Augustine's account was that he blamed himself, rather than the seductive temptations of the 'Devil', for his plight.



Focused on individual experience, lust led him to search ‘within’ to understand sin’s inexorable grip, and from this intensely personal journey emerged an explanation for everyone’s desire to sin.

Augustine’s extended effort to achieve chastity has been satirized for centuries. It is usually assumed, that before he became a repressed celibate, Augustine led a life of debauchery. In fact, his family life, both as a child and after he became a father himself, was unremarkable. Augustine recorded his life journey not because he thought it unusual (the standard autobiographical motivation) but because he believed, it represented the universal human condition. Although Augustine’s father, who died while his son was still in his early teens, had not been a practicing Christian, the young man was brought up as a Catholic by his mother, (Monica). In his late teens, he formed a faithful long-term relationship with a young Catholic woman from a neighboring town, and their son, Adeodatus (meaning ‘gift of God’), was born in 372. Augustine records that he ‘lived with only one woman and kept faith with her bed’ during the fifteen years they were together. He ended the relationship, only when his family arranged his engagement to a girl of higher social standing. The two-year wait until his new fiancée reached the legal marriageable age (which was twelve) was a critical period in Augustine’s self-discovery. An old translation of *Confessions* well captures his inner torment:

*[She] who was wont to be his bed-fellow, being torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage, my heart that cleaved to her was broken and wounded until it bled. To Africa then returned she, vowing to thee that she would never know man more, and leaving with me the son whom I had begotten of her. But I, miserable man, unable to imitate the woman, and being impatient of the two years delay after which I should receive her whom I desired [for marriage], and being less a lover of marriage than a slave to lust, did procure yet another – though not a wife – by whom that disease of the soul, as strong or even stronger than before, might be sustained.”*

It was in the ashes of a broken relationship, seeking consolation in sex; which comforted the body but tortured the soul, that Augustine embarked on the confrontation with his inner self that would provide the template for the authentic Western spiritual search. 'Depressed and even overwhelmed', he began to 'search after the cause of evil' by entering 'into the very innermost part of my soul', lamenting: 'what torments did my heart endure in that travail, what sighs were those, O my God!'

#### **1.4.9.1 The Original Sin**

At the core of his bodily being, Augustine found not the evil that the Manicheans and the Platonists stressed, but evidence of the enduring love of the creator God. Augustine discerned, that 'even beyond his soul and mind itself, there is unchangeable light of the Lord', and that all creatures 'have a being because they are of thee'. He critically questions himself that, 'Who placed this [evil] power in me, and who engrafted upon my stock this branch of bitterness, seeing that I was wholly made by my God, most sweet?' Augustine believed that the Devil could not be the *origin* of evil, since even he was made by the 'good Creator'. It was through the Bible, and above all others through Apostle Paul, that Augustine learnt that 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh'. He came to believe that accepting this reality, through 'tears of confession, a troubled spirit, and a broken and contrite heart', was the essential first step towards salvation. The purpose of *Confessions* was to document 'how Augustine came to accept the truth of the human condition'. It was not intended to illustrate the author's growing piety or the evil of sexual desire, but to highlight the insurmountable depravity that must be accepted before grace, the unearned gift of God's forgiveness, could be received. Augustine's point was that the desire to sin could not be banished by human effort. As an illustration, *Confessions* places emphasis on a seemingly harmless adolescent prank. As a youth, Augustine once stole pears from an orchard; even though he had no need of the pears, already having his own, and never ate them, he nevertheless enjoyed the sin: 'What an abomination! What a parody of life! What abysmal death! Could I enjoy doing wrong for no other reason than that it was wrong?' observing the supposedly willful greed of babies revealed the same truth; the basic human desire, from the very first, was to sin. No human being could free themselves from this perversity, which infected every aspect of human nature.

Augustine chose Christ and celibacy in the Easter of 387, and shared his baptism with Adeodatus. The boy whom his father had called ‘the child of my sin’ was now also a child of grace. Father and son shared the grief of Monica’s death later the same year, and eventually lived together as members of the scholarly community, which Augustine formed in North Africa. Adeodatus was central to the learned discussions, that took place there, but died in 389 or 390, before he was even eighteen years old. The loyalty and love Augustine showed to his son and had long maintained for the child’s mother was glossed over by the church for centuries; this was not proper behavior for a saint. In 391, at the age of thirty-seven, Augustine became a priest in the North African town of Hippo, and in 395 was made bishop. In the early fifth century, while immersed in a study of Genesis, he expounded the doctrine which he had begun to set out in *Confessions*. He became more concerned to stress, ‘how much the original sin in the Garden of Eden had permanently corrupted human nature?’ Augustine drew heavily on custom, theology and tradition to buttress his case. He accepted, that original sin was not fully expounded in the Bible, but was adamant, that unless it was accepted, even good Christians would be tempted to seek salvation through holy living and end up in hell. Before they could be saved, he argued, a person must admit that they were wholly incapable of reforming themselves, so that they would rely only on the mercy of God.

The obvious difficulty in Augustine’s account was how the transmission of sin occurred. This was to remain the subject of confused controversy for centuries to come; in fact, it would never be resolved, but Augustine kept his answer simple; semen was the culprit. Original sin, and the guilt and just judgment of God which followed from it, was physically transmitted via sexual intercourse to every human being. Only Jesus ‘alone of those who are born of a woman is holy. . . by reason of the novelty of his immaculate birth’, whereby the Holy Spirit ‘infused immaculate seed into [Mary’s] inviolate womb’. Despite his grim view of human nature, Augustine did not despise the body, as many of his opponents suggested. Indeed, he was critical of the ascetics who were ‘waging war on their body as if it were a natural enemy’; he believed that they were blind, both to God’s goodness and to the necessity of relying on grace alone. For Augustine, God had not made the slightest error in his creation of human beings, but evil desires, ‘after establishing themselves in the stock of our ancestors, have become naturally ingrained’. He was convinced that every-

one was hopelessly and innately subject to desires that could never be overcome by human will. At the core of each person was not an incorruptible divinity, but a decaying lust which continuously contaminated the whole being. To his optimistic opponents, he pointed out that even when sexual intercourse was prohibited and lustful thoughts were vanquished, random erections and night-time emissions remained.

Augustine knew that original sin was an idea well suited to the times. Many pagans remained in the Roman Empire, and teachings that explained why even the most moral of them was destined for hell, encouraged precautionary Catholic baptisms. Moreover, Catholicism did not enjoy an ecclesiastical monopoly even in the Latin speaking west. One of its rival churches, that of the Donatists, which was particularly strong in North Africa, sought to preserve its purity by avoiding any compromise with the world and its sinful ways. This ensured Augustine's assertion that the church was a community of fellow sinners, would be tested in the fires of public debate. And when Augustine wearied of argument, original sin provided a justification for the forceful suppression of such dissidents. Because people were not rational beings, who could freely choose good, (*disciplina* – 'an active process of corrective punishment') – had to be employed against Christians as readily as pagans. Augustine believed that the law must be imposed on his fellow believers as he says 'Take away the barriers created by the laws! Men's brazen capacity to do harm, their urge to self-indulgence would rage to the full.'

Augustine's argument with the doomed Donatists was largely over, by the time his doctrine of original sin found its final form. Whereas in his earlier writings he had held on to a notion of free will, in the last decades of his life, he came to believe that human beings were so corrupted, that they could not even *choose* to embrace the mercy of God; those who appeared to have chosen to be saved had, in reality, already been predestined by God for salvation. For Augustine, this was a paradoxical source of hope, means that, whatever happened in this fallen world, God had already set apart those who were to be saved. But the comfort this gave baptized believers came at a considerable cost to everyone else, 'that mass [of people] which will certainly be damned'.

When Augustine was born, the Roman Empire was enjoying renewed prosperity, but by the time he died, in 430, the Vandals were besieging his home in Hippo. Although the

growing power of the barbarians corresponded with Augustine's increasingly bleak prognosis of the human condition, their rampages were not solely to blame for this. His most forlorn descriptions of human nature were formulated during a ferocious public debate that began when a group of intellectual ascetics from Rome sought refuge in North Africa following the sack of Rome in 410. It was within this furnace of a culture war that Augustine's most cherished doctrine was refined and tempered, and ultimately receive papal and imperial sanction.

#### **1.4.9.2 The Three Stages of Sin**

Augustine (*De Trin*) describes three stages of sin, of which the first is "when the carnal sense offers a bait," which is the sin of thought; the second stage is reached "when one is satisfied with the mere pleasure of thought"; and the third stage, "when consent is given to the deed." It can be simply outlined as *Stage 1: Concupiscence of the Flesh*. The senses (e.g. the sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing) perceive something that causes delight. *Stage 2: Contemplation* (believed to take place in the heart; the actual biological functions of the brain and heart were not understood until much later), in which the mind delights in the sense impression, and stays with it, rather than referring it to God, its creator, as Augustine deliberates). *Stage 3: Consent of the Will*. This is when actual sin takes place [some authorities said that it takes place at Stage 2, even if no overt act follows]. Remember the universal hierarchies especially 'The Flesh / female' and 'Reason / male'. According to D.W. Robertson ( Jr.), one of the great medievalists of this century 'It's easier to remember these three Latin words because they all begin with "con.", and remember, "con" is French for "female sexual organ", and adultery is often a metaphor for any kind of sin.' Augustine discusses the proper use and improper use, or 'abuse', of the things of this world.

#### **1.4.10 ST. AUGUSTINE: VIEWS ON SALVATION**

St. Augustine discussed on the nature of salvation and on Christian life. For this there are the three primary stages of the gospel story: creation, fall, and redemption. Pelagius is the famous heretic and theological opponent of *Augustine* who criticized Augustine's views. In articulating Augustine's we can draw on his *Confessions* (Books). According to

Augustine, human nature as God originally created, it was good. In his Book-1 of Confessions, Augustine says that ‘the God, who made me must be good’. Elsewhere, he testifies that God made man in his own likeness which implies his belief in the goodness of human nature as originally created. Augustine seems to attribute both free will and a conscience to God’s original design for people. Describing himself prior to his conversion, Augustine writes, ‘I knew that I had a will, as surely as I knew that there was life in me’. While he believed the human will to be severely constrained after the fall, presumably Augustine would affirm its freedom in God’s original design. Augustine understood conscience; the ability, by which people internally distinguish good from evil; as part of God’s design for human nature. He described it as God’s law which is written in men’s hearts, which cannot be erased, however sinful they are.

#### **1.4.10.1 The ‘Fall of Humanity’**

According to Augustine, human nature changed significantly as a result of Adam’s first sin, known as ‘the fall’. The fall resulted in ‘the bond of original sin’ which had several implications. Firstly, this bond brought death to human beings. Augustine describes Adam as the first sinner, in whom we all died. Secondly, the bond changed human nature, resulting in a appetite toward sinfulness. The fall produced a sinful ‘heritage of misery’ for all humans, whereby people are unavoidably sinful from birth. Augustine writes, “Lord, where or when was I, your servant, ever innocent”. He characterizes the post-fall state of sinfulness as a form of just punishment sent by God. Augustine understands the condition of sinfulness to issue from the human will, damaged by the fall. For Augustine, the damaged will is no longer free as it prevents people from embracing God. Immediately, prior to his conversion, Augustine was aware of two wills within him, one that desired God and another that rejected God. Without God’s intervention, he found that rejection prevailed. Referring to his years prior to conversion, he seeks an answer to the question that where was his free will. In Augustine’s theology, ‘habit’ plays an important role in constraining the fallen will. He understands habit as a pattern of behavior that conforms the will to sin. The role of habit is clear from Augustine’s description of the events leading to his bondage to sin. First, sin grew from his perverted will. Second, yielding to sin produced habit. Finally, Augustine confessed that ‘when he did not resist the habit it became a necessity’. For Augustine,

habit is that which binds fallen people in the prison of sin and restrains the exercise of free will.

#### **1.4.10.2 The Salvation**

Augustine's view of salvation flows logically from his understanding of the fallen human will. He says that the will cannot incline toward God of its own accord. God must initiate salvation. Reflecting on his conversion, Augustine writes to God, "You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight" Many other passages testify to Augustine's view of God's sovereignty in conversion as people cannot contribute anything to this process. Upon conversion he says, God restores human free will. Augustine writes that his free will was "summoned in a moment," at conversion, and also, God forgives converts of their sins. Augustine confesses to God, "you have forgiven me such great sins" Furthermore, at conversion, God begins to restore the convert from the sickness of sin. Augustine refers to this process, as God 'remaking' his creature. While this process is occurring, the Christian life remains a struggle between flesh and spirit, hindered by temptations and a continuing tendency to sin. While transformation includes the obedience of the believer, Augustine attests that the power to accomplish good works comes from God. Resurrection with Christ and entry into the 'blessed country of heaven' is the culmination of Christian salvation. The process of gradual transformation continues until this time.

For Augustine, Christ is central to salvation. Augustine characterized Christ's humanity as 'mortal' yet perfect, complete and superior to other men and without fault. Augustine refers to Christ's divinity and calls Him 'the Word of God which is equal with God' and more explicitly God himself. He also refers to Christ as the 'Mediator' between God and humanity. He says that Christ played several roles in the process of salvation; firstly, the sacrifice of Christ paid humanity's debt of sin; as both 'Priest' and 'Sacrifice', Christ offered himself for the atonement of human sin. Secondly, Christ took the death sentence for sin upon himself so that he might make null the death of the wicked, which he justified. Thirdly, the sacrifice of Christ brought reconciliation; through the forgiveness of the cross, Christ dissolved the enmity that had existed between people and God. Fourthly, Christ defeated the powers of evil on the cross. Augustine refers to Christ as the 'Victor' and

elsewhere he states that with Christ we have prevailed over the enemy. Lastly, Christ offered a living example of humility and good works.

Pelagius had countered Augustine's theology at several points. Firstly, he argued that if the human will is inevitably bent toward sin in its fallen state, God could not hold humans responsible for their sin. Since God clearly does hold humans accountable for their sin, Augustine's anthropology cannot be true. Secondly, as a corollary, Pelagius argued that if people are inevitably bent toward sin, they could not accomplish the moral commandments of God. Would God command something that is not possible? Thirdly, Pelagius argued that Augustine radically underestimates the goodness and power of human nature. As Pelagius notes, the goodness of human nature sometimes manifests itself even among the beings who do not worship God. If this is so, human nature does not appear to be as damaged and sinful as Augustine suggests. Fourthly, Pelagius argued that if God sovereignly initiates salvation, and if all people are equally sinful and unable to help themselves, it would be unjust for God save some and condemn others. God is just, and therefore leaves the choice of salvation up to people.

We can say that Augustine's perspective of salvation and the Christian life is fundamentally different from that of Pelagius. While the two share a view of the goodness of human nature as God's original design, their views diverge with regard to the significance of Adam's sin and the character of salvation. For Augustine, Adam's sin was decisive for all humanity, damaging human nature such that it tends toward sin and is unable to embrace God. In light of this anthropology, Augustine views salvation as a process initiated and completed by Christ. So we can take that Augustine believed (as the Catholic Church does today) that initial justification is by faith alone, but that good works are required for salvation after this. Augustine believed that these good works were meritorious. Augustine very explicitly rejected the idea of salvation by faith alone.

#### **1.4.11 CONCLUSION**

St. Augustine, the greatest thinker of the Christian age, stands at the threshold of a new era. Middle Ages, actually, began with St. Augustine. His influence is clearly visible in the writings of both Catholic and the Protestant thinkers of the middle ages. His idea of a



Christian commonwealth became an object, worthy of realization by all the Christians. The origins of the idea of world government based on the principles of justice and peace are to be traceable to the writings of St. Augustine. His interpretation of the fall of Rome paved the way for the scientific study of history. Though interpreted in their own way, Hegel and others drew their inspiration from the thought of St. Augustine. The impact of Plato in particular, but also that of Aristotle, Cicero and Stoics, is clearly evident in his work, and he helped to transmit the ancient heritage to the new world 'that was being born'. Although an idealist, he was, 'by general consent, the first great 'realist' in western history'. He deserves this peculiarity, because his picture of social reality in his 'Civitas Dei' gives an adequate account of social factions, tensions and competitions which we know to be almost universal on every level of community. It is on these social factions, tensions and competitions that St. Augustine lays emphasis in his description of the 'Civitas Terrena'. He asserts that even in the family, one cannot rely on friendship, seeing the secret treachery. Until we remember, that our own generation has as much difficulty, in preserving the peace and integrity, in the smallest and most primordial community, the family, as in integrating community on the highest global level.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
Course Title: **Western Political Thought**  
Unit – II: **Early Modern Thinkers**

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## **2.1 MACHIAVELLI'S PRINCE: METHOD, THEORY OF STATE, STATECRAFT AND PUBLIC MORALITY**

**- Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 2.1.0 Objectives
- 2.1.1 Introduction
- 2.1.2 Machiavelli – Methods
  - 2.1.2.1 Empirical Methods
- 2.1.3 Theory of State
- 2.1.4 Machiavelli on Statecraft
- 2.1.5 Machiavelli on Public Morality
- 2.1.6 Summing Up

### **2.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to:**

- Know significance of Machiavelli to Western Political Thought
- Understand Machiavelli's Method
- Comprehend Machiavelli's Theory of State
- Know Machiavelli's views on Statecraft and Public Morality

### **2.1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Niccolo Machiavelli was born in Florence on May 3rd, 1469 during a time of great political activity in Italy. His first role in political affairs came at the young age of 29, when the ruling

regime of Savonarola fell from power in his native city. Though he had no previous administrative background, Machiavelli was appointed to serve as second chancellor of the Florentine Republic under the new government. His nomination to this powerful diplomatic post was in large part due to the influence of the Italian humanists, who stressed the need for an education in the “humane disciplines” of Latin, rhetoric, classical studies, ancient history and moral philosophy - subjects in which Machiavelli excelled as a student.

The position of second chancellor included important responsibilities for the foreign and diplomatic relations of the Republic and gave Machiavelli the opportunity to travel and observe first-hand the successes and failures of leaders throughout Europe. It was from these experiences as a diplomat and ambassador that Machiavelli formed his deep convictions about the methodology of effective leadership. Indeed, from his later writings it is evident that the foundation for much of his political philosophy rested upon the lessons he drew from the diplomatic and military events of his time.

Machiavelli’s first assignment was on a mission to the court of Louis XII of France to appease the French leader after a disaster in their alliance against Pisa. He quickly learned that Florence’s sense of its own importance was clearly at odds with the realities of its military position and relative wealth. To anyone educated in the school of modern kingship, his native government appeared vacillating and weak. Machiavelli took this embarrassment to heart and later wrote powerfully about the political necessity of military strength, the dangers of procrastination, the folly of appearing irresolute, and the need for boldness, ferocity, and tangible power.

A few years later, in October of 1502, Machiavelli was sent to meet with Cesare Borgia, the duke of Romagna and an audacious and threatening military power who later demanded a formal alliance with the Florentines. It was during this time of great political turmoil and upheaval in Italy that Machiavelli drew meaningful lessons from his observation and assessment of contemporary statecraft. He was greatly impressed by Borgia, a fearless and courageous leader who possessed undivided and autonomous power, operated under conditions of extreme secrecy, and acted with swift execution. The success of his leadership resulted from his qualities of boldness, physical strength, and predatory instinct. Though he admired much of Borgia’s leadership style, Machiavelli was unimpressed by his seeming overconfidence. When Borgia assumed that his maneuvering and posturing to ensure a loyal successor to the papacy would automatically result in a favorable situation, Machiavelli

criticized the duke's reliance on good luck. Indeed, Machiavelli often referred to Borgia in his writings as an example of irrational reliance on chance and good fortune - a recurring theme in his later philosophical works. Machiavelli had learned that truly effective leadership required taming fortune and empowering oneself to be the master of one's own destiny.

The next influential leader with whom Machiavelli interacted was Julius II, the newly elected pope. Though initially convinced that the warrior pope was destined for disaster, Machiavelli was later converted to Julius's plan of reconquering the lost papal states. The pope's sheer audacity and authority - and most importantly the absolute nature of his power - gave great hope for unexpected victory. Machiavelli admired this ferocity, but noted in later writings that "if times had come when he needed to proceed with caution, they would have brought about his downfall; for never would he have turned away from those methods to which his nature inclined him." For Machiavelli, a leader must adapt to changing circumstances and craft his strategy not merely according to his temperament, but in accordance with the most effective course of action. Indeed, the primary weakness that each of these leaders shared was a disastrous inflexibility in the face of changing conditions. It was upon this basic premise of versatility and potency that Machiavelli founded his political philosophy.

Unfortunately for Machiavelli, Julius's ferocity prevailed, at least in the short run, and after his alliance with Ferdinand of Spain, the Medicis re-entered Florence and the Republic was dissolved in September of 1512. Machiavelli was formally dismissed from his post at the chancery, sentenced to imprisonment, and issued an enormous fine after being suspected of conspiring against the new Medicean government. The next year, however, Julius II died, and his successor Leo X granted a general amnesty as part of the rejoicing, freeing Machiavelli to a premature retirement at his country home.

Though he lived in constant hope of re-entering the political scene, the remainder of Machiavelli's life was dedicated to writing and reflection. His lot from this time forward was to contemplate the political scene not as a participant, but as an analyst. Machiavelli became a prolific and diverse author, writing biography (*Life of Castruccio Castracani*), civic and social history (*The History of Florence*), and even what many consider to be the best Italian play of the century (*Mandragola*). Machiavelli is best remembered, however, for his works of political philosophy. In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli reflects systematically on his political and diplomatic experience, the lessons of history (both

contemporary and ancient), and ultimately articulates what he supposed to be the rules of statecraft. Machiavelli's best-known book, *Il Principe*, (*The Prince*) contains several maxims concerning politics.

Machiavelli's hopes of returning in a full-fledged manner to the political arena never materialized. In 1521, he published *The Art of War*, and in 1525 Pope Clement VII awarded him a stipend for his historical work – particularly displayed in his *History of Florence*, another work not published until after his death. When the Medicis were overthrown in 1527, Machiavelli's ties to the family (through his work as historian and his other, smaller duties) rendered him suspicious in the eyes of the new government; even the restoration of the Republic did not mean Machiavelli could regain his earlier reputation. He died in San Casciano in 1527, just a few miles outside his beloved Florence.

### **2.1.2 MACHIAVELLI - METHODS**

By the time Machiavelli wrote, the medieval view of the political realm as a microcosm displaying the same structural principles of order prevalent in creation as a whole had been shattered. Once seen as the embodiment of universal purposes, the political realm now stood exposed as a battlefield where antagonistic forces struggled for supremacy. Machiavelli held a mirror up to reality; he did not seek to change that reality in any fundamental way. Nor was his admiration for antiquity and worldly values anything new. He was soaked in the spirit of Florentine humanism and learned from his predecessors. These environmental influences and intellectual debt induce some commentators to interpret his texts strictly in terms of their context. However, the Machiavellian hostility towards metaphysical ideas can easily be noticed in his texts. The study of the methods that Machiavelli used to reach to the conclusions therefore necessitates the brief understanding of this hostility. Following is a brief note on Machiavellian hostility to metaphysics.

The relentless quest for precedents has led some to forget that a doctrine must be judged not by the letter but by the spirit. Great thinkers will use conventional forms or conventional language to express new ideas. Machiavelli's redefinition of the pivotal concept of *virtù* is a case in point. For the civic humanists, *virtù* was understood in its Aristotelian sense, as a moral good, denoting a humane, prudent, wise form of behaviour. A virtuous deed is done for its own sake, for the sake of being virtuous. To Machiavelli, *virtù* was more like a force of nature, embracing in its meaning qualities such as ambition, drive, courage,

energy, will-power, shrewdness, and self-reliance. This is Roman rather than Greek (or Christian) virtue. It does not permit us to use locutions such as ‘virtue is its own reward’. For virtue, in the special Machiavellian sense, always exists for the sake of something else. It finds its classic expression in war.

Machiavelli’s originality is not only signalled by his unconventional use of conventional language. It is also evident in what he does *not* say, in the vocabulary he avoids. For example, neither in *The Prince* nor in any of his other works does he even mention, let alone endorse natural justice or natural laws, concepts central to the classical and medieval tradition and commonly found in the writing of his contemporaries. Machiavelli seems to have no time for such abstract universals, for standards outside history; and history, as he treats it, is merely a series of physical events, with no transcendent meaning. What we call absolute values are relics of traditional metaphysic – an invention of man masquerading as an invention of God. Our moral strictures, in his estimation, are purely conventional and reflect the existential needs of human beings living in communities. They are the result of natural necessity, not natural law; they exist because they are necessary to human survival, not because they are an inheritance from God (as Bible says) or inscribed in human nature (as the Aristotelians say).

Also significant is the absence of the word ‘soul’ (*anima*) from *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. As conceived by Plato and Aristotle, and later in Christian theology, the soul differentiates man from the rest of nature, giving him a special dignity. Whereas *anima* never occur in Machiavelli’s two main works, *animo* (‘spirit’ or ‘spiritedness’) occurs frequently and is used in the sense of ‘fighting spirit’, or the will to defend one’s own (body, family, homeland, etc.) against actual and potential enemies. Spirit, thus construed, depends on physicality, whereas soul (*anima*) always attempt to transcend physicality. Again, Machiavelli seems to be saying that we are primarily objects in nature, and that we are therefore governed by ‘natural necessity’

Machiavelli implicitly rejects the very notion of a metaphysical structure of the universe, the attempt to say that certain things have ‘essence’, or purposes, implanted in them by God or by nature. There is, in other words, no trace of Aristotelian or Christian teleology, no reference to any ideal order, to any doctrine of man’s place in the great chain of being, to any culminating fulfilment towards which creation moves. There is no discernible assumption of the existence of divine law; the only natural laws Machiavelli mentions are

laws of physical necessity. Nor does he concern himself with the salvation of souls or the contemplation of God's handiwork. His gaze was firmly fixed on terra firma.

Machiavelli, according to Francesco De Sanctis, a nineteenth-century Hegelian liberal, gave expression to the emerging antagonism between theology and science, two 'ways of thinking and acting'. The scientific perspective was founded on the revolutionary idea that human consciousness is independent of any transcendent authority and is merely the self-knowledge of human being acting in society and history to subdue nature for their own purposes. Machiavelli, in helping to pioneer this new outlook, thus represented 'the most profound negation of the middle ages'. He sought truth on earth instead of in heaven – in observation, not in from axiomatic principles.

### **2.1.2.1 Empirical Methods**

Because of the hostility to metaphysics, it is commonly assumed that Machiavelli's principle contribution to intellectual history was the 'inductive method' – the ideas of grounding knowledge on the collection, collation, and analysis of what we call facts. This method is contrasted to the medieval practice – not entirely abandoned by Machiavelli's contemporaries – of seeking explanations by a long process of inference and deduction. Machiavelli is thus acclaimed as the founder of modern political science.

Machiavelli undoubtedly saw himself as an innovator who substituted 'things as they are' for 'things as...they are imagined'. He wanted to examine 'what is actually done', not 'what should be done'. By positing a separation between analytical and normative political inquiry, he was, according to his own self-image, taking 'a paths yet untrodden by anyone'. For him, the vast array of facts to be analysed included the whole of history from antiquity to the present. Understanding 'things as they are' obviously requires an understanding of things as they were. History, he thought, could furnish a stable body of knowledge transcending the flux of events.

But those who dispute Machiavelli's scientific credentials often press their arguments too far. It is unfair, for example, to accuse him of deducing crude generalizations from ancient Roman percepts and practices without regard to contextual particularities. *The Prince* is full of references to *recent* history and *contemporary* politics, and certainly reflects Machiavelli's experience in the chancery service. In all his works he ordinarily supports his general propositions with examples drawn from several different periods of history – thus

suggesting that he appreciates the difference between a type of behaviour characteristic of some particular period and a more general historical law.

However, by no stretch of the imagination could Machiavelli be described as a 'pure' scientist. His intention was not merely to *explain* but also to *prescribe* and some time to *condemn*. His works abound in percepts, warnings, criticism, practical suggestions, prescriptions, and useful maxims. The final chapter of *The Prince*, where realistic appraisal and detached advice give way to fervent nationalism, destroys any notion that Machiavelli was merely cold-eyed technician, devoid of ideals and utterly cynical. But a passionate commitment certain political ideals and principles is not incompatible with an equally passionate attachment to objective methods of analysis. His new 'path' required him to maintain a rigid distinction between the object of inquiry and the inquiring mind, to prevent his value-preference from colouring his empirical analysis. No doubt he failed on occasion, but what strikes readers of Machiavelli is his remarkable degree of objectivity, his ability to set aside his personal bias in the pursuit of knowledge.

### **2.1.3 THEORY OF STATE**

Machiavelli never cared to bother about finding a plausible theory of the origin of state, its functions, the organisation of the government and its relations vis-à-vis the individuals. He never asked himself abstract questions like the one – what is the state? How it came into being? What is its relation with the individuals? Whether he conceived at all of the state as such and in the abstract seems dubious. He was really concerned only with the actual state of his times. Maxey puts it nicely, "No fine-spun theories, no abstruse speculation; no complex doctrines find room in its twenty-six brief chapters, but only tried and practical rules of experience, rules only tested in the laboratory of every-day affairs." He never conceived the state except in terms of governmental organisation that could give security and peace. Allen puts it: "but, in the main, Machiavelli expressed ideas about the state of his own times rather than about the states... Neither the 'Prince' nor the 'Discourses' expresses in a coherent manner any political theory of the state or that of government. Being himself a practical politician, to him practical theorem of how to keep the states in order was more important than the abstract theory of origin of state."

Yet from the above discussion it should not be concluded that he did not have any political theory at all. Though he never conceived of a political philosophy yet later thinkers sorted



out his various scattered ideas and erected them into a systematic theory. Machiavelli's political theories, of course, were not developed into a systematic matter except in the form of utterances on contemporary conditions. Behind those utterances as Sabine puts it, "or implicit in them however there often was a consistent point of view, which might be developed into a political theory and in fact was so developed after his time. Machiavelli was not much interested in philosophy and not much inclined to generalize beyond maxims useful to a statesman."

Machiavelli was not interested in idealistic conception of the state. His chief interest was concentrated in the unity of body politic and power. Following the empirical method, he seriously studied the past—from 4th century to 15th century of the medieval age. This age was characterized by the Feudal state. In this order king divided his dominions into many parts. Each part granted to a noble or tenant chief. There were no common laws and central authority. In short feudal system was a confusion. Out of this confusion church emerged as the superior authority. Result was continuous conflict between the spiritual and temporal authorities. Pope claimed superiority over all the princes. State (civil authority) was merely the police department of the church. Thus a true national life could not grow in such a system. He X-rayed the entire Italian society. The feudalism and the church not only destroyed the identity and importance of the state, but the state was considered subordinate. But Machiavelli completely divorced religion from politics. He broke the medieval tradition that the political authority is under the control of church. He made the state totally independent of the church by saying that the state has its own rules of conduct to follow, state is highest, supreme and autonomous. He said the state is superior to all associations in the human society. He rejected the feudal system and propounded all powerful central authority, who is supreme over all institutions.

The central theme of Machiavelli's political ideas is power. He highlighted power as an essential ingredient of politics. According to him moral code of individual prescribed by the church cannot provide guidelines to the ruler. According to Machiavelli a ruler must remember that whatever brings success is due to power. For acquiring political power he can use any type of Means. He said politics is a constant struggle for power. All politics is power politics. For Machiavelli absolute state was the End; and for this Means was power. He said the sole aim of the 'Prince' was to make the country strong and united, establish

peace and order and expel the foreign invader. To achieve this end any means would be satisfactory.

There are many reasons why Machiavelli justified a secular and powerful state. Machiavelli lived in Renaissance Italy and was greatly influenced by the new spirit of Renaissance. The intellectual awakening injected rational scientific approach in every sphere of human life, renaissance replaced the faith by reason. Italy was the leader of Renaissance, the most modern and urbanized country of Europe. But in Italy the wealth, intellect and artistic achievements were accompanied by moral degradation and political chaos. The worst aspect of the period during which Machiavelli lived was the rampant corruption and selfishness among the Italian rulers and the church officials Machiavelli represents the culture which was undergoing a period of deep political crisis. Italy consisted of a very large number of small but independent states. Some of these states like Florence and Venice were republics, while others were ruled by despots. Internally these states were the home of fierce political rivalries and personal ambition and externally they were involved in a constant struggle with one another. This political division of Italy and the struggle between the states made the country weak and a prey for the ambitions of the powerful neighbouring states of France, Prussia and Spain. France invaded Italy and defeated the Medici rulers. Machiavelli was witness to this tragedy. It was out of this traumatic experience that made Machiavelli conclude that unless Italy was united under a strong central government, the country would always remain under the threat of conquest and annexation by neighbouring countries.

In short, we can list certain ideas of Machiavelli about the state which can be said to have formed into a systematic political theory:

1. State is the highest form of human association which has to be created as the human beings are selfish, egoistic and ambitious but weak and fickle. According to him state has its origin in a calculating self-interest on the part of the individual. Machiavelli gives to this general line of thought a distinctly materialistic turn. He writes that men have by nature endless desires and that the craving for additional satisfaction of them is the main reason for the creation of the state.
2. State is not something natural to human beings but is an artificial creation. It is not something which is implanted in the social instincts of human beings.

3. There are three forms of the states e.g., Monarchy, Aristocracy and Republic. He deals at length with the Monarch and the Republic and ignore Aristocracy altogether. He had a very low opinion about Aristocracy. He regards the Republic as the best form of government, but as the conditions in the then Italy had become rotten, it no longer remained practical. Monarchy suited the condition of Italy of his time as it was meant for founding a new state or reforming a corrupt one
4. In the words of Allen, “The Machiavellian state is, to begin with, in the complete sense, an entirely secular thing.” The state has no unearthly reasons for its existence. Its existence is on account of inter-play of purely material interests. The church has no locus standi in Machiavelli’s scheme of the state. Realist as Machiavelli was, he was quick to realise that church was already a powerful institution in the then existing states. So he gave a twist to his thought and advised his fictional Prince to respect the religion followed by his subjects. Religion teaches good qualities to citizens such as humility, submissiveness, obedience to law etc. A good ruler, therefore, instead of discarding religion, make a capital of this powerful instrument in keeping a curb on anti-social tendencies of the subjects. According to Machiavelli, “the best check upon men’s evil and anarchic tendencies is religion.” The Prince should patronise the church which will help in keeping order and imbibing the instinct that service to the state is supreme duty. Machiavelli begins his discussion of religion by showing how Roman policy was furthered by skilful playing upon the religious feeling of the peoples. Though Machiavelli rejects the doctrine Divine Law and that of superiority of the church over the state or even independence of the church of the state control, yet he does not despise religion. The title of one of the chapters in his *Discourses* is “The importance giving religion prominent influence in the state”. According to him religion is necessary for the health and prosperity of the state. As Foster puts it beautifully, “thus he attributes to religion an important place in the state; but a place within the state, not above it or beside it.” Church is only an organ or an instrument subservient to the state.
5. According to Machiavelli the state should have an army of its own. It must have a regular army of its own citizens for it can trust no others particularly the mercenary soldiers. The reason for lawlessness in Italy of his time was that ruffians misnamed as professional soldiers who were ready to fight for whosoever would offer the

largest pay and who were faithful to none, had taken the place of older citizen-soldiers of the free cities. Machiavelli had seen with his own eyes how the national army of France had routed the mercenary soldiers of Italy. Hence he urges that the training and equipment of a citizen-army is the first need of a state. The state must have a strong, well-disciplined and well-equipped force of its citizens bound by loyalty. In Machiavelli's state military training would be compulsory for all able-bodied citizens between the age of seventeen and forty. Without a national army a state cannot survive long.

6. The Machiavellian State is constituted by citizens who are imbued with the spirit of probity, law abidingness, and trustworthiness in the performance of public duties. The existence of such a spirit is the sign of a healthy state. It is only in a corrupt or abnormal state that these qualities do not exist in the citizens.
7. According to Machiavelli a normal and a healthy state always has an impulse to expand and grow its power. The tendencies towards its extension of its dominions are in Machiavelli's opinion inevitable both in Republics and Monarchies. A Prince is restlessly impelled to the policy of expansion by the insatiable craving for power and republic by force of preserving its existence for, in a competitive world if it does not expand, others will expand, of course, at its cost, and will make its survival impossible. The best example of expansion was set by the ancient Roman Republic. The maintenance of a well-trained army is essential for following a policy of aggrandisement as well as for self-preservation. The acquisition of an Empire is thus as natural to a state as growth to a human body. According to Machiavelli "All free governments have two principle ends – one of which is to enlarge their dominions and the other to preserve their liberties." To Machiavelli aggrandisement is the symptom and natural consequence of health in a state.
8. The last feature of Machiavelli's state is that the law-giver or legislator performs a great role in setting things in order. He realised the importance of law and law-giver by his study of Greek and Roman history. Though he regarded force and fear as the most powerful instruments in administration, yet he believed that it is the good laws which can form the foundation stones of state. The laws made by a wise law-giver can not only regulate and control the actions of the citizens but also

generate civic and moral virtue among them and mould national character. The good laws framed by a legislature are useful both in a newly formed as well as in a corrupt state. A wise law-giver can repeal bad laws, change and make new ones. According to Sabine, "There is practically no, limit to what a statesmen can do, provided he understands the rules of his art. He can treat down old states and build new, change forms of government, transplant population, and build new virtues in the characters of his subjects. If a ruler lack soldiers, he need blame no one but himself, for he should have adopted such measures to correct the cowardice and effeminacy of his people. The law-giver is the architect not only of the state but of society as well, with all its moral, religious and economic institutions." The contemporary situation coupled with the logic of his political philosophy induced him to attach such an exaggerated importance to the law-giver.

The above listed points may indicates towards a well ordered theory of state of Machiavelli but one must agree with the view that the *Prince* and the *Discourses* are books on the art of government rather than on the theory of state. Machiavelli never thought in terms of writing a treatise on political theory; he only concerned himself with giving suggestions to the ruler as to how to solve day-to-day administrative problems and how to keep himself in power.

#### **2.1.4 MACHIAVELLI ON STATECRAFT**

Machiavelli's science of statecraft (or maxims to the ruler) develop out of his ministerial correspondence, study of history and its lessons, the wisdom of the ancient and from examples of great and noble deeds. *The Prince* is full of hard and calculated advice about how a new prince should act to establish himself in a recently conquered principdom, and a good deal of the advice is about the use of violence and deceit. His advice to new princes is an extrapolation from the actions of already successful princes. Machiavelli seems to be saying to princes: 'do what others have already done', only choose your precedents carefully to make sure that you imitate the right prince in the right circumstances. And the notion that princes might have to do some pretty nasty things now and again to save their states had been a commonplace since ancient times.

He cautions unwise princes that they will come to grief if they ignore these maxims, for by adhering them they will be free from their dependence on fortune. He believes that history taught, and to ignore its lessons will be suicidal.

Some significant aspects of the advice to the ruler are as follows:

1. Machiavelli elaborates the doctrine of “Raison D Etat”.
2. End justifies the Means.
3. State is sovereign, autonomous and non-religious.
4. A prince must combine the qualities of a lion and a fox.
5. Use a double standard of morality.
6. Favour despotic rule.
7. Maintain strong army.
8. Human nature is low and ungrateful, so Prince must consider this nature of man.
9. He should win the popularity of his people must not touch the property of the people.
10. A prince must have council of wise men and not of flatterers.
11. Separate politics from religion. 12. Remain free from emotions.

**1. Machiavelli elaborates the doctrine of Raison D ‘Etat’:** It means “Reason of state”. It implies actions and policies promoting safety and security of the state. Because the state must preserve itself before it promotes the welfare of its people. For preserving and safeguarding itself all means adopted by the state are justified by Machiavelli. According to him in politics, one is guided by the harsh realities of political life which is a struggle for power and survival. The actions of the state must be judged only on the basis of Raison D Etat i.e. independent, self-sufficient and well-ordered and well maintain state. Machiavelli advised the prince in preserving and safeguarding this type of state all means adopted by the state are justified. Prince should give priority to power. Morality and ethics have different spheres. It cannot be mingled with the reason of the state. To a prince power of state is of supreme importance. Self-sufficiency of the state means the state will have its own army, a

strong and unified government, unity and integrity among the people and solid economic foundation.

**2. End justifies the Means:** It is a very famous statement of Machiavelli which he justified for the “Reason of state”. He assumed that state is highest form of human association. State is to be worshipped like a deity even by sacrificing the individual. A ruler must remember that whatever brings success and power is virtuous even cunningness, shrewdness is justified. Politics is the most precarious game. It can never be played in a decent and orderly manner. The state has some primary objectives and responsibilities like protection of life, maintenance of law and order and looking after wellbeing of its members. Hence state must have adequate means at its disposal.

**3. State is sovereign, autonomous and non-religious:** Machiavelli said the state is superior to all associations in the human society. It is sovereign and is autonomous, moral and religious considerations cannot bind the prince. He is above and outside the morality. He can use religion to realize his ends. Religion cannot influence politics and the church cannot control the state. In fact sovereign state enjoys absolute power over all individuals and institutions. State is must necessary of all institutions. It stands on a wholly different footing and therefore be judged by different standards. State power is the end and religion is its organ and instrument. Nothing is unearthly in the state; State came into being to satisfy material interests of the people. He divorced politics from theology and government from religion. He did not view the state as having a moral end and purpose but gave importance to man’s worldly life. He said politics is an independent activity with its own principles and laws.

**4. A prince must combine the qualities of a lion and a fox:** Machiavelli advised the prince he should imitate the qualities of fox and lion. The imitation of the fox (cunningness, foresight) will enable him to visualize his goal and means to achieve it. The imitation of the lion will give him necessary strength and force to achieve that goal. A fox might have shrewdness and foresight, but he is powerless without necessary force of a lion. Similarly a lion without shrewdness and prudence of a fox would be reckless. Hence a ruler who wants to be very successful must combine in himself the qualities of both fox and lion. He must possess bravery of lion and cunningness of fox, physical force is necessary when there is anarchy and indiscipline. But law and morality is essential to check selfishness of people and to generate civic virtues.

5. **Use double standard of politics:** One for the ruler and another for his subjects. He said morality is not necessary for the ruler. He is creator of law and morality hence price is above the both. A ruler has primary duty of preserving the state. For this purpose he may use instruments of lie, conspiracy, killings and massacre etc. Because absolute morality is neither possible nor desirable in politics. He insisted that morality is essential for people. Only moral citizens willingly obey laws of the state and sacrifice their lives for their nation. It cultivates civic sense and patriotic spirit. Thus Machiavelli prescribes double standard of morality.

6. **Favoured despotic ruler:** Machiavelli argues that the princes and ordinary people feel good about being loved. However, in Machiavelli's terms, love does not always work because the behaviour of those in love relationships is usually but not always predictable. Fear, by contrast, never fails: 'If you have them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow.' Therefore it is an axiom in politics that it is better for a prince to be hated and feared than to be loved only. According to Machiavelli foundation of Government is the reason of state. Government is not created by God to punish men for their sin. Machiavelli says that the government is founded upon the weakness and insufficient capacity of men. If in a society men are corrupt and selfish and the law is powerless, then normal administration is not possible at all. A superior power is essential for bringing the society into order. The government with absolute power stop the excessive desires and control the behaviour of the people.

7. **Maintain strong army:** He recommends constant military preparedness for the preservation of the state. Prince should organize a strong army to meet any internal and external threat to his power. Strong and regular army is must for a state for its own defence. The state tries to build up its own independent, regular and faithful army. Such an army should consist of its own citizens and be prepared not only to defend its national borders but also to expand. The citizens must be trained for army service and there should be compulsory military training for all able persons.

8. **Human nature is low and ungrateful, so prince must consider this nature of man:** According to Machiavelli rational analysis of politics must begin with an account of human nature, Machiavelli viewed the activities of man with special interest and explained human nature. He viewed men to be a compound of weakness, ungrateful, fear, lust for



power and assumed all men are bad. Prominent traits of human nature are (1) there is no limit to human desires. He is selfish and aggressive. Hence there is strife and competition. (2) The masses are interested in security. They realize that only laws of the state can ensure security hence they co-operate with the state and obey the laws. Hence a ruler who wants to be successful must ensure security of life and protection of people. (3) People must be restrained by force because force breeds fear. Only force and repression can keep control and check on the evil tendencies in man. Hence the method of government should be force and not persuasion. (4) By nature every human being is ambitious and remains unsatisfied. No human being is content with his position. He is always after domination. The enmities and wars are the outcome of this desire. Thus human nature is selfish, power hungry, quarrelsome and guided by materialistic considerations. Only fear of punishment is a powerful bond and it never fails.

**9. Should try to win popularity of his people:** Prince shall try to win popularity, goodwill and affection of his people. He shall keep his subjects materially contented by not taxing them. The prince shall not interfere in age old customs and traditions of his people because by nature people are conservative. He shall not have craving for wealth and women of his own subjects. He shall keep a watchful eye on his dissidents.

**10. A prince must have council of wise men and not of flatterers:** Powerful government and internal unity are essential for any state. A prince has to select his officers and advisers carefully, unhesitatingly purging those who have been disloyal. Prince must choose wise men in his council and shall give them full liberty to speak the truth to him. He must ask them about everything and hear their opinion and afterwards deliberate by himself in his own way.

**11. Separate politics from religion:** Before Machiavelli medieval political philosophers believed that the religion was the basis of the state. But Machiavelli emancipated the state completely from the control of the church. He denied medieval philosophy of religion. He repudiates the theory of Aquinas that man needs the guidance of the divine law. Machiavelli said that only end which man can place before him is the pursuit of his well being in his material values in life. He did not view the as having a moral end and purpose but gave importance to man's worldly life. He believe that politics is an independent activity with its own principles and laws. Moral and religions considerations cannot bind the prince; state

is above and outside the religion. Machiavelli does not ignore religion and morality. In the opening chapter of the *Discourses* he says princes who want to maintain themselves respect all religions preserve the purity of all religions. He said religion is useful only as an organ of the state. He gave only an instrumental value to religion. He advised the ruler that religion play important role in the life of a community. According to him religion is necessary for unity and integrity of the people within the state. Common religion creates a sense of unity among people. Religious rites, beliefs establish social harmony. It also cultivates civic sense and patriotic spirit. Decline of respect for religion among the people is a sign of ruin for the state. He said religion cannot influence politics and the church cannot control the state. In fact the sovereign state enjoys absolute power over all individuals and institutions. As such the church is subordinate to the state. Thus Machiavelli separated religion from politics and paved way for emergence of the secular state. He was not against the religion and morality. He only proposes two different standards of morality and placed the state above morality and religion. According to Machiavelli state is the highest form of social organisation and the most necessary of all institutions. It stands on a wholly different footing and must therefore be judged by different standards. He said politics is an independent activity with its own principles and laws. State is non-religious and secular. It has its own rules of conduct to follow. Machiavelli sanctioned the use of immoral means by the ruler whenever it was necessary to do so to save the state. Thus the separation of politics from ethics is the essence of Machiavellian.

**12. Prince must be free from emotions:** Prince should exploit emotions of his people for the purpose of the state. He should be cool, calculating and opportunist. His suggestion is that a prince must know how to act as a beast. Machiavelli caution the prince against excessive generosity, strictness or kindness, and stress the need for moderate behaviour. A prince has to be gentle or severe depending on the situations. His relationship with his subjects is similar to the one between a father and his children. A prince has to be strong, and demonstrate his strength whenever necessary.

**13. Ordered state:** In “The Prince” Machiavelli advocated absolutism and an effective government. This advocacy of absolutism was due to the fact that he had witnessed anarchy, lawlessness, corruption and misrule that prevailed in Italy of his times. He had witnessed how King Charles VIII of France had captured Florence without being offered resistance. Therefore Machiavelli advocated a well-organised, ordered and militarily strong state.

Without a strong state, any country had no hope of survival in international politics. He believed that an ordered state was the only security against forces of external aggression and internal chaos. Princes cannot allow themselves the moral luxury of choice available to their subjects. Thinking the worst the whole time is not something which comes naturally to most men. It has to be learned. Suppose a prince refuses to learn his trade properly. Suppose he insists on conducting himself on the basis of Christian ethics, assuming that men are seldom very good or very bad. Suppose he even goes as far as thinking about his enemies like that. Machiavelli does not say that this is an improper way of conducting princely business in a moral sense; he simply says that it is unsafe. Love your enemies if you will; believe they will keep faith; turn the other cheek if you like, Machiavelli seems to be saying, but don't come complaining to me if you lose your state. Besides, men of sense, if they think at all about so obvious a matter, will naturally want to live in a state well governed by its prince and feared by its neighbours. Nobody wants to live in a state which is weak and vulnerable to military takeover.

### **2.1.5 MACHIAVELLI ON PUBLIC MORALITY**

The novelty in Machiavelli's writing is his attitude towards religion and morality, which distinguished him from all those who preceded him. Throughout the Ancient and Medieval Ages, Politics has been the hand made of ethics or morality. A very lukewarm attempt has been made by Aristotle to separate politics from ethics but he was not fully successful. With the Greek philosopher ultimately the moral consideration weighed heavily because according to them state is essentially a moral institution. It is Machiavelli who for the first time separated politics from ethics and morality. He not only rejects the cultivation of virtues like humility, lowliness and contempt for worldly things on which medieval thinkers laid so much stress and considered pursuit. For Machiavelli, a successful ruler or state is one which will be able to acquire, maintain, consolidate and increase power. The survival and preservation of the commonwealth is his fundamental concern. A state and a ruler has to be judged by an independent criterion, the morality of success, which is protection of citizens, guaranteeing their well-being, expansion of territory and a zealous safeguarding of national interest. Politics is ultimately and finally a constant struggle for power and domination, which has to be judged by its own rules and norms so that states survive. Machiavelli point out that in writing about the rules of politics, he is projecting the real truth and not leaving anything to imagination.

Machiavelli does not condone the use of immoral or wicked ways. To him, the end is important, which can be attained by any means. He contends that a ruler need not always adhere to conventional morality; rather he shall be willing to do so. He also insists that a private individual will have to display impeccable moral values of the highest order. For Machiavelli, the home and family nurture these moral values, teaching the individual the virtues of independence, simplicity, purity, loyalty and trust. He emphasize that an individual adhere to these values, whereas a statesman can be flexible as far as the conduct of the state affairs is concerned, but not in private dealings.

For Machiavelli, there are two levels of morality or ethics: public and private. The moral worth of one is not inherently superior to the other, but if a conflict arose between the two then the one, which will produce the most practical result, shall take precedence. In practice this meant, if necessary, taking action which is publicly moral and designed to secure the liberty of the state, but, in the short term at the expense of private morality. Machiavelli separated politics from morality by saying that these are two different sciences whose spheres of enquiry are altogether different. Politics deals with the rules of conduct of state, and Morality deals with the rules of conduct of the individuals. Their subject matter is different and like proverbial East and West they never meet nor do they collide or overlap each other. The ruler who for all practical purposes is the state is much above and different from the subjects. While the state has a morality of its own, the morality of success, the private individual is at all times to display qualities that are in consonance with the highest moral standards. Sabine argues that, "Machiavelli proposes two different standards of morality, one for the ruler and the other for the private citizens. The first is judged by the success in keeping and increasing his power, the second by the strength which his conduct imparts to the social group. Since the ruler is outside the group, or at least in very special relation to it, he is above the morality to be enforced within the group. The ruler as the creator of the state is not only outside the law, but if law enacts morals he is outside morality as well. There is no standard to judge his acts except the success of his acts except the success of his political expedients for enlarging and perpetuating the power of his state."

In politics, fair is foul and foul is fair, depending on the circumstances and situations. No general rule is valid, for everything became a matter of political expediency. A Prince has to be compassionate, humane, loyal and honest, while simultaneously willing to use force,

fraud, deception and treachery. Machiavelli argued that political actions are to conform to high moral standards, namely compassion, good faith, trustworthiness and honesty in times of stability. However, in times of strife, chaos and disorder, principled politics will spell ruin. He asserts that power is anything but divine, and to think that states came into existence by the will of the god is absurd. Machiavelli observes that “I will even venture to say that (the virtues) damage a prince who possess them and always observes them, but if he seems to have them they are useful. I mean that he should seem compassionate, trustworthy, humane, honest and religious, and actually be so; but yet he should have his mind so trained that, when it is necessary not to practice these virtues, he can change to the opposite and do it skilfully. It is to be understood that a prince, especially a new prince, cannot observe all the things because of which men are considered good, because he is often obliged, if he wishes to maintain his government, to act contrary to faith, contrary to charity, contrary to humanity, contrary to religion. It is therefore necessary that he have a mind capable of turning in whatever direction the winds of fortune and the variations of affairs require, and that he should not depart from what is morally right, if he can observe it, but he should know how to adopt what is bad, when he is obliged to”. While Machiavelli considers force as the prime factor for the regulation of the affairs of the state, he also emphasises the importance of religion and favours the use of church as an instrument for creating national customs and habits of thought which will help in preserving peace and order in the society. Machiavelli is categorical that public spirit is crucial to the stability of the state. One of the key determinants of public spirit is religion, and the other, liberty. He advised the Prince to do anything and everything possible to cultivate belief in religion, even if the ruler in his personal capacity is irreligious or have very little faith in religion. Machiavelli separated religion from politics and set the tone for one of the main themes of modern times, namely secularization of thought and life.

The distinction between the Rules of conduct of individuals and the ruler is permissible only on one condition. The ruler whether in a corrupt state or in a free state must identify his interests with those of the subjects. A prince cannot hope to be the successful unless he regards the interests of the subjects as his own. The chief interest of a prince is public welfare. There is no other chance of stability or order. Reasons of state justify every degree of treachery and brutality. Even murder, deceit and assault are permissible if the end is of course, to safeguard the interest of the state. In *Discourses* he writes, “when the

safety of our country is absolutely at stake there need be no questions of what is just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or disgraceful but all other considerations set aside, that course alone is to be taken which may save our country and maintain its liberty”. But Machiavelli makes it more than clear that morality of politics cannot be that of private life. Murder or breach of faith among individual members of society infringes the life and security of other fellow beings. Machiavelli expects individual to keep faith and act in upright manner. However he permits the prince to violate these principles in the interest of the state. He says, “a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men are entirely good, this prospect will not held, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are bound to observe it with them; and no prince is ever at a loss for plausible reasons to cloak a breach of faith.”

Unlike traditional political theory, which contends that ethical conduct is desirable for it will bring about moral elevation, Machiavelli is too realistic to overlook the irony of the political situation. In a fragmented world, politics has to be linked with necessities, meaning those factors that compelled individuals to find ingenious solutions. Machiavelli is aware that civilization and a good society meant high moral standards. But he is realistic enough to accept that a society’s moral fabric is made or destroyed by its people. His amorality implied that in specific situations, a ruler will have to resort to tactics that are not considered strictly moral. Therefore Machiavelli talked not only of the science, but also of the art of politics. Politics is no longer a means to higher goals like justice or truth, but an end in itself. The criterion of a successful state is efficiency and not legitimacy, so his art of politics applied to both legal and illegal states. He takes it for granted that states, like individuals, will differ widely in nature. He also highlighted that in times of relatively stable social order, “all moral questions can be raised from within the context of the norms which the community shares; in periods of instability it is these norms themselves which are questioned and tested against the criteria of human desires and needs.”

Machiavelli has been severely condemned for open advocacy of immorality in public life. But if we analyse his views more closely we will find that he is neither moral nor immoral but unmoral. As Prof Maxey has said “in Machiavelli’s eye the state knows no ethics. What it does is neither ethical nor unethical but entirely non ethical. It is of the neuter gender so far as right and wrong are concerned.” Sabine and Dunning also express similar

views. According to Maxey, “In the realm of statecraft and in the affairs of government there is but one criterion by which to judge the character of an action and that is by its results. If the results are good the action cannot be called wrong, nor is it necessarily right; the safe thing to do is to call it expedient; and if the results are bad, to say the action was inexpedient.” Moralists are essentially wrong in putting the individual and state at par. They want the state to hold on to the same ethical standards as the private individual. They are two different entities for which two different sets of rules of conduct are applicable. Machiavelli is like a physician of the state. The physician does not bother about the ethics of man. He wants to set the body right.

#### **2.1.6 SUMMING UP**

After going through this lesson you can very well understand how controversial Machiavelli is. He received both admiration and hostility simultaneously for the ideas he advanced. This was partly due to a misunderstanding of the context in which he wrote his texts and partly due to sheer ignorance about their contents and implications. As L. A. Burd written in the Cambridge Modern History, vol. I, “Living at a time when the old political order in Europe was collapsing and new problems both in state and in society were arising with dazzling rapidity, he endeavoured to interpret the logical meaning of events, to forecast the inevitable issues, and to elicit and formulate the rules which, destined henceforth to dominate political action, were then taking shape among the fresh-forming conditions of national life”.

Niccolo Machiavelli commanded a sinister reputation as no other thinker in the history of political theory. “The murderous Machiavel” as William Shakespeare called him. The term “Machiavellianism” symbolised villainy. The initial reaction to Machiavelli’s writings was one of shock, and he himself was denounced as an inventor of the devil. “A damned Machiavel”, commented Shakespeare, “holds the candle to the devil himself”, referring to the devil as “Old Nick” after Machiavelli’s first name. This was because Machiavelli sanctioned the use of deception, cruelty, force, violence and the like for achieving the desired political ends.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli had his share of admirers. Spinoza regarded him as a friend of the people for having exposed the Prince. Montesquieu regarded him as a lover of liberty, an image that emerged in the Discourses and not from the Prince. He separated Machiavelli

from Machiavellianism and described him as a pioneer in political sociology. As a disciple of Montesquieu, Rousseau projected Machiavelli as Republican, a satirist of tyranny and described him as a good citizen and an honourable man. For the Enlightenment philosophers, Machiavelli heralded in a new era. He was a historian who laid the foundations of a new science of politics by integrating contemporary history with ancient past. They praised Machiavelli for his realism and pragmatism and the fact that he wrote about human nature, the nature of political society and its actual operations, with a concern about how things were, rather than how they ought be. As Lerner says “The whole drift of this work is towards a political realism, unknown to the formal writings of his time”.

Machiavelli underlined the importance of politics as a public responsibility and the need for rulers and maxims distinct from those applicable in the private sphere. More than anybody else, he emphasised the need to judge politics by a purely political criterion, rendering moral platitudes obsolete and irrelevant. While the Prince advised the ruler the ways and means to seize and keep power, the Discourses gave instructions on the methods by which a new revolutionary regime could stay in power with the help of people’s participation and a philosopher prince.

For Machiavelli, success was the yardstick to measure and judge political activities, and assess achievements in light of the initial promise. This enabled him not only to be dispassionate in his study of political power shorn of its religious and moral orientations, but also to enquire into the secular origins of political authority and the state. The refreshing aspect of his writings was that they were neither speculative nor abstract. He represented the dawn of a new age which rejected idealisation and insisted on the need to grasp the realities of politics. He was the first to grasp the tone of these changes, initiates a scientific study of politics, and hence was honoured with the title of being the “first modern political theorist and scientist”.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**

**Course Title: Western Political Thought**

**Unit – II: Early Modern Thinkers**

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**2.2 HOBBS' LEVIATHAN: THEORY OF STATE,  
KNOWLEDGE, INDIVIDUALISM AND ABSOLUTISM**

**- Rajnish Saryal**

**STRUCTURE**

2.2.0 Objectives

2.2.1 Introduction

2.2.2 Hobbes Philosophy/Knowledge

2.2.2.1 Analysis of Human Nature

2.2.3 State of Nature

2.2.4 The Law of Nature

2.2.5 Social Contract and Theory of State

2.2.5.1 Attributes of Sovereignty

2.2.6 Individualism and Absolutism in Hobbes's Political Thought

2.2.7 Summing Up

**2.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to:**

- know important aspects related to Hobbes Philosophy/knowledge;
- acquainted with Hobbes views on Human Nature and State of Nature
- understand the Law of Nature and Social Contract
- comprehend the attributes of Sovereignty

### 2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Hobbes was born prematurely in 1588. He survived all the vicissitudes of seventeenth-century English politics to die in his bed at the age of ninety-one in 1679. He was not born to power or wealth or influence: the son of a disgraced village vicar, he was lucky that his uncle was wealthy enough to provide for his education and that his intellectual talents were soon recognized and developed (through thorough training in the classics of Latin and Greek). Those intellectual abilities, and his uncle's support, brought him to university at Oxford. He was educated at Oxford who found the prevailing Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy little to his taste. He was recommended as tutor to the Cavendish who became the second Duke of Devonshire. He spent most of his life in the houses of noblemen. He discovered the new science on the Grand Tour in 1610, and in the early 1620s he became the friend and amanuensis of Francis Bacon. Hobbes was a staunch Royalist. By 1641, when he fled to France to escape the coming Civil War, he had met Galileo and many of the most noted scientists and men of letters of his day.

Hobbes spent some of his time in exile in France (1641–51) as mathematics tutor to the future Charles II. He also worked on his most celebrated work *Leviathan*, which was published in London on Hobbes's return to England to make his peace with the Commonwealth. There is some mystery about why he actually came back when he did, though the probability is a combination of homesickness and his growing reputation in *émigré* circles for religious unorthodoxy, if not downright atheism. Charles II, in his good-natured way, always retained a soft spot for Hobbes. He was invited back to Court after the Restoration and given a royal pension of £100 a year.

Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679, lived during the most crucial period of early modern England's history: the English Civil War, waged from 1642-1648. To describe this conflict in the most general of terms, it was a clash between the King and his supporters, the Monarchists, who preferred the traditional authority of a monarch, and the Parliamentarians, most notably led by Oliver Cromwell, who demanded more power for the quasi-democratic institution of Parliament. Hobbes represents a compromise between these two factions. On the one hand he rejects the theory of the Divine Right of Kings, which is most eloquently expressed by Robert Filmer in his *Patriarcha or the Natural Power of Kings*. Filmer's view held that a king's authority was invested in him (or, presumably, her) by God, that

such authority was absolute, and therefore that the basis of political obligation lay in our obligation to obey God absolutely. According to this view, then, political obligation is subsumed under religious obligation. On the other hand, Hobbes also rejects the early democratic view, taken up by the Parliamentarians, that power ought to be shared between Parliament and the King. In rejecting both these views, Hobbes occupies the ground of one who is both radical and conservative. He argues, radically for his times, that political authority and obligation are based on the individual self-interests of members of society who are understood to be equal to one another, with no single individual invested with any essential authority to rule over the rest, while at the same time maintaining the conservative position that the monarch, which he called the Sovereign, must be ceded absolute authority if society is to survive.

Although social and political turmoil affected Hobbes's life and shaped his thought, it never hampered his intellectual development. His early position as a tutor gave him the scope to read, write and publish (a brilliant translation of the Greek writer Thucydides appeared in 1629), and brought him into contact with notable English intellectuals such as Francis Bacon. His self-imposed exile in France, along with his emerging reputation as a scientist and thinker, brought him into contact with major European intellectual figures of his time, leading to exchange and controversy with figures such as Descartes, Mersenne and Gassendi. Intensely disputatious, Hobbes repeatedly embroiled himself in prolonged arguments with clerics, mathematicians, scientists and philosophers – sometimes to the cost of his intellectual reputation. (For instance, he argued repeatedly that it is possible to “square the circle” – no accident that the phrase is now proverbial for a problem that cannot be solved!) His writing was as undaunted by age and ill health as it was by the events of his times. Though his health slowly failed – from about sixty, he began to suffer “shaking palsy,” probably Parkinson's disease, which steadily worsened – even in his eighties he continued to dictate his thoughts to a secretary, and to defend his quarter in various controversies.

Hobbes gained a reputation in many fields. He was known as a scientist (especially in optics), as a mathematician (especially in geometry), as a translator of the classics, as a writer on law, as a disputant in metaphysics and epistemology; not least, he became notorious for his writings and disputes on religious questions. But it is for his writings on morality and politics that he has, rightly, been most remembered. Without these, scholars might remember

Hobbes as an interesting intellectual of the seventeenth century; but few philosophers would even recognize his name.

### **2.2.2 HOBBS' PHILOSOPHY/KNOWLEDGE**

All political philosophy must begin and end with man. The perennial questions for all political theorists are: What is man? What is state? Why should the individual obey the state? Hence all political philosophers have begun the study of the state with the study of man. This is more true of Hobbes as the central pivot around which the whole of his philosophy revolves is the individual.

Hobbes presumes that the motion of particles creates sensation in the human mind. How mechanical laws are able to create sensation, he is not able to explain. So it can be only said that it was a presumption made by him. It is from sensation that all mental phenomenon comes into being. Receptive forces like perception, imagination, memory and prudence and reason are the cumulative results of sensation. There are other and more important forces of brain which Hobbes calls 'Active' forces which includes emotions, passions and desires. According to Hobbes, emotions and passions are natural and inborn and reason is artificial and self-acquired. Hence man is not primarily a creature of reason but of the passions. Hobbes's further assumption is that the motion of particles either aids or retards 'Vitality', the organ for which was the heart rather than the brain. If the 'Vitality' is increased and decreased, two primary types of emotions – desire and aversion respectively – are created. Hobbes derives all complex types of emotions from these two primary types of feelings. The emotions to him will always be paired. What man desire he calls Good (and he will desire only that which will enhance the 'Vitality'), and the pleasure is the moment in his mind which accompanies the desire. What man dislikes (and he will dislike only that which represses the 'Vitality') he calls Evil, and the movement in his mind that accompanies the aversion is called Pain by him. For him all emotions are forms of desire or aversion. For Hobbes the conception of good or bad is not objective or fixed or constant. Rather it is subjective, ever-changing and transient. Human desires continue to change from time to time. There is no final end or goal of life. In the words of Hobbes, "So the end of every man is continued success in obtaining those things which he from time to time desires." And this according to Hobbes is 'Felicity' and the means through which a man can achieve 'Felicity' are 'powers'. Thus life becomes "perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death."

### **2.2.2.1 Analysis of Human Nature**

The Scientific Revolution, with its important new discoveries that the universe could be both described and predicted in accordance with universal laws of nature, greatly influenced Hobbes. He sought to provide a theory of human nature that would parallel the discoveries being made in the sciences of the inanimate universe. His psychological theory is therefore informed by mechanism, the general view that everything in the universe is produced by nothing other than matter in motion. According to Hobbes, this extends to human behaviour. Human macro-behaviour can be aptly described as the effect of certain kinds of micro-behaviour, even though some of this latter behaviour is invisible to us. So, such behaviours as walking, talking, and the like are themselves produced by other actions inside of us. And these other actions are themselves caused by the interaction of our bodies with other bodies, human or otherwise, which create in us certain chains of causes and effects, and which eventually give rise to the human behaviour that we can plainly observe. We, including all of our actions and choices, are then, according to this view, as explainable in terms of universal laws of nature as are the motions of heavenly bodies. The gradual disintegration of memory, for example, can be explained by inertia. As we are presented with ever more sensory information, the residue of earlier impressions ‘slows down’ over time. From Hobbes’ point of view, we are essentially very complicated organic machines, responding to the stimuli of the world mechanistically and in accordance with universal laws of human nature.

In Hobbes’ view, this mechanistic quality of human psychology implies the subjective nature of normative claims. ‘Love’ and ‘hate’, for instance, are just words we use to describe the things we are drawn to and repelled by, respectively. So, too, the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’ have no meaning other than to describe our appetites and aversions. Moral terms do not, therefore, describe some objective state of affairs, but are rather reflections of individual tastes and preferences.

In addition to Subjectivism, Hobbes also infers from his mechanistic theory of human nature that humans are necessarily and exclusively self-interested. All men pursue only what they perceive to be in their own individually considered best interests – they respond mechanistically by being drawn to that which they desire and repelled by that to which they are averse. This is a universal claim: it is meant to cover all human actions under all circumstances – in society or out of it, with regard to strangers and friends alike, with

regard to small ends and the most generalized of human desires, such as the desire for power and status. Everything we do is motivated solely by the desire to better our own situations, and satisfy as many of our own, individually considered desires as possible. We are infinitely appetitive and only genuinely concerned with our own selves. According to Hobbes, even the reason that adults care for small children can be explicated in terms of the adults' own self-interest (he claims that in saving an infant by caring for it, we become the recipient of a strong sense of obligation in one who has been helped to survive rather than allowed to die).

In addition to being exclusively self-interested, Hobbes also argues that human beings are reasonable. They have in them the rational capacity to pursue their desires as efficiently and maximally as possible. Their reason does not, given the subjective nature of value, evaluate their given ends, rather it merely acts as "Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired". Rationality is purely instrumental. It can add and subtract, and compare sums one to another, and thereby endows us with the capacity to formulate the best means to whatever ends we might happen to have.

### **2.2.3 STATE OF NATURE**

From these premises of human nature, Hobbes goes on to construct a provocative and compelling argument for why we ought to be willing to submit ourselves to political authority. He does this by imagining persons in a situation prior to the establishment of society, the State of Nature.

According to Hobbes, the justification for political obligation is this: given that men are naturally self-interested, yet they are rational, they will choose to submit to the authority of a Sovereign in order to be able to live in a civil society, which is conducive to their own interests. Hobbes argues for this by imagining men in their natural state, or in other words, the State of Nature. In the State of Nature, which is purely hypothetical according to Hobbes, men are naturally and exclusively self-interested, they are more or less equal to one another, (even the strongest man can be killed in his sleep), there are limited resources, and yet there is no power able to force men to cooperate. Given these conditions in the State of Nature, Hobbes concludes that the State of Nature would be unbearably brutal. In the State of Nature, every person is always in fear of losing his life to another. They have no capacity to ensure the long-term satisfaction of their needs or desires. No long-term or

complex cooperation is possible because the State of Nature can be aptly described as a state of utter distrust. Given Hobbes' reasonable assumption that most people want first and foremost to avoid their own deaths, he concludes that the State of Nature is the worst possible situation in which men can find themselves. It is the state of perpetual and unavoidable war.

According to Hobbes this condition of man in the state of nature is primarily because of the lack of overarching political authority. The state of nature is "natural" in one specific sense only. For Hobbes political authority is *artificial*: in the "natural" condition human beings lack government, which is an authority created by men. What is Hobbes's reasoning here? He claims that the only authority that naturally exists among human beings is that of a mother over her child, because the child is so very much weaker than the mother (and indebted to her for its survival). Among adult human beings this is invariably not the case. Hobbes concedes an obvious objection, admitting that some of us are much stronger than others. And although he's very sarcastic about the idea that some are wiser than others, he doesn't have much difficulty with the idea that some are fools and others are dangerously cunning. Nonetheless, it's almost invariably true that *every human being is capable of killing any other*. Even the strongest must sleep; even the weakest might persuade others to help him kill another. Because adults are "equal" in this capacity to threaten one another's lives, Hobbes claims there is no natural source of authority to order their lives together. (He is strongly opposing arguments that established monarchs have a natural or God-given right to rule over us.)

In the Hobbesian state of nature people have a right to do whatever they think that will ensure their self-preservation. The worst that can happen to them in the state of nature is violent death at the hands of others. If they have any rights at all, if nature has given them any rights whatsoever, then the first is surely this: the right to prevent violent death befalling them. But Hobbes says more than this, and it is this point that makes his argument so powerful. People do not just have a right to ensure their self-preservation: they each have a right *to judge* what will ensure their self-preservation. And this is where Hobbes's picture of humankind becomes important. Hobbes has given us good reasons to think that human beings rarely judge wisely. Yet in the state of nature no one is in a position to successfully define what is good judgment. If *one judge* that killing other is a sensible or even necessary move to safeguard one's life, then – in Hobbes's state of nature – one has a right to kill

other. Others might judge the matter differently, of course. Because we're all insecure, because trust is more-or-less absent, there's little chance of our sorting out misunderstandings peacefully, nor can we rely on some (trusted) third party to decide whose judgment is right. We all have to be judges in our own causes, and the stakes are very high indeed: life or death.

For this reason Hobbes makes very bold claims that sound totally amoral. "To this war of every man against every man," he says, "this also is consequent [i.e., it follows]: that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place [in the state of nature]." He further argues in the *Leviathan* that in the state of nature we each have a right to all things, "even to one another's body". Hobbes is dramatizing his point, but the core is defensible. If I judge that I need such and such – an object, another person's labour, another person's death – to ensure my continued existence, then in the state of nature, there is no agreed authority to decide whether I'm right or wrong. For Hobbes human beings who lack some shared authority, as is the case in the state of nature, are almost certain to fall into dangerous and deadly conflict.

In nut shell in the state of nature there is basic equality of power and everyone thinks to himself that he is capable of getting whatever he wants. Furthermore, since everyone has the same needs for the same resources, but those resources are scarce, combined with the fact that people primarily act only out of self-interest, this would all lead to the competition of every human against every other for the resources that they want to acquire.

Thus, Hobbes's conclusion is that, in the state of nature (pre-government), humans would be in a constant state of war and quarrel with one another—everyone competing and fighting for the world's resources, which are not abundant enough for everyone to have everything that they desire. This natural state of man is one where people live in "continual fear and danger of violent death" and life itself is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

#### **2.2.4 THE LAW OF NATURE**

The situation is not, however, hopeless because men are reasonable, they can see their way out of such a state by recognizing the laws of nature, which show them the means by which to escape the State of Nature and create a civil society. But how men became reasonable all of a sudden following the dictates of law of nature needs a bit detail discussion.



Hobbes thinks the state of nature is something we ought to avoid, at any cost except our own self-preservation (this being our “right of nature,” as we saw above). But what sort of “ought” is this? There are two basic ways of interpreting Hobbes here. It might be a counsel of prudence: avoid the state of nature, if you’re concerned to avoid violent death. In this case Hobbes’s advice only applies to us (i) if we agree that violent death is what we should fear most and should therefore avoid; and (ii) if we agree with Hobbes that only an unaccountable sovereign stands between human beings and the state of nature. This line of thought fits well with an egoistic (self-interest) reading of Hobbes, but we’ll see that it faces serious problems.

The other way of interpreting Hobbes is not without problems either. This takes Hobbes to be saying that we ought, morally speaking, to avoid the state of nature. We have a duty to do what we can to avoid this situation arising, and a duty to end it, if at all possible. Hobbes often makes his view clear, that we have such moral obligations. But then two difficult questions arise: Why these obligations? And why are they obligatory?

Hobbes frames the issues in terms of an older vocabulary, using the idea of natural law that many ancient and medieval philosophers had relied on. Like them, he thinks that human reason can discern some eternal principles to govern our conduct. These principles are independent of (though also complementary to) whatever moral instruction we might get from God or religion. In other words, they are laws given by nature rather than revealed by God. But Hobbes makes radical changes to the content of these so-called laws of nature. In particular, he doesn’t think that natural law provides any scope whatsoever to criticize or disobey the actual laws made by a government. He thus disagrees with those Protestants who thought that religious conscience might sanction disobedience of “immoral” laws, and with Catholics who thought that the commandments of the Pope have primacy over those of national political authorities.

Although he sets out nineteen laws of nature, it is the first two that are politically crucial. A third, that stresses the important of keeping to contracts we have entered into, is important in Hobbes’s moral justifications of obedience to the sovereign. (The remaining sixteen can be quite simply encapsulated in the formula, “do as you would be done by.” While the details are important for scholars of Hobbes, they do not affect the overall theory and will be ignored here.)

The first law reads as follows:

“Every man ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it, and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war.” (Leviathan, xiv.4)

This repeats the points we have already seen about our “right of nature,” so long as peace does not appear to be a realistic prospect. The second law of nature is more complicated:

“That a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.” (Leviathan, xiv.5)

What Hobbes tries to tackle here is the transition from the state of nature to civil society. But how he does this is misleading and has generated much confusion and disagreement. The way that Hobbes describes this second law of nature makes it look as if we should all put down our weapons, give up (much of) our “right of nature,” and jointly authorize a sovereign who will tell us what is permitted and punish us if we don’t obey. The terms of the contract, according to Hobbes reads, “I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner . . .”

But the problem is obvious. If the state of nature is anything like as bad as Hobbes has argued, then there’s just no way people could ever make an agreement like this or put it into practice.

At the end of Leviathan, Hobbes seems to concede this point, saying “there is scarce a commonwealth in the world whose beginnings can in conscience be justified”. That is: governments have invariably been foisted upon people by force and fraud, not by collective agreement. But Hobbes means to defend every existing government that is powerful enough to secure peace among its subjects – not just a mythical government that’s been created by a peaceful contract out of a state of nature. His basic claim is that we should behave as if we had voluntarily entered into such a contract with everyone else in our society – everyone else, that is, except the sovereign authority.

### 2.2.5 SOCIAL CONTRACT AND THEORY OF STATE

In Hobbes's social contract, everyone except the person or group who will wield sovereign power lays down their "right to all things." They agree to limit drastically their right of nature, retaining only a right to defend their lives in case of immediate threat. (How limited this right of nature becomes in civil society has caused much dispute, because deciding what is an immediate threat is a question of judgment. It certainly permits us to fight back if the sovereign tries to kill us. But what if the sovereign conscripts us as soldiers? What if the sovereign looks weak and we doubt whether he can continue to secure peace...?) The sovereign, however, retains his (or her, or their) right of nature, which we have seen is effectively a right to all things – to decide what everyone else should do, to decide the rules of property, to judge disputes and so on. Hobbes concedes that there are moral limits on what sovereigns should do (God might call a sovereign to account). However, since in any case of dispute the sovereign is the only rightful judge – on this earth, that is – those moral limits make no practical difference. In every moral and political matter, the decisive question for Hobbes is always: who is to judge? As we have seen, in the state of nature, each of us is judge in our own cause, part of the reason why Hobbes thinks it is inevitably a state of war. Once civil society exists, the only rightful judge is the sovereign.

What we have discussed above can be recapitulated in simple words. For Hobbes, the first and most important law of nature commands that each man be willing to pursue peace when others are willing to do the same, all the while retaining the right to continue to pursue war when others do not pursue peace. Being reasonable, and recognizing the rationality of this basic precept of reason, men can be expected to construct a Social Contract that will afford them a life other than that available to them in the State of Nature. This contract is constituted by two distinguishable contracts. First, they must agree to establish society by collectively and reciprocally renouncing the rights they had against one another in the State of Nature. Second, they must imbue some one person or assembly of persons with the authority and power to enforce the initial contract. In other words, to ensure their escape from the State of Nature, they must both agree to live together under common laws, and create an *enforcement mechanism* for the social contract and the laws that constitute it.

According to Hobbes, since the sovereign is invested with the authority and power to mete out punishments for breaches of the contract which are worse than not being able to

act as one pleases, men have good, albeit self-interested, reason to adjust themselves to the artifice of morality in general, and justice in particular. Society becomes possible because, whereas in the State of Nature there was no power able to “overawe them all”, now there is an artificially and conventionally superior and more powerful person who can force men to cooperate. While living under the authority of a Sovereign can be harsh (Hobbes argues that because men’s passions can be expected to overwhelm their reason, the Sovereign must have absolute authority in order for the contract to be successful) it is at least better than living in the State of Nature. And, no matter how much we may object to how poorly a Sovereign manages the affairs of the state and regulates our own lives, we are never justified in resisting his power because it is the only thing which stands between us and what we most want to avoid, the State of Nature.

According to this argument, morality, politics, society, and everything that comes along with it, all of which Hobbes calls ‘commodious living’ are purely conventional. Prior to the establishment of the basic social contract, according to which men agree to live together and the contract to embody a Sovereign with absolute authority, nothing is immoral or unjust – anything goes. After these contracts are established, however, then society becomes possible, and people can be expected to keep their promises, cooperate with one another, and so on. The Social Contract is the most fundamental source of all that is good and that which we depend upon to live well. Our choice is either to abide by the terms of the contract, or return to the State of Nature, which Hobbes argues no reasonable person could possibly prefer.

#### **2.2.5.1 Attributes of Sovereignty**

Sovereignty’s attributes are what one would expect from a thinker who believes that the creation of sovereignty is an all-or-nothing act. Either you choose to live under a Sovereign or you don’t, and there is no point in quibbling about the Sovereign’s powers: either he has them all, or men will find themselves back in the State of Nature almost before they know it. It should again be noticed that Hobbes derives all the attributes of sovereignty from the original case of the making of sovereignty by Institution. The eleven attributes of sovereignty which Hobbes lists would be the attributes of Sovereignty which rational men in the State of Nature would voluntarily give to their Sovereign, and in any case they would be attributes which any absolute Sovereign would take for himself if he were ever in a position to do so.

Hobbes describes the attributes of sovereignty by Institution and then goes on to say that, the attributes of sovereignty being what they are, the Sovereign by acquisition would naturally have them too. Hobbes knows that the attributes of Sovereignty claimed by contemporary kings were capable of arousing furious resentments in their more liberty-loving subjects. Hobbes rubs salt into their wounds by arguing that, if these liberty-loving subjects thought about the matter clearly, they would set up a Sovereign by their own free will whose attributes would be much more absolutist than the claims of even the most absolute of contemporary kings. Of course, Hobbes's argument about the attributes of sovereignty works just as well, or even better, for the case of a Civil Society which has dissolved into chaos and is looking for ways to build itself up again. The gall for the liberty-lovers who would put constraints on the exercise of sovereignty is to be found in Hobbes's argument that either the constrainers would have to change their minds and admit that sovereignty by its very nature was absolute, or they would have to admit that they were being muddle-headed.

1. The first attribute of sovereignty is that the contract which sets it up repudiates all previous contracts. This must obviously be true of the original contract by which men got themselves out of the State of Nature. Contracts made in the State of Nature would have been invalid anyway, because a large part of what made the State of Nature so unbearable was that men would be unlikely to trust each other enough in the absence of a law-enforcing agency to make contracts in the first place. The case of a Civil Society breaking down and looking for ways to reconstitute itself is slightly different because there is always the possibility that men, or groups of men, might think that they had made a prior agreement with God, or they might be inclined to think that they could still make agreements with God after sovereignty had been re-created. Contracts like these could be very troublesome to a Sovereign, because contracts with God Himself would naturally take precedence over contracts men made with their fellows to create earthly sovereignty. Hobbes obviously has in mind here those post- Reformation covenants which peoples made with God by promising to live in good and godly commonwealths in the future. Hobbes is scathing about contracts with God which implicitly or explicitly put limits on the Sovereign's power. Contracts like these are really useless, because they have no force unless there is some power on earth to

judge when they have been broken. That judge could only be the Sovereign because, as we have seen, to set up another judge in a Civil Society to judge the Sovereign's actions would be tantamount to setting up another Sovereign. When that happens a Civil Society is already on the way to civil war, the first stage on the slippery slope back down to the State of Nature which nobody in his right mind wants. Besides, any covenants with God, supposing there to be any, would have to be made by the Sovereign himself, not by his subjects. A people only has a will through its representative, and that representative by definition is the Sovereign. In the social contract, the contracting parties agree among themselves to transfer their troublesome Right of Nature to the Sovereign, and it is this which creates the sovereign authority. The contracting people authorise all that the Sovereign does. That would include any contracts made by the Sovereign with God, and the Sovereign would not even be obliged to tell his subjects what the terms of that contract with God actually were. Any mediation with God's person must therefore be through the Sovereign, so what good would that do for the liberty-lovers keen to put restraints on the sovereign power? Besides, there is always the possibility that those who claim to have made covenants with God are simply lying. We only have their word for it that God agreed to keep his side of the bargain. And how do we know that God even listened?

2. The second attribute of sovereignty is that the Sovereign can never forfeit his right to it. This follows from the terms of social contract itself, and is therefore true by definition. By transferring their Right of Nature to a Sovereign who is not party to the contract, men make the Sovereign their agent-at-large in the world. They authorise what the Sovereign does. It is the nature of agency that what my agent does, I do. What my agent does, he does in my name. Because he acts with my authority, I and not he is responsible for his actions. Not only can the Sovereign not be said to have forfeited his sovereignty by breaking the terms of an original contract to which he was not party, but also he can never be accused of acting wilfully against my own will because he acts with my authority. *His will is my will.* To challenge him is to challenge myself, a self-accusation which has no more force than if I were to accuse myself of breaking an agreement with myself to keep a New Year's resolution. Judging one's own commands to oneself is a nonsense, or

at best a metaphor. One can only punish oneself by agreeing with oneself to be punished. The same would be the case with a Sovereign. Because the Sovereign's will is my will, I would in effect be accusing myself, and because I have transferred that will, in so far as I am able, to the Sovereign, that would require the Sovereign to accuse himself, and of course he would always let himself off lightly. Being a rational egotist, the Sovereign would always judge in his own favour in his own cause. Of course, there is still the possibility of setting up a mechanism for judging the Sovereign, but Hobbes has already hammered home the obvious point that if the right to judgement is disputed 'it returns therefore to the sword again, and every man recovereth the right of Protecting himself by his own strength'. Multiplying judges is the same as multiplying sovereigns. The consequence is civil war and eventually a return to the State of Nature.

3. Hobbes thinks that it is sufficient that a majority should agree to the transfer of the Right of Nature to the Sovereign for the social contract to be valid. His reasons for thinking this are simple. Hobbes has in mind the possibility that when the original contract was made by Institution to get out of the State of Nature, some men might have found its terms too hard to swallow and so they dissented. Hobbes thinks that that would not matter provided only that a majority agreed. He argues that by coming together to consider making a social contract, potential dissenters tacitly consented to be bound by the majority. But suppose they refused to recognise that. The dissenters, not being party to the contract, would remain in the State of Nature. The chosen Sovereign, who is also not party to the contract, remains in the State of Nature too. He may therefore exercise his Right of Nature on the dissenters, and we already know that the Right of Nature is unlimited. The Sovereign could therefore compel the dissenters to come into Civil Society by agreeing among themselves to recognise him as Sovereign and authorise all he does, or he could kill them if they made him feel insecure. It is worth noting here that the condition of the State of Nature is not always the same. In the original State of Nature, men only had their roughly equal fellow men to contend with, but those who choose to remain in the State of Nature while others choose to enter Civil Society with a Sovereign find themselves in an even more perilous position than the original State of Nature where no sovereigns existed. A Sovereign with the sword in his hand

would be a much more dangerous adversary than one of those roughly equal men likely to be encountered in the original State of Nature. A single individual in the State of Nature would have no chance at all of winning a trial of strength with a Sovereign. That individual would have to lie very low, living furtively and fearfully to such a degree that it would always make sense for him to come into Civil Society, and this would apply to everyone else who was in the same position. Straightforward prudence is a more than sufficient motive for original non-joiners to come into Civil Society on the same all-or-nothing terms which the other joiners originally agreed to.

4. Hobbes knows very well that, human nature being what he thinks it is, it is a certainty that men will be dissatisfied from time to time with the government which their Sovereign provides. Being the rational egotists that Hobbes thinks they are, men will be especially prone to complain about government as it affects them as individuals. Having a certain *amour propre*, men will be inclined to believe that they suffer injuries at the Sovereign's hands. These injuries could be real or imagined, but injuries they would certainly appear to be. Hobbes argues that the Sovereign, despite appearances, is incapable of injuring anybody. How can this be? Hobbes makes a crucial distinction between what he calls Iniquity and what he calls Injury. Iniquity is ordinary human wickedness and it is the same in Civil Society as it is in the State of Nature. Hobbes says that the State of Nature has a Law of Nature to govern it, and that Law of Nature is also God's command. Coming into Civil Society cannot abrogate God's commands, which never alter, so the Sovereign, being in himself a man like any other, can certainly act wickedly towards at least some of his subjects on the ages-old principle *ira principis mors est* (the prince's wrath is death). (There would in fact be strict self-limitations on the wicked acts of a rational prince.) Hobbes insists that to call acts of sovereign wickedness 'injuries' is to make a conceptual mistake. Injuries are literally actions which are not lawful. The Latin root of the word tells us that. Injuries are therefore defined by the positive law of a Civil Society, and are punished through the ordinary machinery of justice which is a Civil Society's distinguishing characteristic. But who can judge the Sovereign? The law is his command, so how can he be self-commanded? Of course, he has the Law of Nature to guide him in his actions, and of course a



prudent and pious Sovereign would be foolish not to listen to God, but earthly judgement is another matter. The idea of justice and injustice can have its place only in a Civil Society where the Sovereign is both law-giver and law-enforcer. To say that the Sovereign can do injustice is open to all the objections against judging a Sovereign which have been discussed. Besides, the social contract authorises everything that the Sovereign does, so that the Sovereign's actions are each man's actions, the Sovereign being his agent. It therefore follows that when it appears to me that the Sovereign has done me an injury, the supposed injury is something which I have done to myself, and nobody else can be responsible for a self-inflicted wound. The Sovereign may have acted wickedly towards me, but it is logical nonsense to say that he has done me an injury.

5. It follows from this that a Sovereign may never justly be put to death by his subjects because they would be punishing the Sovereign for their own act, and no principle of jurisprudence could ever conceivably justify punishing another for what one did oneself.
6. The Sovereign obviously determines all measures for internal peace. One of the great disturbers of the peace is diversity of opinion, particularly political and religious opinions. Therefore the Sovereign has the right to censor both. In political terms, this boils down to a sovereign right to decide the meaning of words, especially the words 'just' and 'unjust' about which so much controversy is possible. The Sovereign cannot decide the meaning of 'right' and 'wrong' because God has already decided that, but justice being the product of the Sovereign's own law, it is obviously up to him to decide what it means.
7. One of the Sovereign's main jobs would be to censor religious opinions and decide on forms of worship. A religious settlement rigorously enforced is an obvious necessity at a time when men took where they were going to spend eternity very seriously and were prepared to kill each other if they disagreed about the right path to heaven. Religious controversy had been tearing Europe apart for over a century when Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*. Hobbes probably knew that you could not change men's inner convictions by force, but the Sovereign could certainly decide what the public forms of worship should be. Beyond that, what men thought

in their heart of hearts probably did not matter very much. (In his own heart of hearts Hobbes himself was probably an atheist.)

8. Decisions in the ordinary courts of the realm must be the Sovereign's. All courts will be his courts, just as all law will be his law. Different kinds of courts which might make different kinds of judgements would lead to confusion. Uncertainty about how the law actually worked would lead to a sense of insecurity, and it was for some measure of security that men quitted the State of Nature for Civil Society in the first place. The State of Nature was insecure because it was lawless. There was no machinery of justice in the State of Nature so it would be foolish to incorporate uncertainty and therefore insecurity into the machinery of justice in Civil Society.
9. The sword of Justice is also the sword of war. When the contracting parties to the social contract put the sword into the Sovereign's hand, they meant the Sovereign to protect them from each other and also from external enemies. Most sovereignties are acquired through conquest, and war is a nasty business whether it is the war of all against all in the State of Nature or foreign invasion. Disagreement over the question of war or peace would plainly be divisive. A state is most a state when it goes to war. War-making is the ultimate act of sovereignty, so to deny the right of the Sovereign to decide matters of war and peace would be to deny him the very heart of sovereignty.
10. Sovereign cannot do all the work of government by himself. All government will be government in the Sovereign's name (open in the name of the King!), but in fact the Sovereign will be obliged to work through agents. Sovereigns will naturally seek advice. They might even seek advice from parliamentary assemblies, or they might confine their advice-seeking to a few cronies, or even to a single royal favourite, but no matter where that advice comes from it is advice in the ordinary sense of the term, which the Sovereign may take or leave as he sees fit. Nobody could conceivably have a *right* to give the Sovereign advice, and that the Sovereign could ever be *obliged* to take advice from anybody is unthinkable. The choice of royal servants is therefore the Sovereign's alone and he may appoint and dismiss them at will.

11. Sovereign will want to reward their servants from time to time. The Sovereign therefore has the right, and the sole right, to grant titles of nobility. He may even have the right of demotion, and he is certainly not accountable to anyone else for the way in which he exercises the ennobling power. Aristocracy is to be the Sovereign's creation in so far as that is possible in societies where aristocracies are used to thinking of themselves as hereditary.

Hobbes's account of sovereignty is sovereignty on the grand scale. It is worth repeating that Hobbes infers all the attributes of sovereignty from the original case of voluntary contract by Institution, and only then does he say that conquest sovereignty by Acquisition would enjoy the same rights. In *Leviathan*, the argument is carried on at a fairly abstract level, and it may not be obvious at first sight that *Leviathan* can be read as a philosophical commentary on recent European and English history, but this is in fact the case.

#### **2.2.6 INDIVIDUALISM AND ABSOLUTISM IN HOBBS'S POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Absolutism and individualism are two important political ideas which find important places in Hobbes's scheme of things. There is on the one hand theory of sovereignty which makes Hobbes's sovereign absolute in all respects. Hobbes has been regarded as one of the first thinkers like Bodin who preceded him put certain variable limitations on the power of the sovereign. It was destined for Hobbes to make his sovereign absolute and unlimited, supreme and unrestrained from all sides. As this theory of sovereignty proves to be the revolutionary theory of its time, and also controversial theory, in its dust and turmoil people forgot that the theory of absolutism of the sovereign is derived from his individualism pure and simple. His critics fail to realise that Hobbes starts with individual and ended with individual. Individual's security is the pivot round which all his other political ideas revolve. Everything in Hobbes's political philosophy, either before or after the institution of the civil society, is for the individual, of the individual and by the individual. His critics never penetrate deep into his theory and get the superficial impression that absolutism is the central part of his system. But actually absolutism is only an ally, an accompaniment, a subservient idea of another idea that is individualism. This idea of absolutism derives all its light from individualism, just as the moon has no radiance, similarly, without the necessity of the individual self-preservation, it is not probably necessary for Hobbes to make his sovereign

absolute. From the point of view of influence of Hobbes on subsequent political thought also, we find that his individualism is more important than absolutism. His individualism gave rise to the laissez-faire theory which became a powerful tool on the hands of utilitarian thinkers like Bentham in the development of the individualistic doctrines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Self-interest of the individual comes to be regarded as the pre-dominant motive in life. His absolutism, on the other hand, was forgotten after the dust of the revolution had settled down. There is wrong impression about him that he is absolutist and nothing else because he belongs to the Royalists camp.

The view of Sabine is definitely correct when he says, “the absolute power of the sovereign – a theory with which Hobbes’s name is more generally associated – was really the necessary complement of his individualism.” Prof. Dunning also says in the same vein “But notwithstanding his exaltation of the power of the state his theory was, in its foundation, wholly individualistic and rested on as complete recognition of the natural equality of all men as was ever asserted by Milton or any other of the revolutionary theorists.” Even a commentator like Vaughan, who is otherwise very critical of Hobbes says “While Hobbes’s theory sovereignty resulted in absolutism, it was nevertheless based on the doctrine that all men are equal naturally and upon the belief in the desirability of a large number of individual freedom.” Prof. Wayper also says, “the Leviathan is not merely a forceful enunciation of the doctrine of sovereignty... it is also a powerful statement of individualism.” A different place and in a different context Prof. Vaughan goes to the extent of saying, “By a strange irony, it was reserved for the deadliest enemy of individualism to give the first formal statement of the theory upon which in the hay-day of its power individualism was universally held to rest. The whole work of Hobbes breathes the bitterest hatred not only of individualism as a theory, but even of those elementary rights which none but the most backward nations now deny to the individual in practice. Yet this preposterous system is itself based, consciously or unconsciously on assumptions representing an extreme form of individualism, an individualism is more uncompromising than that of Locke himself.”

As Prof. Oakeshott has pointed out that individualism as a gospel has drawn its inspiration from many sources. But as a rational theory of society or a school of thought it has its root in the so-called nominalism of the medieval scholasticism. The essence of this doctrine is that “the reality of a thing is its individuality” that which makes it this thing, and that both in God and man will is precedent to reason.” Hobbes inherited this doctrine of nominalism

and passes it on to the modern world. Before we proceed further we must make one point clear. If we regard individualism as the doctrine which postulates the fundamental or inherent rights of the individuals and a belief in the value or sanctity of individual man and personality, we shall be sadly disappointed by Hobbes. Such a doctrine is nothing but democracy, or liberalism. But Hobbes is avowedly, “no liberal or democrat but he is an individualist, not because he believes in the sanctity of individual man, but because for him the world is and must always be made up of individuals.” For him, there does not exist any such thing as people, or common will or general will or common good as, for instance, they exist for a staunch democrat like Rousseau. What is most important for him is the inevitability of separate individuals and their separate interests. His individualism is based on the philosophy for which the world is composed of individual substantiate.

There is a common belief that Hobbes starts as an individualist and ends as an absolutist. It is believed that upon the institution of the sovereign he is a staunch individualist and the creation of the civil society of his concept is designed precisely to destroy individualism. It is completely fallacious. To prove this, it is important to note why Hobbes creates an absolute sovereign? Hobbes believes that people in the state of nature (despite his pessimistic view of human nature) have the ability, as a function of rational self-preservation, to combine forces, enter into contract, and create a common power whose exclusive purpose is to insure the physical security of all. They do not enter into a contract with the sovereign but with themselves, creating a mortal god against which there is no right of resistance. For Hobbes civil society is not the natural predisposition of man, as Aristotle had assumed, but a necessity built and maintained by humans (not God) on the foundation of hard experience. Similarly, positive law is not derived from a higher, eternal law; it takes its origin from convention grounded in circumstance. In agreeing to give up the right of nature to do whatever they deem necessary for their own preservation, subjects willingly charge one man or group of men to maintain order, “stable and trustable social relations.” They obey for the sake of protection, and in pursuance of that goal the sovereign must be allowed autocratic discretion, making law and doing in effect “whatsoever he shall think necessary to be done, both beforehand, for the preserving of peace and security . . . and when peace and security are lost, for the recovery of the same.”(*Leviathan*) The power of the state is justified solely on a utilitarian standard—the security of individual human beings, ignoring as irrelevant any consideration of custom, tradition, or supernatural sanction. Under

Hobbes's iconoclastic formulation, law, morality, even religious truth, exist simply as the will of an absolute sovereign who is fulfilling the conditions under which it has been created. Even the most tyrannical government, he held, was better than no government at all.

It becomes apparently clear that his absolutism does not destroy individualism. The following points will put some more light on it.

First, the dark view of human nature with which he starts necessitated the creation of the absolute power, with its ruthless and coercive force, capable of keeping them in awe and also in control, against the upsurge of the anti-social tendencies.

Secondly, according to Hobbes the absolute sovereign is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The absolute sovereign is created to provide sufficient security to the individual's life.

Thirdly, the sovereign gets the absolute powers with the express consent of the individuals.

Fourthly, even after the creation of the absolute sovereign, the individual is not completely swallowed by it, individual is free to do anything in the silence of law. So long as the law does not forbid, the individuals are free to do anything.

Fifthly, Hobbes's individualism is nowhere more glaring and apparent than in the individual's right to resist the sovereign in case the latter fails to give sufficient protection for individual's life or in case the sovereign himself tries to kill him it places him in such a condition in which his life is endangered.

Sixthly, there is no place of collective will or general will in the Hobbesian contract. This means that the individuals retained their individuality even after the creation of absolute sovereign.

Lastly, Prof. Oakeshott has given a strong argument in this respect. He says that the *Leviathan* has not been created with the purpose of the destruction of the individualism. It is in fact the minimum condition of the civilized and settled society. He argues further that the sovereign is absolute in two respects only and neither of them is destructive of individuality: first, the surrender of natural rights to him is absolute and his authorization is permanent and exclusive; secondly, there is no

appeal from the legitimacy of his command. The surrender of the rights are absolute. According to Oakeshott, “Hobbes refused the compromise which suggests that a part of the rights has to be sacrificed not because he was an absolutist in Government, but because he knew a little elementary logic.” Even after giving the absolute rights to the sovereign, and providing for no appeal against the command of the sovereign, except in case of danger to the life of the individual, Hobbes is an individualist out-and-out.

We can, thus, conclude that Hobbes is an individualist. In fact Leviathan is the first democratic attack on democracy. Hobbes is no democrat or liberal, but he is definitely an individualist. He attacks democracy with the instrument of democracy itself. Hobbes’s government can be said to be the government of the individual, for the individual and by the individual but it cannot be said to be the government of the people, for the people and by the people, rather it is the anti-thesis of democratic government.

### **2.2.7 SUMMING UP**

Thomas Hobbes philosophy has to be understood in a context where violent strife raged between Catholics and the new Protestant Christians in the aftermath of the Reformation. This convinced Hobbes that people must be free to hold whatever religious beliefs they prefer, but that religion must not be the organizing principle of a government. He developed a comprehensive theory of how people should be governed that has influenced most political thought since.

Hobbes believed that absolute freedom would result in a war of “...all against all.” He argued that people spend all of their lives in the restless pursuit of power and influence over others, calling it the “state of nature.” This led him to believe a government must have sufficient power to provide internal peace and protection against external threats, while leaving people free to adopt whatever beliefs they prefer without coercion.

To obtain peace and security, Hobbes maintained that people must mutually agree to give up some of their freedom and submit to the authority of a political power. He called this the social contract. Though a lifelong enthusiast for monarchies, he proclaimed any power legitimate provided that it was strong enough to provide its subjects security. Hobbes was an absolutist, believing that the division of executive, legislative and judicial powers makes a state ineffective. Even so, Hobbes insisted that men still retained the right to defy the

state on matters of defence of their lives or, more nebulously, their honour. This led many critics of Hobbes to charge that the only effective recourse he leaves to state abuse is that of revolution.

Hobbes' philosophy could aptly be described as the rough draft of the Enlightenment, which began in the late 1600s. Enlightenment philosophy emphasized reason and science as the proper organizing principles for government. While many later political philosophers came to different conclusions, almost all work from the agenda he set. Their primary concerns are about the definition of the state of nature, the description of the social contract, and what the roles of religion, human rights, and government should be in civil society.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**

**Course Title: Western Political Thought**

**Unit – II: Early Modern Thinkers**

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**2.3 LOCKE'S TWO TREATISES OF GOVERNMENT:  
THEORY OF STATE, KNOWLEDGE, NATURAL RIGHTS  
AND LIBERALISM**

**- Rajnish Saryal**

**STRUCTURE**

- 2.3.0 Objectives
- 2.3.1 Introduction
- 2.3.2 The Political Philosophy/knowledge of Locke
- 2.3.3 Locke's Conception of Human Nature
- 2.3.4 The State of Nature
- 2.3.5 Natural Rights and Property
- 2.3.6 Locke's Theory of State
  - 2.3.6.1 The Social Contract
  - 2.3.6.2 Locke on the Form of Government
- 2.3.7 Liberalism in Locke's Political Thought
- 2.3.8 Summing Up

**2.3.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to know:**

- key texts written by Locke and his political philosophy
- Locke's conception of Human Nature and State of Nature
- Locke's views on natural rights, property and forms of government
- Locke's theory of social contract

- Locke's place as liberal thinker in political thought

### 2.3.1 INTRODUCTION

John Locke, the father of philosophical liberalism, a great champion of the rights of men, the prophet of consent in politics, and great upholder of the cause of individuals, is born at Wrington, Somersetshire, in 1632. The times in which Locke is living are not marked with easiness and calm. He lives through a period of great political disturbance and revolution. Most of the European countries are still under the heels of the absolute monarchs where the seeds of liberalism and liberty are suppressed with all ruthlessness. The way of thinking is undergoing a considerable transformation, and the theological and ecclesiastical arguments are completely set aside. The principles of toleration and democracy are gaining ground, and successfully struggling against the Divine Right of kings. The effect of the increase of wealth and growing mercantile influence on government made for a growing emphasis on the importance of the property and freedom for individual business initiative, which was conspicuously apparent in Locke. He voices, indeed, the common sense of an age tired of the conflicting enthusiasms of the English Civil War and anxious to be allowed to reap the harvest of prosperity which stretched out into the long horizons of the eighteenth century.

John Locke (1632-1704) presents an intriguing figure in the history of political philosophy whose brilliance of exposition and breadth of scholarly activity remains profoundly influential. Locke proposed a radical conception of political philosophy deduced from the principle of self-ownership and the corollary right to own property, which in turn is based on his famous claim that a man earns ownership over a resource when he mixes his labour with it. Government, he argued, should be limited to securing the life and property of its citizens, and is only necessary because in an ideal, anarchic state of nature, various problems arise that would make life more insecure than under the protection of a minimal state. Locke is also renowned for his writings on toleration in which he espoused the right to freedom of conscience and religion (except when religion was deemed intolerant!), and for his cogent criticism of hereditary monarchy and patriarchal. After his death, his mature political philosophy lent support to the British Whig party and its principles, to the Age of Enlightenment, and to the development of the separation of the State and Church in the American Constitution as well as to the rise of human rights theories in the Twentieth Century.

The most important works of John Locke were published in the decade following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Locke wrote his *Two Treatises of Government* almost immediately after the glorious revolution of 1688 in which a corrupt, absolutist Monarch was replaced by William and Mary in a bloodless coup that established a constitutional monarchy. Before that, Locke's career had taken him from an established and respectable country family in Somerset, to studentship in medicine at Christ Church, Oxford, to the household of the Whig politician and Exclusionist agitator Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, and eventually into subversive intrigue and hastily exile in Holland during he reigns of James II. Though a couple of early works are known from his Oxford days- *Essays on the Law of Nature* (1660) and *An Essay on Toleration* (1667) - Locke's mature political theory was developed during his time with Shaftesbury. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* established him as the greatest philosopher of the age, and embroiled him in scientific disputes with Issac Newton, and others, as well as providing a basis for his work on education. Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* was published anonymously in 1689. Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* was divided into two parts. The first was titled subtitled *An Essay Concerning False Principles* and was a refutation of Sir Robert Filmer's argument in favour of the 'Divine Rights of the Kings'. The argument in this treatise form an important context for Locke's own political thought that find its expression in the *Second Treatise or An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government*. Locke's *Second Treatise* had a clear and profound influence on the American Revolution. Locke's greatest contributions to the American philosophy of government can be found in his elaboration of the of parliamentary ideals of mixed government and separation of powers. Locke's challenge to the traditional absolutism arises in part from the Protestant notion that each individual has a direct relation to the god. The *Two Treatise* espoused and defended freedom, consent and property as cardinal principles of legitimate political power. His religious views, never orthodox, also embroiled him in dispute, both as a result of his work on toleration and in regard to his late work *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*, which defended a rather minimalist characterization of Christian belief.

## **Key Texts of Locke**

*A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)

*Two Treatises of Government* (1689)

*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

*Thoughts on Education* (1693)

*On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695)

### **2.3.2 THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY/KNOWLEDGE OF LOCKE**

Locke's political philosophy can be rightly termed as the voice of freedom of the 17<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment. Rationality is at once the keynote of his life and the central purpose of all his and the central purpose of all his mental questioning. Liberalism in the real sense of the term began with John Locke. He preached to organise the society in accordance with its own truth, and condemned the dogmatic and despotic tendencies of the age. In the Journal of May, 1681 he write, "The three great things that govern mankind are Reason, Passion, and Superstition; the first govern a few, the two last share the bulk of mankind and possess them in turns; but superstition is most powerful and produces the greatest mischief's". Locke argued that rational judgement is founded on the probability inferred from experience and not on dogmatic certitude, and that which arrogantly lays claim to absolute truth in empiric matters by that act shows itself probably false. He further argued that man has a natural impulse to freedom, and a right, in an uncertain world, to liberty, in opinion and speech, to seek the truth in his own way. He argued that every right of the civil government over men, depends upon a prior right conferred upon government by free men, unanimously constituting a civil society and, by majority, authorizing government to act in particulars. A government resting upon such content alone is free and all else is despotic. In a scientific systematic and rational manner he developed his arguments in a coherent system of thought. Some of threads used by him in this process may be discussed as below:

### **2.3.3 LOCKE'S CONCEPTION OF HUMAN NATURE**

Locke's conception of human nature is summed up in his '*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*'. Like Hobbes, he does not adopt a cynical view of human nature. Locke

believed that man was rational as reason was the dominant factor in individual and social life. He held that men are naturally endowed with social instinct; they are basically decent, orderly social minded, and quite capable of ruling themselves. They are not quarrelsome. They are essentially peace loving. Human beings according to him are basically moral and rational creatures. They are not always selfish, but sometimes altruistic also.

Locke optimistically saw each individual as capable of seeking the truth of one's self. For Locke, these most basic truths began from the claim that individuals are essentially conscious beings in a world of physical matter, with which they are constantly interacting. It is through these interactions, of which the most important are our perceptions of the world, that we acquired knowledge or probable beliefs about it. An individual's conscious experience is at the root of having ideas. Locke rejected innate ideas as sources of knowledge. Locke further argued that knowledge is not innate, but is acquired by experience. At the time of birth of a person, mind is like a 'tabula rasa', a clean slate, a blank tablet without any imprints, a piece of white paper on which nothing has been written. Whatever the human mind acquires, it is through the five sense organs. The outer world creates sensations on human mind which give birth to reflection and experience and memory.

Locke is also convinced that "naturally and innately men are more or less equal". As he writes in the pages of his 'Civil Government': "All men are naturally in a state of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection. The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule." It is obvious from the above that "every individual counts for one and is, therefore, normally, the equal of every other, that he has rights which belong to him simply as a human being and not because of his pre-eminence in strength, wealth or position, and which all other individuals ought to recognise, just as he ought to recognize theirs."

Locke argued that every individual has certain innate and natural rights which belong to him simply as a human being, and not because of his pre-eminence in strength, wealth or position. Every individual has the rights to life, liberty and property. These rights, according

to him, belong to, and can be exercised and respected by only rational human beings. Locke's individuals are really human beings moved by human altruistic considerations.

Locke, however is willing to admit that some men are a little wiser, or a little stronger, or a little more industrious than others, but to him the differences between men are far less striking and far less important than their similarities. He is certain that many of the differences which seem to exist between men were arbitrary and artificial rather than natural. It is thus clear the Locke was a strong environmentalist in the sense that he believed that a man's mental and moral ability were largely the result of the experiences, the sensations, or the education to which he is exposed.

According to Locke men are not only rational, orderly, decent and social, they were essentially utilitarian also. According to Locke, the object of all human action was to substitute pleasure for pain. "This is the view of human nature which was copied by Bentham, which was later worked out more thoroughly and called 'psychological' egoistic hedonism." In the words of Locke, "What has an aptness to produce pleasure in us is what we call good, and what is apt to produce pain in us we call evil." This pleasure or utility, in the case of Locke, can be explained as one of the bases of the covenant. The covenant gives peace and harmony to individuals and ensures protection of their rights which makes their life worth living and worth enjoying.

The factor which influenced the Locke's conception of human nature was the events of the Glorious revolution of 1688. In 1688, the people in effect dismissed one sovereign for incompetence and, with a minimum of disturbance, elected another who, as they believed, would perform his proper functions efficiently and whom they could trust to recognize the rights and privileges which they claimed for themselves. The accession of William and Mary was thus a triumph for the thesis that sovereign rule by consent and for the benefit of their subjects. It seemed to Locke to vindicate his belief in the ability of the people to rule themselves. Human beings to Locke, thus, appear to be reasonable cooperative, social and sympathetic. Human nature, to him, is marked with love, sympathy, kindness and goodwill. It is with these qualities that men, according to Locke, lived in the state of nature prior to the entrance in the civil society.

### 2.3.4 THE STATE OF NATURE

Locke's ideas on the state of nature are to be found in his '*Second Treatise*.' Locke recognized the state of nature as normally peaceful because of man's social instinct. The original state of nature, he tells us, is "a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their persons and possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man." The state of nature according to Locke is a "state of peace, goodwill, mutual assistance and preservation."

Given God gave the earth to all of mankind, Locke envisages the state of nature as a state of perfect equality in which each person has the freedom to do as he sees fit without asking leave or depending on the will of any other man. Individuals have an equal right to natural freedom. As a true Christian, Locke believed that god created human beings and earth. Every one has the equal right to share the earth and its fruits, since they are god's creation. Reason teaches man not to harm his neighbour or his liberty or possessions, but also that he is right to punish those who transgress against him. "The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone", and "there cannot be supposed any such *Subordination* among us, that may Authorize us to destroy one another".

The most famous sentence in the *Second Treatise* is that 'though this (the State of Nature) be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence'. Locke's State of Nature is very unlike Hobbes's, because life there is recognisably social in a sense Hobbes would never allow, hence Locke's very firm statement that the State of Nature is a state of liberty, not licence. By this Locke means that men in the State of Nature, bound by Natural Law, would be able, on the whole, to recognise and respect the Natural Rights of others. The law of nature, to Locke, is not a natural impulse. It is rather moral law based on reason to regulate the conduct of men in natural conditions. Locke defines it as the dictate of right reason which obliges everyone and teaches mankind who will but consult it, that all beings are equal and independent; no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty and possession.

From this law of nature, which governs the state of nature, men derive certain natural rights to life, liberty and property and as each man possesses these rights, it is obvious that no man may rightfully interfere with the right, liberty and property of another. The law of nature, thus, not only accords men their rights, it also imposes upon them their duties. The

state of nature, thus, in which men live and have acknowledged rights and duties, is moral and social in character. Locke argued that the State of Nature is still the state of fallen man. Sinful men, alas, will sometimes invade the Natural Rights of others. From this it follows that men have another Natural Right, the right of judgement (and punishment) when they think their Natural Rights have been violated by others. This right is not a substantive right, a right to *something*; rather it is an energising right, or a right which gives life to the other Natural Rights. Rights are useless unless there is a right to judge when rights have been violated, and so the right to judgement completes the package of Natural Rights. Besides natural rights, human being also has natural duties to discharge. Liberty, for Locke, is not the freedom to do what one chooses, but to act within the bounds of the law of nature. Freedom presupposed order and is possible only within a framework of law. Law keep individuals from being subject to the arbitrary will of another person. Natural rights act as a constraining factor once these are established through a contract between individuals.

The state of nature, although a state of bliss, yet it was not free from defects and inconvenience. Locke raises the question as to why a man may give up his freedom that he enjoys in the state of nature. He answers because that state is full of uncertainty and it is also exposed to aggression. The state of nature lacks established, known and settled laws, a known and indifferent judge, and the power to give a judge execution of the law. In the state of nature man has two powers – to preserve himself according to the Law of Nature and the power to punish criminals. In such a free state, all men are of one community making up a society distinct from the animals. “And were it not for the corruption, and viciousness of degenerate Men, there would be no need of any other; no necessity that Men should separate from this great and natural Community, and by positive agreements combine into smaller and divided associations.” In other words, the few who seek to predate and to live by force, prompt people to form polities.

Thus according to Locke, there were three fundamental defects of the state of nature for which people could not endure it for a long time. Firstly there was no ‘established, settled and known law’ in the state of nature. Secondly, there was no ‘known and impartial judge. Thirdly there was no executive power to enforce just decisions. The existence of these shortcomings in the state of nature made life miserable. Conceiving that the remedy lay in the formation of civil government, men in the state of nature, according to Locke, voluntarily compacted and agreed to join and unite into community for their safe and comfortable living.



### 2.3.5 NATURAL RIGHTS AND PROPERTY

The conception of natural rights and the theory of property is the third most important theme in Locke's political philosophy. By Natural Right Locke means an entitlement under Natural Law, which is God's Law. God did not create the world and people it for nothing. He certainly wanted men to get their sustenance, which means that He intended men to live, and to live as long as it pleased him. Locke developed a sophisticated theory of Natural rights, particularly the Natural Right to property. Like all law, God's Law, as revealed in the Ten Commandments, or found out by human reason, implies a corresponding set of rights. These Natural Rights Locke thinks are of three substantive kinds: the right to life, liberty and property. God means us to live at his pleasure, not another's, therefore no-one may kill me (except in self-defence, which includes war); God commands me to labour in order to sustain and live my life, therefore I have the right to the liberty to do so; and God must mean what I take out of mere nature to be mine, therefore a natural right to property originates in the command to labour: the land I plough, and its fruits are mine.

Locke pointed out that by human reason and by revelation it is apparent that the earth and its fruits belonged to god, and that god has given them to the human inhabitants in common to enjoy. He dismissed Filmer's argument that god has given the earth and its fruits to Adam and his heirs exclusively. More than this, he also argued that it is human labour which distinguished what is privately owned from what is commonly held. Labour is the unquestioned property of the labourer, and by mixing his labour with a piece of land, an individual acquired a right to whatever he has made of that material. The fact that a man labours to pick fruit or till the soil presents the distinguishing characteristic of private versus commonly held property. There is no need for any consent to be given by his comrades living in the state of nature, indeed awaiting that consent may mean he starves. "The *labour* that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath *fixed* my *Property* in them."

Locke further gives an example that: take a river from which a man draws water. The water in his pitcher is necessarily his – by virtue of his labouring to retrieve it; however, the water remains in common ownership. Any game in the wild is owned by all, until the hunter marks it for the chase, upon which the hare or the deer begins to become his property. Locke deals with the first objection that if a man, with his labour, manages to secure vast

resources, but there are brakes on such an engrossment. The stress is on what human beings made of the earth, how and what they left for posterity. He insisted god has given human beings the earth to make it a better place, full of conveniences of life by entrepreneurship, hard work and reason. Here also Locke emphasized that human beings were trustees, stewards who could appropriate and consume by being industrious and creative without wasting, squandering, spoiling or destroying. Thus, men's natural reason also tells them two other very important things. First, it tells each man that all other men have the same rights as he has. All rights have duties attached to them (a right without a corresponding duty, or set of duties, is a privilege, not a right, a sinecure for instance, which carries with it the right to a salary without the duty to work for it). Rational men are capable of working this out for themselves, and they easily recognise that claiming Natural Rights requires that they respect the exercise of those same rights in others, and it is this reciprocity which makes the State of Nature social. If everybody recognises naturally that Natural Rights are universal or they cease to be natural, then plainly this implies that men could live together without government. That is what Locke really means when he says that the State of Nature is a state of liberty, not licence.

In the State of Nature, an individual has initially a right to appropriation which is limited to three things. An individual could appropriate only that much for which one has a need, and provided enough and good is left for others. An individual has right only to that much for which he has mixed the labour of his body and the work of his hand. Labour not only created property but also determined its value. It is labour that made the world different by creating conveniences and increasing productivity. Locke assumed that scarcity is not a problem, for there is enough for all to find satisfaction, thereby, setting aside the problem of limited means and unlimited human desires.

Locke spoke of individuals in the state of nature having perfect freedom to dispose of their possessions, and persons, as they thought fit. He emphatically clarified that since property is a natural right derived from natural law, it is therefore prior to the government. He emphasized that individuals has rights to do as they pleased within the bounds of the law of nature. Rights are limited to the extent that they do not harm themselves or others.

The limited right of appropriation and equality of possessions in the state of nature is distorted with the introduction of money. This is because one could possess more regardless

of the use of the product and hoard without injuring anyone. The circulation of a currency in the form of gold changed this. The introduction of money also permits a man to hold his profit in the form of coin, which does not waste, and thereby enables him (justly) to increase his wealth. Men could now buy, sell and make profits to their hearts' content. Gold does not spoil, or go to waste, so there can be no natural limits to its accumulation. Gold therefore effectively abolishes the natural limitations set on property accumulation, hence inequality of property in the State of Nature. Locke's attitude to the emerging commercial society is ambivalent. He does not reconcile the injunctions within natural law which emphasized equality of property with the inequality of unlimited accumulation which is made possible because of the introduction of money.

### **2.3.6 LOCKE'S THEORY OF STATE**

Locke assumed the existence of a vibrant economy and civil society prior to the creation of any government. This is to emphasize that civil society is independent of political authority, that economic activity as opposed to politics is more important and that there is a need to separate the private from the public sphere.

Through the discussion on property, Locke stated that it represented human entitlements and in fact "the great and chief end of men's uniting into commonwealth and putting themselves under government is the preservation" and protection of their property. The purpose of government is to secure human entitlements and ensure lives, liberties and the material possessions of all human beings. "The connection between property and the supportive role of society lies Locke's identification of property with society rather than with the political order."

It is the social character of property that enabled Locke to defend a minimal state with limited government and individual rights, and reject out right hereditary principle of government. Locke also emphasize that no government can deprive an individual of his material possessions without the latter's consent. It is the duty of political power to protect entitlements that individuals enjoyed by virtue of the fact that these has been given by god. It is for the protection of liberties and property that they entered into an agreement instructing the government to recognize these rights and embody them in a statutory form.

### 2.3.6.1 The Social Contract

Locke argued that in the state of nature the initial abundance of land eventually turn into scarcity not due to massive population growth but through greed and invention of money. Subsequently disputes in the state of nature multiply and multiply. It becomes imperative to establish a civil government. So although it is initially peaceful, eventually, even for Locke, the State of Nature becomes unbearable. Therefore to get rid of the state of nature which had become a state of inconvenience, people make a contract to enter into a civil society. The compulsion to constitute a civil society is to protect and preserve freedom and to enlarge it. The political community created by such a contract tried to remove the three inconveniences and to protect the rights of the individuals. In Locke's own words: "The reason why men give up the state of nature for civil society is the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property." Thus according to Locke property precedes society, state and government. This is a contract of all with all. According to Prof Sabine, Locke presumably assumes two contracts, one between individuals giving rise to the community and the other between the community and its government. By the first contract, the civil society is constituted. By the second contract, the government comes into existence. This contract is the step to the drawing up a trust which creates government as only a fiduciary power to act for certain ends. The community is thus both creator and beneficiary of the trust. But as a beneficiary of the trust, the community makes no contract with the trustee who accepts a unilateral obligation towards it. The acceptance of the trust by the government is at the same time its undertaking not to exceed the limits laid down by the trust.

The essential basis of the contract in the case of Locke is consent. Community begins with consent, Locke argues, and this consent can only be majority consent, as universal consent is impossible to gain. Through a contract, individuals consented to submit to majority rule and organize themselves as a community and civil society. They surrendered their powers partially, namely the three specific rights that constituted the natural right to enforce the laws of nature. Without consent there is no political community. In this connection Locke discusses two types of consents: (1) express or direct consent, (2) implied or tacit consent. Express consent is an explicit commitment given at the time when commonwealth is instituted. In case there is no provision for explicit consent, people's obligation can be gauged by their tacit consent. Tacit consent according to Locke, "everyman, that has any

possession or enjoyment of any part of the dominions of any government, does thereby give his tacit consent, and is as far forth obliged to obedience to the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as any one under it; whether this his possession be of land, to him and his heirs forever, or a lodging only for a week; or whether it be barely travelling freely on the highway; and in effect, it reaches as far as the very being of any one within the territories of the government.” The obligation to obey the government will depend on the fact that public power is used for “peace, safety and public good of the people.” Moreover individuals will not yield to the government more power than what they actually possess in the state of nature, which meant that “there cannot be an absolute arbitrary power over the lives and fortunes which are as much possible to be preserved.” Lockean individuals are not committed to unconditional obligation. There is a rational and limited agreement which assured obedience for the preservation and enhancement of life, liberty and property. The validity of the contract will depend on the continuation of these benefits.

Another significant feature of this contract is that men do not surrender their rights which they possess in the state of nature. All that the men agree to is to “give up everyone his single power of punishing to be exercised by such alone as shall be appointed to it amongst them, and by such rules as the community, or those authorised by them to that purpose, shall agree on.” Hence the contract is no more than a surrender of certain rights and powers whereby man’s remaining rights will be protected and preserved. The contract by which men pass from the state of nature to the civil state is not an instrument of enslavement but a charter of freedom for the individual who, so far from surrendering all his powers to a despotic monarch or a despot oligarchy, surrenders so much, and only so much, of them as shall provide security, hitherto lacking in fact though not in right, for the free untrammelled exercise of all the rest.

Another significant feature of the Lockean contract is that it ensures to the individuals the right of revolution against despotic and tyrannous government. Locke asserted categorically that governments can be altered, amended, changed or dissolved legitimately, and listed five occasions when this is possible. These are as follows

1. Whenever such a prince or a single person established his own arbitrary will in the place of the laws.

2. When the prince hindered the legislature from assembling in its due time or from acting freely, pursuant to those ends for which it is constituted.
3. When by the arbitrary power of the prince, the elections and the way of elections are altered without the consent, and contrary to the common interests of the people.
4. The delivery of the people into the subjection of foreign power, either by the prince or by the legislature.
5. The person who has the supreme executive power neglected laws already enacted and cannot be executed.

Locke argued that all true states are established by consent. He assumed that a minority will consent in all things to rule by the majority. A government cannot be arbitrary: it is bound by the general laws which are public and not subject to individual decrees. All individuals will be governed by the same rules as everyone else; otherwise it will violate the natural moral equality of individuals. He clarified that people can use force only against unjust and unlawful authority. Locke insist that people will use the right of resistance and revolution wisely as their bitter medicine, and not as a daily bread. It is only when they realized that revolution will result in a better social order, that they will resort to it and not for “every little mismanagement in public affairs” or for transient causes. Locke emphatically asserted that a government based on consent, coupled with the right of the people to rebel, is the best fence against rebellion”. People have the right to judge and assess authority which is no longer sacred or supernatural. Locke is confident that with more free communication and greater transparency there will be less need for revolution. Locke defended religious toleration and pluralism. In the *Letter*, he assigned the civil magistrate the duty to protect the “life, liberty and indolence of body” of the members of the commonwealth. Locke excluded atheists and those religious groups that debarred others from professing and practising their beliefs from the privileges of toleration.

Locke is confident with more free communication and greater transparency there will be less need for revolution. Locke’s work justified the right of resistance, and in the last resort of revolution, against unjust authority. He emphasizes that all authority, political and parental, is a trust, given by god. Therefore no human being has a right over his own life, since the

Christian perception categorically saw life as gifted by god, and that all human rulers can take the live of their subjects or foreign enemies only if they have acted detrimentally towards public good. Political authority became legitimate, and rulers have the legitimate right to command if they have provided practical services to their subjects. For Locke, the ruler became therefore a trustee, far from being an owner of the subject.

### **2.3.6.2 Locke on the Form of Government**

In Locke's theory, any form of government which protected Natural Rights, and especially property, will be a legitimate government, but that leaves entirely open the question: Which form of government is most likely in practice to protect Natural Rights? Locke is deadly against the theory of absolute monarchy. Locke accepted the well known liberal principle that all rulers and magistrates derive their power and authority from the people. The state has been framed by the people through the social pact. Once a civil society is established, the individuals establish a government to act as a judge in the nature of a "fiduciary power" for promoting certain ends. The community's decisions are by majority rule, unless they specifically agreed to a number greater than the majority, which Locke realize will be more difficult to muster. Though the community appointed a legislative power, it continued to retain supreme power, meaning that the people have the right to assess and evaluate the performance of the legislature. The legislature is the supreme power with a sacred duty to preserve the society. If people find the performance unsatisfactory, they can take steps to change or alter the existing body. "The Legislative being only a Fiduciary power to act for certain ends, there remains still in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them."

Within the government, the legislative power is supreme since it is the representative of the people, having the power to make laws. Legislative power is supreme but it ought not to be absolute or arbitrary. What power it should wield is limited to the powers that man possessed in the state of nature which should also be limited to serving the public good. It "can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly impoverish the subjects." Its laws must thus conform to the laws of nature and any use of arbitrary or absolute power, or indeed, operating without settled law, creates a situation worse than the state of nature. "For then Mankind will be in a far worse condition, than in the State of Nature, if they shall have armed one or a few Men with the joynt power of a Multitude. The government

cannot take a man's property without his consent, and since governments need to raise taxes to finance themselves, they can only do so with the consent of the governed. "Hence it is a mistake to think, that the Supreme or *Legislative Power* of any Commonwealth, can do what it will, and dispose of the Estates of the Subject *arbitrarily*, or take any part of them at pleasure."

Besides the legislature there is an executive, usually one person with the power to enforce the law. The executive, which included the judicial power, has to be always in session. It enjoyed prerogatives and is subordinate and accountable to the legislature. There is no need for the legislative to stand all the time, but the executive power ought to be permanently in office to ensure that the laws are enforced. The executive may use powers of prerogative to ensure the smooth process of legislation, but it ought never to overstep its bounds. Locke observes that while good princes stay within their limitations, "the reigns of good princes have always been most dangerous to the liberties of their people" for developing a trust in their prerogative which is soon abused by the next generation. The legislative and executive power has to be separate, thus pre-empting Montesquieu's theory of separation of powers. The third wing of the government is the federative power, the power to make treaties and conduct external relations.

Locke thus advocated a limited sovereign state, for reason and experience taught him that political absolutism is untenable. Describing the characteristics of a good state, Locke said it exist for the people who formed it, and not the vice versa. Locke is the first to argue that the state dealt with matters strictly political in nature, and has no warrant to interfere in domains strictly outside the political. Nor could it demand more powers on the pretext of public safety and welfare. Locke categorically asserted that supreme power resided in the people and the people as a community has the inalienable right to institute and dismiss a government. Once the government is instituted, it will be assessed periodically and its actions scrutinized meticulously. Locke argued that the individuals have the right to resist a government that is tyrannical, thus requiring him to show that subjects do not have an unconditional obligation to obey simply by virtue of their birth.

### **2.3.7 LIBERALISM IN LOCKE'S POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Liberalism as a political creed begins with Locke. The origins and detailed delineation of the liberal order, both in the political and societal dimensions, is the singular achievement



of Locke. The breadth of vision that Locke espoused by offering a theory which combine constitutionalism, stability, freedom, consent, property and tolerance has played a crucial and pivotal role in an orderly development of western democracies. Lockes concepts of constitutionalism, toleration, natural rights, limited consensual and law based authority; pluralism and property has a significant impact beyond the English settlement of 1688 in establishing and nurturing a liberal society in England, and in inspiring similar traditions in America, France and Holland. The American and the French revolutions and the constitutional edifice in the United States are Lockean in spirit and letter. Lockes ideas especially his doctrine of tolerance, government by consent and realization of human freedom in its economic and political contexts, find concrete expression with the discovery of the American continent. It is worth pointing out that the liberatarian philosophy characterised by optimism and abundance is made possible as a result of the discovery of America.

John Locke's *Second Treatise of government* is a ringing defence of individual liberty and individual moral rights, including rights to property. Locke calls for a limited government and also outlines legitimate functions of the government. Attacking patriarchal defences of absolutist monarchy, he takes some modest steps toward attacking patriarchy and promoting the moral rights of women and equal moral status of men and women. Locke espouses a theological ethics, within which one can discern seeds of secular and even utilitarian notions of the foundation of ethics. He is adamant in asserting that no one acquires political obligations to obey the established authorities except by her free and voluntary consent, but also acknowledges the difficulties that have spurred some to abandon this consent doctrine. Locke proclaims that all normal human individuals are free and equal persons, and takes this to be compatible with inequality in people's possessions and opportunities. These are in short some of the prominent liberal ideas of Locke.

The first liberal-looking assertion in Locke is the naturalness of property and the inviolability of property right except by free and voluntary consent: what we have come to call consent to taxation. Nine points of positive law will be about who rightfully owns what. What makes something mine is either that I have inherited it or, better still, that I have worked for it. Mixing one's labour with something is the surest title to possession of all. Locke is certainly not hostile to aristocracy, and he looks with favour on self-made men, the traditional alliance between Whig aristocracy and industrial wealth which was to form the basis of the English Liberal Party after 1859.

Locke wrote a famous *Letter Concerning Toleration* which still strikes a liberal chord. Locke's plea for toleration is an appeal for the privacy of the individual's own mind. The law should never be used to proceed against a man for what he thinks, but only for what he does or might be about to do. The exceptions are Catholics, a potential fifth column in the service of the nation's Catholic enemies, and atheists because, having no fear of hellfire, they cannot be expected to tell the truth on oath in courts of law. Locke's appeal for toleration is, then, a plea for toleration of every kind of Protestant and dissenting sect, a view of toleration which seems unduly restricted in the light of the classic liberal statement on toleration, J.S. Mill's essay *On Liberty* (1859), but on the way there. What the state must never do is try to change men's opinions on the rack. The man may be coerced, but not the conscience, which is by its nature free, a doctrine surprisingly reminiscent of Hobbes's dictum that the will cannot be coerced.

Liberals like to think of themselves as putting a high value on human rationality, and this is an attitude they share with Locke. In the *Second Treatise* Locke is careful to argue against the naturalness of patriarchy in Filmer. Children only owe a duty of obedience to natural fathers who keep their children's Natural Rights in trust for them until they reach the age of consent. As soon as children know what they are doing, they become adults as fully endowed with Natural Rights as anybody else. Locke is very sensible here. The existence of a moral sense, which plainly exists even in very small children, is not enough to put a child in full possession of his Natural Rights. Rationality is still crucial; children have got to be able to understand that rights imply duties, especially the duty to recognise the same rights in others. Living with others means accepting mutual obligations, and failure to recognise this is a failure of understanding, either through incapacity or wilful obtuseness. Some such plea underlies the Lockian theory of punishment: a thief who denies the Natural Rights of others has failed to act as a rational man, and so must be corrected (some prisons in America are still called Houses of Correction). A useful analogy would be with membership of a club. We would say that a member of a club who said that its rules did not apply to them would simply be failing to understand what being a member of a club entails. Rationality also extends to the public reasonableness of positive laws: everything is to be out in the open (and Locke was saying this at a time when even the publication of parliamentary debate was over half a century in the future). Marxist commentators on social contract theory have always detected a bourgeois flavour in the liberal conception

of law as being fixed, knowable and known, because these are exactly the conditions in which commercial judgements about the future can be made. If law is vague, or can change arbitrarily and quickly—say changes of the place where customs duties are to be collected, or constant variations in the rate of taxation—then the conditions for commerce worsen.

The Lockean model of society is a competitive, capitalist model which is supported by the liberals. Men are free to acquire, and are encouraged by God to do so. There will be winners and losers, rich and poor. Strange, therefore, that Locke fails to mention class, which, on Locke's own account, would exist even in the State of Nature where there is buying and selling. What all individualistic theorists of society tend to forget is that there may be an important difference between acquisition and the defence of what has been acquired. Men may acquire as individuals, either through luck, effort or inheritance, but they tend to defend what they have as a group, which is class by any other name. Is Locke's state a class state in the way that his society is a class society? Locke never tells us in the *Second Treatise*, but there are broad hints elsewhere in his works, especially in his draft *Constitution for the Carolinas* (in whose pretend-aristocracy Locke was a margrave), where he refers to his American polity as 'a democracy of God's proprietors, ten thousand a year, debts paid'. It is still a matter for scholarly controversy exactly how literally men were then capable of taking the idea of democracy as implying universal suffrage, but there does not seem to be much doubt in Locke's case.

The idea of government as a trust which can be betrayed reeks of the liberal distrust of political power a century and a half before Lord Acton: 'All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Plato apart, political theorists before Locke are notoriously reluctant to tackle the question of why it is that men want power. Most would agree with Machiavelli that power aggrandisement is a fact of human nature as it applies to princes or with Hobbes when he intimates that any man would agree to be sovereign if the chance came his way. Locke at least has some feeling for what love of power can do to a man, hence his constitutionalism, and hence his emphasis on government as a trust. Perhaps Locke wishes us to think that, like the best trustees, the best governors would be those who get very little out of governing beyond the satisfaction of doing it well. The characteristic trait of men acting politically is not the desire for dominion over others but protection from them, and that obviously includes government. The worst rulers would be the grabbers for power, a view Locke does share with Plato.

Locke plainly thinks that there is a tendency, if it is no more, to harmony in human social life. This harmony is not perfect, otherwise political society would not be necessary. The state is therefore society's regulating mechanism, essentially extra- society, not its vital spring. Free activity will be the norm, coercion the exception in the cases of thieves and vagabonds. As a Christian, Locke believes that God's intentions for his Creation are benevolent: He did not put men in the world so that they would continually be at one another's throats. Government is 'outside' society in the same way as the governor of an engine is not part of the engine but extraneous to it. The governor of an engine is there to stop the engine overheating, and only starts working when there is a danger of that. Government regulates but does not initiate.

Locke's famous *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* shows him to be cautious, and to a degree sceptical as an epistemologist. Locke believes that the only form of knowledge we can properly trust is the knowledge gained through the perception of the senses. This denial of the truths of metaphysics (but not of religion because Locke believed in 'natural religion', the belief that the reasonableness of Christianity could be demonstrated) passes over into Locke's political theory in the form of a reluctance on Locke's part to attribute to the state any high, transcendent purpose beyond the peace and security of its citizens. The state interferes only when there is infringement of the right of the individuals. The state has no positive work to do. Locke's plea that free men should keep their government under constant scrutiny to make sure that it does not overstep the mark finds its echo in the utilitarian idea that a government is more or less legitimate, depending on whether it increases or decreases the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Checking up on this should be almost a daily task for free men, but what utilitarians like Bentham lack is the suspicion of power itself, as distinct from a concern that power should be used for socially useful ends.

What really dates Locke is his account of the social contract itself, which liberalism later sloughed off in favour of the natural sociability of man and therefore his natural tendency to construct political communities. The other thing which dates Locke, though it doesn't disqualify him from being one of the main inspirers of liberalism, is the idea that we really could disobey the state by refusing to be bound by its laws. Perhaps in Locke's day it was possible to disobey the state without social chaos, because states did not in fact ask much of most of their citizens most of the time. Occasional service on a jury, occasional taxation,

the odd turning out to parade in the militia was all that government demanded of those who were not its servants. However in the modern state disobedience is impossible in a much more technical sense. The modern world is an age of intense legal specialisation among lawyers, and it is technically impossible to disobey the laws because it is perfectly possible that I might *think* I was disobeying the laws while I was in fact continuing to obey some laws whose existence I did not even suspect. This is not to say that Locke on disobedience is completely irrelevant to the modern world. Civil disobedience, to make government take notice, is at least in the spirit of Locke. Civil disobedience relies for its moral force on being the very opposite of a return to any kind of State of Nature. It relies on very law-abiding people disobeying *that* law on *that* occasion. Locke might have liked that.\

### 2.3.8 SUMMING UP

Locke is one of the most controversial and influential theorists in the entire history of political thought. His writings on epistemology, natural law, economics, political theory, education, toleration and theology made a difference to the intellectual world more than anybody else since Aristotle. His ideas shaped the enlightenment and the modern world. “The heirs of Locke are, first, Berkeley and Hume; second, those of the French philosophers who did not belong to the school of Rousseau; third Bentham and the philosophical Radicals; fourth, with important accretions from Continental philosophy, Marx and his disciples.

If we list out the items that constitute the liberal world view: individualism, freedom, consensual limited government, minimal state, constitutional authority, the rule of law, the majority rule principle, separation of powers, sovereignty of the people, representative democracy, property rights, civil society, pluralism, tolerance and the right to judge authority, then Locke is the founding father of liberal political theory. Subsequent liberal theorists have worked within the framework that Locke provided. The ideological triumph of liberalism in this century over its rivals, Communism and Fascism, prove that the Lockean insights developed in the context of late seventeenth century England proved to be the most enduring and satisfying framework among all the competing political ideologies of the last 400 years.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**

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Unit – II: **Early Modern Thinkers**

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**2.4 ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT: THEORY OF STATE, POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY, CIVIL SOCIETY, IDEALISM AND ROMANTICISM**

- V. Nagendra Rao

**STRUCTURE**

- 2.4.0 Objectives
- 2.4.1 Introduction
- 2.4.2 Rousseau's Political Philosophy
- 2.4.3 The Social Contract
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  - 2.4.4.1 Human Nature
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- 2.4.5 Social Contract
- 2.4.6 Popular Sovereignty
- 2.4.7 Assessment of Rousseau as Political Thinker

**2.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

**2.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was the most complex of all the philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. He has exerted intense influence on European intellectual history. As Walker observed, "No other eighteenth century thinker contributed the major writings

in such an extensive range of subjects and forms, nor wrote with such unrelenting passion and expressiveness". The French Revolution was profoundly influenced by his teachings. As Patrick Riley mentions, Rousseau to be the greatest of all critics of inequality, the purest social contract theorist of the eighteenth century, the greatest writer on civic education.

Unlike other Social Contractualists, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau was not formally trained in any university rather embarked on a journey of self-learning. He was born in 1712 in Geneva, a republican city-state bordered by large monarchical kingdoms and a centre of popular agitations. Rousseau's childhood was not destined to be stable, as his mother died within a week of his birth. His father abandoned Rousseau when he was 10. Rousseau was taken in by his mother's brother. In order to earn his living Rousseau apprenticed to an engraver, when he was 13. At 16, Rousseau ran away from his apprenticeship, began moving from one European city to another. Hence, he had no formal education or university training. Patronized by much older and richer women like Madame de Warens, who provided him later with his pastoral retreat, Rousseau was self-taught and used his musical talents to establish himself in Paris. In 1756, however, when he was at the height of his musical career, he left Paris, as if rejecting city life, and settled down in a cottage in the country side, where he wrote such masterpieces as *Social Contract* and *Emile*. Both of these books were published in 1762, both were condemned by the French Parliament, causing Rousseau to flee to Switzerland. He also spent a year in England under the protection of David Hume, but he eventually returned to France in 1767 and married Thérèse Lavasseur a year later. Rousseau lived a secluded though prolific life thereafter before dying aged 66 in Ermenonville.

#### **2.4.2 ROUSSEAU'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

Rousseau remains as a significant philosopher in the history of philosophy because of his influence on later thinkers. The concern that dominates Rousseau's work is to find a way of preserving human freedom in a world where human beings are increasingly dependent on one another for the satisfaction of their needs. This concern has two dimensions: material and psychological, of which the latter has greater importance. In the modern world, human beings come to derive their very sense of self from the opinion of others, a fact which Rousseau sees as mordant of freedom and destructive of individual authenticity. He mainly explores two routes to achieving and protecting freedom: the first is a political one aimed

at constructing political institutions that allow for the co-existence of free and equal citizens in a community where they themselves are sovereign; the second is a project for child development and education that fosters autonomy and avoids the development of the most destructive forms of self-interest.

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau sets out to answer the fundamental question of politics, the reconciliation of the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state. This reconciliation is necessary because human society has evolved to a point where individuals can no longer supply their needs through their own unaided efforts, but rather must depend on the co-operation of others. However, conflict among the now-interdependent individuals creates the Hobbesian insecurity which would lead all to consent to the establishment of state authority and law. This establishment amounts to the corroboration of unequal and exploitative social relations that are now backed by law and state power. Rousseau argues that this state would, in effect, be a class state, guided by the common interest of the rich and propertied and imposing non-freedom and subordination on the poor and weak. The property-less consent to such an establishment because their immediate fear of a Hobbesian state of war leads them to fail to attend to the ways in which the new state will systematically disadvantage them.

*Thus, The Social Contract* aims to set out an alternative in which, Rousseau claims, each person will enjoy the protection of the common force whilst remaining as free as they were in the state of nature. The key to this reconciliation is the idea of the general will: that is, the collective will of the citizen body taken as a whole. The general will is the source of law and is willed by each and every citizen. In obeying the law each citizen is thus subject to his or her own will, and subsequently remains free as imagined by Rousseau. The *Social Contract* being the main source of Rousseau's political philosophy, it deserves a brief mention of its contents.

### 2.4.3 THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

*The Social Contract* is a great work comprises of four books, each book is further divided into several chapters. Rousseau begins his exploration of politics by pondering on the source of the legitimacy for political authority. He rejects to locate its source in nature, because such a position implies the inherent natural superiority of the rulers over the ruled, though the superiority that may exist is only sustained by force. At the same time, he argues



that force is not also the basis for legitimacy while considering the idea of ‘might is right’ as absurd. Instead, legitimate political authority is based on a kind of “social contract” created between society’s members.

While answering the question why should such a contract ever be necessary in State of Nature Rousseau writes that there comes a point in the state of nature at which society must be formed in order for mankind to survive. The social contract’s purpose is to resolve the problem of how to bind people to each other without infringing upon their freedom, and it does this by requiring the unconditional surrender of the individual’s freedom to the whole community. Each person enters the contract on equal terms; no person loses their natural freedom. Those who formed the contract come to be collectively known as the ‘people’; when sharing in the sovereign power, ‘citizens’; and in being under the laws of the state, ‘subjects’.

Rousseau’s conception of the state begins with the idea that society functions in correspondence to the interests that people hold in common. Hence, the ultimate end of any state ought to be “the common good” and following the general will expressed by the Sovereign is the only way to achieve this common good. Fortuitously, the “general will” can never coincide with a particular will. Such an expression of the general will finally takes the shape of law, thus, Law must be made by the people as a whole (i. e. made by the sovereign) and applicable to the whole.

Rousseau feels that the goal of any system of law is reducible to two ends: liberty and equality. However, equality does not mean the complete absence of differences in wealth, but the absence of such differences that would damage the balance of citizens in the state. He further adds that power shall never be great enough for violence, shall always be exercised by virtue of rank and law; and when it comes to equality, no citizen shall ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself.

Rousseau makes an attempt to distinguish the Government from the Sovereign as he considers any confusion between the two would be dangerous. For him, the government deals with particulars (decrees) while the sovereign deals with the general (laws). As a staunch believer in public opinion, Rousseau also puts forward the establishment of a censor’s office, as the vanguard of public opinion. Since public opinion is connected to

public morality and virtue, and also those who are connected to law, Rousseau argues the censor's office helps in upholding the laws by influencing such a public opinion.

Through his master piece *The Social Contract*, Rousseau thus, sets out to answer the most fundamental question of politics, the reconciliation of the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state. This reconciliation was essential because human society has evolved to a point where individuals can no longer supply their needs through their own unaided efforts, but rather must depend on the co-operation of others. A detailed discussion of Rousseau's thoughts on the Human Nature, State of Nature, Civil Society are further necessary to understand Rousseau's philosophy.

#### **2.4.4 HUMAN NATURE, STATE OF NATURE AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

Even though Rousseau never formally divided human development into various stages, for our understanding, we must consider Timothy O'Hagen's seven distinct stages in Rousseau's understanding of human evolution. These are: (1) Nascent Man – The Pure State of Nature; (2) Elementary Cooperation – The State marked by Hunting, Gathering and Fishing; (3) The 'Youth of the World' – The Stone Age; (4) Nascent Society – The Iron Age; (5) The State of War; (6) Civil Society – Current Day Society which is marked by injustice, inequality and despotism and (7) A New Civil Society – A Future or at least Potential Society that is marked by justice and equality. The classification helps us in understanding Rousseau's views regarding Human Nature, State of Nature and Civil Society.

##### **2.4.4.1 Human Nature**

For Rousseau initially humans lived solitary lives, as they did not require one another to provide for their material needs. Human interactions were episodic and casual, conducted for the purpose of a hunt, or to satisfy a sexual instinct. Early man had no fixed abode, and no continuous social interaction. Man in a state of nature, wandering up and down the forests, without industry, without speech, and without home, neither standing in need of his fellow creatures, nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps not even distinguishing the one from another. At this stage, man, like other animals, also characterized by the two natural sentiments of self-love and pity (*amour de soi* and *pitié*). Self-love is the interest every human being has in preserving itself, and pity, or compassion is the repugnance every such being feels at the suffering of another living being.

Rousseau also feels, if humans are naturally good at this stage of human evolution, their goodness is merely a negative and amounts to the absence of evil. At this stage human beings are distinguished from the other creatures only by two characteristics: freedom, and perfectibility. Freedom, in this context, is simply the ability not to be governed solely by appetite; perfectibility is the capacity to learn and thereby to find new and better means to satisfy needs. Rousseau states that these two characteristics essentially gave humans the potential to achieve self-consciousness, rationality, and morality. At the same time, such characteristics are more likely to take them to a social world of deception, dissimulation, dependence, oppression, and domination.

Rousseau explains, as human populations grew, simple but unstable forms of co-operation evolved around the activities like hunting. According to Rousseau, the essential transitional moment in human history came at a societal stage marked by small settled communities. At this point a change, or rather a split, took place in the natural drive humans have to care for themselves: competition among humans to attract sexual partners lead them to consider their own attractiveness to others and how that attractiveness compares to that of potential rivals. Rousseau associates the genesis of *amour proper* (excessive love of self, often rendered as pride or vanity) essentially with this sexual competition. This *Amour proper* in human beings awoke their need for recognition, value ascribed to such recognition and also the need to be treated with respect. Although *amour proper* has its origins in sexual competition and comparison within small societies, it did not achieve its full toxicity until it is combined with a growth in material interdependence among human beings. In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau traces the growth of agriculture and metallurgy and the first establishment of private property, together with the emergence of inequality between those who own land and those who do not. In an unequal society, human beings who need both the social good of recognition and such material goods as food, warmth, etc. become enmeshed in social relations that are inimical both to their freedom and to their sense of self worth. Rousseau in his famous *Second Discourse and Emile* considers this excessive love for or pride astray as a negative passion and the main source of all evil. At the same time, Rousseau held that these also ways for organizing social life and individual education that allow it to take on a benign character. This mission of containing and harnessing *amour proper* finds expression in both the works of *The Social Contract* and *Emile*.

#### 2.4.4.2 State of Nature

In Rousseau's treatment, the 'State of Nature' is a hypothetical, prehistoric place and time where human beings' life was uncorrupted by society. The natural state of man was vastly preferable for him to the social or civil society. Back to nature was his cry as he admired the excellence of primitive simplicity. For Rousseau, the state of nature was an ideal state to criticize wrongness in contemporary civilization, which is repressing human goodness. In fact, his political theory is based upon the conception of a pre-political state of nature. Such a state of nature facilitated the human life unfettered by the shackles of authority or any artificial laws. It helped man to remain independent, contented, self-sufficient, healthy, fearless and without the need of his fellows or a desire to harm them. It was such a state, wherein, each one was able to seek and secure his happiness. In this State of Nature, man knew neither right nor wrong, and had no notion of virtue and vice. He enjoyed a pure unsophisticated innocent life of perfect freedom and equality.

Such a State of Nature is also a state of peace because people are naturally good in the sense that they have a natural pity for their fellow creatures. This natural 'goodness' is easily confirmed, says Rousseau, because we see it in ourselves as well as in others. No normal person went to see others suffer and there are many examples of people risking their lives to prevent others from being hurt. Even the beasts as he says give perceptible signs of pity or compassion, and he gives an example of tendency of a horse to avoid trampling underfoot another living creature.

There was joint ownership of all property and people led a very simple and natural life. As the institution of private property had not yet come into existence, people led a happy and carefree life. In such an unorganized society, the man was leading solitary, happy, free and independent life, without any inequality. The only inequality that exists between humans is purely physical like one person might be slightly stronger or faster than another.

This idyllic state, however, could not last for long. Conditions arose which made it difficult for men in the State of Nature to maintain their primordial freedom and equality. They arose as a result of the growth of "Population" and the dawn of "Reason". The social instinct of man too compelled him to give up natural life, gradually the social institutions also developed. As it has been mentioned in the earlier section, the instinct of self love began to take shape of 'pride' and the idea of private property emerged. Thus he emphasizes

that it is only with the emergence of institution of private property that pre-civil state had to be abandoned, because “The scramble for land and other private property resulted in war, murder wretchedness and horror. The capacity of individuals to own and produce, there came into existence inequality in every sphere of life. Also, the division of labour that followed economic development created a distinction between the rich and the poor which broke down the happy natural condition of mankind and made it necessary to establish a civil society. Furthermore, reason, when employed for the furtherance of private gains, created a disturbing state of affairs. As a result the whole peace of society vanished.

Thus we find that Rousseau envisaging two stages of the State of Nature viz. the pre-property state and the post-property state. While the pre-property State of Nature as an ideal stage, the post-property State of Nature was wretched. In the post-property State of Nature (civil society), there are vast inequalities among human beings, and the majority of them are not physical but rather social, economic or political. One of the fundamental aspects of civil society that allows these inequalities to come about is the notion of property: a notion that is completely foreign to savage man. Rousseau’s praise for the pre-property state of nature can’t be understood as his advocacy for a return to pre-property State of Nature, rather it is something like a matter of regret that we have grown civilized.

#### **2.4.4.3 Civil Society**

In many of his works, mostly in *The second Discourse*, Rousseau discusses how the fall of man happened, how his nature got wasted warped and corrupted with the emergence of the civil society. Rousseau informs us how civil society, in turn, was necessitated by the rise of the institution of private property and the need to defend it by institutionalization of social inequality through law. However, we have to keep in mind a fact that Rousseau’s investigations on civil society were not to be considered as historical truths, but only as mere imaginary reasoning, rather exact nature of things.

According to Rousseau, the origin of civil society and resultant creation of a political authority happened in three revolutions. In the initial phase of ‘State of Nature’ man was leading a solitary, happy, free and independent life. He led a simple life of happiness; there was no law, no morality and no family. But a stage came when social institutions came into being. The first revolution takes place after the institution of family evolved on a permanent basis. This has been interpreted as the beginning of Civil Society. The establishment of

family relationship creates a line of difference between 'mine' and 'thine' and leads to the superiority of some over the other laying the first step towards inequality which is an evil and vice.

The second revolution is brought by the agriculture and the discovery of metal leading towards the specialization of functions and division of labour. It was essentially the cultivation of land that led to its enclosure and this gave rise to the idea of property and the change from the state of nature to that of Civil Society was abrupt and it emerged when, "The first man, who having enclosed a piece of ground, he thought himself of saying 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society". In this way, the institution of private property, which Rousseau calls a curse of civilization, comes into being to create the conditions of inequality. The creation of private property became the root cause of all troubles. In the words of Rousseau, innocence, ideal bliss and happiness disappeared with the surfacing of private property. For him, property was the only artificial right or privilege that emerged in society, and this right belonged to a few. The institutionalization of property rights put an end to the self-sufficiency that existed in the state of nature bringing misery to the majority.

The scramble for land and other private property resulted in war, murder and horror. Society witnessed its division into rich and the poor. Conflict led in turn to a demand for a system of law for the sake of order and tranquility. The rich and the poor, with their interest tried to find a solution, led to the creation of civil society with laws to protect private property and the force to implement them. The rich persuaded the poor to join the power for which the poor accepted gladly. Thus, the formation of Civil Society is accomplished through an artificial co-operation between the rich and the poor having their own motives, this coming into being of the civil society is considered as the third revolution by Rousseau.

However, to Rousseau, this origin of civil society is a curse to the civilization because, it irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the laws of property and inequality, converted the clever claims into inalienable right, gave new powers to the rich. It became advantageous to a few, subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery and wretchedness. People wanted to get rid of this post-property state of nature and the way out is through the *social contract*.

#### 2.4.5 SOCIAL CONTRACT

The purpose behind the social contract, according to Rousseau, is to build rightly organized society consolidating upon what nature already provides the humanity with. In State of Nature man enjoyed natural liberty and free will as no one had the natural authority over his fellow men. However, such a State of Nature man was devoid of his moral liberty as he did not yet developed a moral sense. This moral sense can only be born in society, we need to establish a society in which, not only we preserve the liberty of the State of Nature, but also provide the conditions for the achievement of moral freedom. In place of a society in which a few rule over the many, human beings need to set up a society guaranteeing civil and moral freedom for all. Rousseau suggests that human beings need to come together in society for the achievement of such a better life. At the same time, it is also important to organize that society on certain lines and the main problem ‘is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.’

Rousseau offers a solution to this problem in the form of Social Contract, under which “each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction for the general will, and in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole’. Thus, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a corporate and collective body. This public person, formed by the union of all other persons, takes the name of body politic. Members would call such a body politic as “State” when passive and “Sovereign” when active, and “Power” when compared with such institutions. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of people, called citizens as they share sovereign authority and called as subjects being subjected to the laws of the state.

Here, Rousseau’s idea is to vest sovereignty with all the people signing the hypothetical contract, so that the same people are both the ‘sovereign’ as well as the ‘subjects’. It is the people who collectively make the laws, and it is the same people who they obey these laws. While each ‘individual’ has a “particular will” that aims for his own best interest, the ‘sovereign’ expresses the “general will” that aims for the common good. The sovereign

only has authority over matters that are of public concern, but in this domain its authority is absolute: Rousseau recommends the death penalty for those who violate the social contract.

The general will find its clearest expression in the general and abstract laws of the state, which are created early in that state's life by an impartial, non-citizen lawgiver. The law expressed general will, and must only make regulations that affect the entire populace. The goal of legislation is to protect liberty and equality and to promote the common good. However, the people may not always know how to pursue the common good and may need the help of a legislator to guide them in lawmaking. Thus, legislator prevents private interest from influencing legislation and aids the populace in weighing short-term benefits against long-term costs.

Thus, by introducing the social contract, Rousseau wants people to lay down their natural rights merely to get them back from the sovereign power. The social contract is the act confirming that all the rights people have are given to them by sovereign power. This way, all the rights people have are still theirs. However, although their possessors remain the same, their source has been changed. People have them no longer from nature, but by the sovereign's will, on the basis of sovereign's concession. Upon contracting, all the rights people have are not natural, but derivative. As Grimsley states, Rousseau wants people's freedom to be the holy right which would be the basis for all the other rights, provided that this right no longer comes from nature, but from the social contract. From here, it can be concluded that for Rousseau people can have rights in political society. Sovereign power is not incompatible with the existence of rights.

The main goal of sovereign power and its general will is to re-establish the individual's original freedom which he lost when he entered civil society. When there are no differences between the freedom in the State of Nature and the freedom in the political state, then the goal of sovereign power is attained. Rousseau attempts to transmit the State of Nature, along with its main element, freedom, into the political state. As a result, the individual's freedom would be the element that limits sovereign power. Rousseau writes "Each man alienates, I admit, by the social contract, only such part of his powers, goods and liberty as it is important for the community to control; but it also must be granted the sovereign is sole judge of what is important". However, we can see that the sovereign power, how absolute, sacred, and inviolable as it is, does not and cannot exceed the limits of general



conventions, and that every man dispose at will of such goods and liberty as these conventions leave him.

As Sabine articulates, Rousseau, at the outset, must have been an advocate of individual rights and liberties and of the strong position of the individual over community. Moreover, it follows that Rousseau was prone to setting down the limitation upon the general will whenever he noticed that the individual rights and liberties might have been endangered. It is striking here that the new freedom, which comes into being with the political state, is no longer the same as freedom from the State of Nature. It is apparent how Rousseau was ambiguous here. His whole debate about freedom shows us that he tried to “smuggle” freedom from the State of Nature to the political state without being noticed as changed. However, it was changed in that it is no longer the same freedom: it is the freedom put at a higher level of potency and dignified with morality. Hence, it would be false to conclude that Rousseau wanted to transmit the State of Nature into the political state. If he really had wanted to preserve natural freedom and to transmit it unchanged to the political state, he would have done it in the same or similar way as Locke. But Rousseau changed his freedom on its way from the State of Nature to the political state and, thereby, negated the State of Nature in establishing political society.

#### **2.4.6 POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY**

Rousseau’s concept of sovereignty is different from Hobbes and Locke. For Hobbes, people set up a sovereign and transferred all power to him. In Locke’s social contract people set up a limited government for limited purposes, but Locke considers the concept of sovereignty popular or monarchical as a symbol of political absolutism. Rousseau’s sovereign on the other hand, are the people, constituted as a political community through social contract.

As Sedgwick says Rousseau’s concept is essentially based on three principles: a) men are by nature free and equal; b) the right of government must be based on some compact freely entered into by these equal and independent individuals; and c) as a result of compact, the individuals become an indivisible part of a body of sovereign people which has an alienable right of determining its own internal constitution and legislation.

As Rousseau considers sovereignty of the people inalienable and indivisible, the people cannot give away, or transfer to any person or body their own destiny. Whereas Hobbes

setup a ruler as sovereign, Rousseau draws a sharp distinction between sovereignty which always and wholly resides in the people, and government which is but a temporary agent of the sovereign people. In Locke's concept, the people transfer the exercise of their sovereign authority – legislative, executive and judicial – to organs of government. Rousseau's concept of inalienable and invisible sovereignty does not permit the people to transfer their legislative function, the supreme authority in the state. As to the executive and judicial functions Rousseau realizes that they have to be exercised by special organs of government but they are completely subordinates to the sovereign people and that there is no hint or suggestion of *separation or balance* of power.

As Sabine pointed out, Rousseau regarded consent as the basis of society, but emphasized the importance of the community along with the need to protect individual freedom. A community was created for the benefit of the individual, and Rousseau attempted to reconcile the two claims: that of community with that of the individual, the claims of authority with those of liberty. The general will would be the source of a law. The human being would be truly free if he followed the dictates of the laws. Civil liberty, for Rousseau, was similar to Locke's notion of freedom under civil law. It meant freedom from the assents of others. Individuals are free only if they have physical security. Freedom also meant eliminating the arbitrary will of another person and that would mean the establishment of the rule of law. None should have great influence in the making of the law and no one would be above the law.

Rousseau rejected the idea of total surrender of power that made the individual submission to the sovereign; this will result in social peace without liberty. Liberty was quintessentially human. Rousseau's concept of sovereignty differed from that of Hobbes and Locke. Hobbes spoke of a total surrender of power by the individuals to a third party distinct from the people, and delimited the legal theory of sovereignty. Sovereignty, for Rousseau was inalienable and indivisible, but visible, but vested in the body politic, thereby expounding the concept of *popular sovereignty*. He ruled out the transfer of sovereign and adapted the idea that sovereignty originated and stayed with the people. Unlike Hobbes, for whom the sovereign was the ruler, Rousseau distinguished the sovereignty of people, the political community from that of the government. It provided the foundation of public right. Locke, on the other hand, shivered the idea of sovereignty for it suggested political absolutism. His conception of limited state led him to the idea of '*people were sovereign*', but *their*

*sovereignty* was held in abeyance when the government was in power, and within the government it was Legislature that was supreme. For Rousseau, government is an agent of the general will, the sovereign entity in the body politic. He believed all forms of government were not suited to all countries. A government had to reflect the character of a country and its people. He also proposed a civil religion for cultivating the moral foundations of the state. Civil religion enabled the citizens to fulfill their duties.

For Rousseau, contrary to a representative parliamentary government, a participatory democracy was desirable, for it secured freedom, self-rule, equality and nature. Those were the things that justified restraints on the individual, for they would make him truly happy. Rousseau rejected the English parliamentary system of government, for it gave the people the illusion of freedom whereas in reality the English people were free only during the time of elections once representatives were elected, people lost the freedom.

This way, Rousseau unambiguously claims that sovereignty can rest with no one but people. They, and nobody else, are the origin and the bearer of sovereignty. The main goal of sovereign power and its general will is to re-establish the individual's original freedom; that which he lost when he entered civil society. When there are no differences between the freedom in the State of Nature and the freedom in the political state, then the goal of sovereign power is attained.

#### **2.4.7 IDEALISM AND ROMANTICISM IN ROUSSEAU'S POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Due to the kind of ideas and philosophy pronounced by Rousseau, as you have studied till now, many consider Rousseau as a father of Idealism and Romanticism. He is the inventor of Romanticism which has been adopted and expanded by later philosophers of romanticism and idealism. Idealism in Rousseau's philosophy replaced the bitter thoughts of earlier periods with ones of liberty, individualism, a love of nature, and of freedom. In Rousseau's thought sentiments have deeply mixed with political as well as social judgments. Rousseau was ideally happy about the virtue of life of the 'noble savage'. He found the perfect state of human existence in State of Nature, which he considers as a paradise. In this phase of human history no one suffered inconvenience from maintaining his own rights and liberties against others. No conflict in this ideal society because there is no private property. Rousseau idealizes an imaginative condition in which natural man satisfies "his hunger under

an oak, quench his thirst at the first stream, find his bed at the foot of the same tree that furnished his meal; and therewith his needs are satisfied”. Christie McDonald writes that Rousseau’s state of nature completely opposite to present day modernity: “ideal nature is the antithesis of corrupt society. In fact, it responds point by point to each evil in society; chaos is replaced by order, discord by harmony, and agitation by tranquility. That is to say, ideal nature is the negative counterpart of evil society”.

Rousseau attempted to address the question of how to bring justice to everyone in the society, led him to formulate the concept of civil society. His strong defence of civil society inspired many revolutionary movements proper in all over the Europe during 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even in contemporary world many revolutionary and other social movements are influenced Rousseau’s romantic writings. He throws out the idealistic challenge through these following words: “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater ‘Slave than they.’”<sup>9</sup> Thus we find him also the champion of individual freedom”.

Rousseau also preached for educational reform as the basis for reforming and founding the state. His essential idea is that education must be carried out in harmony with the development of the child’s natural capacities by a process of apparently autonomous discovery. This is opposite to a education system where the teacher is a figure of authority who imparts knowledge and skills according to a pre-determined curriculum. Rousseau proposes a different education on the basis of his belief in natural goodness. His educational plan involves two things: a) the protection and development of the child’s natural goodness through various stages; b) the isolation of the child from the domineering wills of others. The child is not instructed what to do or think but facilitate to draw own conclusions as a result of its own explorations.

Rousseau’s idealistic notions filled with romanticism influenced and inspired many scholars in the later on. His most important philosophical impact was on Immanuel Kant. In Kant’s house a picture of Rousseau was the only image on display, and legend has it that the only time that Kant forgot to take his daily walk was when reading Rousseau’s *Emile*.

#### **2.4.8 ASSESSMENT OF ROUSSEAU AS POLITICAL THINKER**

Rousseau’s master work, *The Social Contract*, essentially attempted to spell out the social relation that a properly educated man – a free man – bears to other free men. This

treatise is a difficult and subtle work of a sharp intellect fired by a great passion for humanity. The liberating fever of the work, however, is easily captured in the key notions of popular sovereignty and the general will.

Rousseau states that government is not to be confused with sovereignty of the people or with the social order which is created by the social contract. The government is only an intermediary set up between the people as law followers – or subjects – and law creators – the state. Furthermore, the government is an instrument created by the citizens through collective action expressed in the general will. The purpose of this instrument is to serve the people by seeing to it that laws expressive of the general will of the citizens are in fact executed. In short, the government is the servant of the people, not their master. And further, the sovereignty of the people as expressed in the general will is to be found not merely in the will of the majority or in the will of all but rather in the will as enlightened by right judgement.

It was Rousseau's basic contention that the delegation of power to a government was revocable in the event that the state was no longer representative of the will of the people or failed in its duty to ensure equal protection under the law or provide for the general welfare. The state itself was to be all-inclusive, small enough for every citizen to know every other citizen, and no decision was to be made without fully-informed, truthful discussion free of outside interference. It was essential in every instance that every citizen shall exercise his social conscience – or empathy – in the determination of the general will of the people.

Two and half centuries have passed since the publication of the *Social Contract*, Rousseau still holds his place as one of the most invigorating and controversial political theorists. For Rousseau, the basic problem was to secure the voluntary integration of individual and social action. In the current century with its unprecedented rapid social changes, this problem is particularly acute. Both Liberals and Totalitarians, in their respective ways, are equally preoccupied with the task of helping people to identify their individual interests with collective institutions. As a brilliant pioneer in this particular field of exploration, Rousseau is still capable of throwing revealing light on the problems of current day politics. While many authoritarians consider Rousseau as an evil spirit of the modern world and a reckless libertarian whose siren voice has lured successive generations along the path of

undisciplined individualism and self-indulgence, on the contrary, liberals regard him as their prophet in curbing the excesses of totalitarian government. Mainly due to these completely opposed views, we may still continue to see Rousseau as the most bitterly controversial figures in the history of political thought in the centuries to come.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
Course Title: **Western Political Thought**  
Unit – III: **Modern Thinkers**

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### **3.1 HEGEL: METHOD, IDEALISM, HISTORICISM, CIVIL SOCIETY AND STATE**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 3.1.0 Objectives
- 3.1.1 Introduction
- 3.1.2 Method: Hegelian Dialectics
- 3.1.3 Hegel's Idealism
- 3.1.4 Historicism
- 3.1.5 State and Civil Society
- 3.1.6 Summing Up

#### **3.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to know:**

- Hegel's contribution to idealistic philosophy
- The significance of Hegelian dialectics
- The nuances of Hegel's Idealism
- Hegel's Historicism
- Hegel's views on State and Civil Society

#### **3.1.1 INTRODUCTION**

C.L. Wayper writes in his book *Political Thought* that “The most outstanding advocate of the organic theory of the State and one of the most important and influential thinkers of modern history was Hegel.” Hegel was born in Stuttgart in Wurtemberg in Southern Germany

in 1770. His father was a civil servant. In his school days he was very bright and brilliant and hence he became a school prize winner. Then he studied theology in the University of Tübingen. He fell under the spell of the French Revolution in his youth and declared it as 'a glorious mental dawn.' During this time he was very thorough with the writings of Rousseau. He worked as a private tutor for sometime. There he wrote the life of Jesus Christ. After serving as a private tutor or for some years he became lecturer in the University of Jena in 1801. During this time Kant exercised a tremendous influence over Hegel. But Hegel never became a Kantian. The contrast between Kant and Hegel is considerably greater than that between Plato and Aristotle. In 1806, Jena fell before the victorious armies of Napoleon. As a result of this Hegel had to leave that place. After Jena, Hegel worked as a local editor and also became a school headmaster in Nuremberg. He published his three volume work on the "Science of Logic." Because of this work, he became the most loudly acclaimed of German philosophers. He became a Professor at Heidelberg University in 1816. He was then forty seven years old. Here he wrote his "Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences", the fullest treatment of his general philosophical system that he ever produced.

Hegel then shifted to Berlin University where he accepted the chair of Philosophy. While at Berlin he acted as the official philosopher of Prussia. In this capacity he expounded the nature of knowledge, god, universe and the state. Hence, his ideas had tremendous effect both upon theoretical and practical politics. At Berlin, Hegel did not consider himself under any obligation to enter into the conflicts of the politicians. He criticised the English Parliamentary Reform movement which was responsible for the passing of the Reform Act of 1832. Hegel died of cholera at the age of 61. He was buried next to Fichte. The Philosophy of Hegel is to be found in his works "The Phenomenology of Spirit", "Logic", "The Philosophy of Right" and the "Philosophy of History." Hegel represents the climax of German idealism in political thought. Like Kant and Fichte, Hegel too based his political system of psychology i.e. on the conception of positive and self-determining freedom. He combined the historical sense of Montesquieu with the philosophic eminence of Kant and Fichte in his writings. The stone of his philosophy is evolution; the evolution of ideas by dialectical process.

According to George Sabine, the significance of the political thought of Hegel centres round two points and those are: a) the dialectic as a method and b) the idealisation of the



nation- state. These two points became the source of the two most important stands of later political thought. The concept of '*Geist*' (spirit) was basic in all the political thinking of Hegel. It appeared in many aspects namely *Weltgeist* (World Spirit), *Volksgeist* (National Spirit) and *Zeitgeist* (Time Spirit). It dominated Hegel's idea of historical evolution. Vaughan has pointed out to the various contribution made by Hegel in his philosophy. In this connection it is pointed out that Hegel grasped the connection between morals and politics and handles the same with a far greater insight, than any of his predecessors. During the 19th century. Hegel was hailed not merely as the official philosopher of Prussia but also as the philosopher of the age, in the same way as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas were regarded as the philosophers of their times. George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel represents the climax of German Idealism in political thought. The cornerstone of the Hegelian system is evolution, the evolution of Idea by Dialectical process. Hegel exalted the personality of the National state represented by its sovereign, to mystical hargnts. He believed in the rationality of the existing institutions. His method was historical, evolutionary and dialectic. History to him showed a process of evolutionary enfolding. Evolutionary enfolding resulted from the fact, that every idea embodied in itself its own contradictions and therefore there are contrarities in nature everywhere. But these contrarities are never absolute or mutually distractive. There is balancing of the opposites leading to equilibrium and evolution of a new idea. He wrote 'service of Logic' and 'Philosophy of History'. His whole philosophy is based on three fundamental postulate (1) All organic processes are dialectical (2) Reality is an organic process and (3) Reality lies in the Ideal.

### **3.1.2 METHOD: HEGELIAN DIALECTICS**

In the universe, the only reality is the idea, spirit or reason or the divine mind. History of the world is the history of the evolution of Idea or Reason. Reason is reality. It is based on thought. Reality is not static. It is dynamic and an organic process. All organic process are dialectical. Dialectics explains the evolution of Reason in human mind. It is the mechanism by which Reason or Idea propels itself and evolves, embodying itself in human institutions and system of thought of a progressively evolving nature. Dialectics is self propelling because its Idea contains in itself its own opposite and it is the nature of idea or thought to seek reconciliation of the opposites. This reconciliation is possible because the contradiction between the opposites of an Idea is never absolute.

The dialectic evolution of Idea or Reason is not linear but spiral, based on triple rhythm of change i.e. thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Each thesis generates its anti thesis. The two are reconciled and transcend to a higher form i.e. synthesis, which preserves what is true in both the thesis and anti-thesis. This thesis generates its own anti-thesis. Closely connected with his theory of nationalism and the philosophy of history was one of his most brilliant ideas namely, 'The Dialectic'. The Historical Method which Hegel adopted for the investigations or the correct interpretation of the world history needed an apparatus of special type. The Dialectics provided such an apparatus. The main purposes of Hegel was to demonstrate the order of development in which Absolute Reason unfolds itself in the ideas and institutions of different civilizations. Hegel attached a great importance to the Ideas of Dialectic. He boasted that he had discovered the greatest formula in the history of philosophy. The Dialectics was a purely logical apparatus capable of revealing the historical necessity and also of interpreting the history in its true perspective. The Dialectic, was to be an ingredient of the Historical Method and hence to be a dynamic force because the subject-matter of the study of Dialectic, namely, the Absolute Idea or Reason or Geist was in constant movement. The Dialectics was an element of primary importance in the Hegelian political philosophy. Hegel found that this apparatus was capable of "yielding new and otherwise indemonstrable conclusions in the social studies" (Sabine). It was Hegel's belief that in the dialectics he had discovered a law of synthesis, inherent both in the nature of mind and in the nature of things.

### **3.1.3 HEGEL'S IDEALISM**

There are two schools of thought regarding the true nature of Ultimate Reality. One school believes that some abstract idea forms the ultimate reality. The philosophers belonging to this school believe that everything in the universe is deducted or derived from some such idea. This school of thought is generally known as Idealism. Prominent subscribers of this theory are Plato, Kant and Hegel. The other school of thought believes that matter is the ultimate reality. All the good things in life, all the institutions and all ideas are derived from the things material. In other words, our ideas are formed according to the environment and the material circumstances in which we live. Prominent thinkers belonging to this school are Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Laski. Hegel is an Idealist in as much as according to him the ultimate reality consisted of Absolute Idea or Reason or Self-consciousness or Spirit (*Geist*). These words sometimes Hegel uses as synonymous. But he does not take care to define

them precisely and separately. But the most important aspect of Hegel's Philosophy that we must remember, is that the material things for him count for nothing as they are the cumulative result of the evolution from the Absolute Idea. The latter is not something static. The Absolute Idea is the most dynamic thing one could ever imagine. The Absolute Idea in its search for Self-Realisation moves forward. Hegel calls it the unfolding of the Reason. The whole universe with all its striking paraphernalia and the phenomena is the result of such unfolding of the Reason. Such is in brief the Hegelian Philosophy of History or Hegelian Historical Method. It can be discussed in detail in the following lines.

The Absolute Idea moves forward in a slow evolutionary process. According to Hegel the whole course of the development of the world history is pre-determined or conditioned. Following Aristotle's Teleology, Hegel believes that the Absolute Idea, through all the chequered history is moving towards some great aim. There is no place for chance or accident in the Absolute Idea's scheme of things. The world throughout the historical evolution has been moving according to a rational plan. The true nature of a thing is what it becomes when it is fully developed. The Absolute Idea, in the beginning of the world process do not know anything, but it is its inherent nature to know at things. The Absolute Idea starts moving with the set goal of getting "perfect knowledge of everything and of itself." In the words of Prof. Wayper, "History is the process," according to Hegel, "by which the Spirit (or Absolute Idea) passes from knowing nothing to full knowledge of itself. The spirit on the way of its goal makes many, experiments". In the long chequered historical process, the Absolute Idea or the Spirit assumes numerous forms, discards the earlier ones and gets on to the newer ones. Each form adopted by the Spirit helps it along the road to complete self-fulfilment but each form represents only one step along that road and there are many more ahead. The first stage in the evolution of the Absolute Idea is the physical or the inorganic world. The physical things that we can perceive through or sense-organs are the manifestations of the Absolute Idea. The second stage in the evolutionary process is the world of plants and animals. This stage is superior to the first stage in the 'sense that' the animal world is more complicated and evolved than the physical world. The third stage is the evolution of man on earth. This stage is much more complicated than the earlier stages as there is a rational element in man which enables him to discern the good from the bad. The fourth stage is the evolution of Family system. It is of higher evolutionary category, as in it in addition to the rational element, the spirit of mutual co-

operation and accommodation also prevails. The fifth stage in the evolution of Absolute Idea is the coming into existence of Bourgeois Society or Civil Society. In this society the economics considerations come into play in addition to the two elements present in Family. Hence this society is a step forward in the evolutionary process. The last and the highest stage in the evolutionary process is the state. In all the earlier stages the Absolute Idea could not realise itself. It is in the state alone that the Absolute Idea gets self-realisation. The evolutionary process comes to an end when the state appears on the scene. The be-all and the end-all of the evolution of the Absolute Idea is the state.

*Geist* or Spirit or Absolute Idea furnished, for Hegel, the basis for a perfect moral order. The *Geist*, working gradually all through the history, got self-knowledge in the state-which was the consummation of the perfect moral order. As Maxey Points out, this concept of Geist was basic in all of Hegel's political thinking. It appeared in Various aspects. *Weltgeist* (world-spirit), *Volkgeist* (national spirit), *Zeitgeist* (time-spirit) etc: It fathered nearly all his political doctrines and dominated this idea of historical evolution. The state, Hegel tells us, is the shape assumed by *Geist* in its complete realisation in phenomena or existence. The moral order, slowly developing in the family and other forms of association finds its consummation in the state. The state as such is the ethical self-conscious substance. The personification of the 'Will', the *Geist* or the Absolute Idea, is the realized ethical idea or ethical spirit. The will that manifests itself, makes itself clear and visible. The state is exalted by Hegel to the position of "the march of God on Earth". If we follow Hegel correctly we should not confuse the ordinary, mundane and actual states with the state of which he talks so highly. He talks of the Idea of state, the concept of the state as it is derived from the *Geist* through the historical evolution. As he is an idealist, for him the true nature of the state is exactly synonymous with its Idea. Prof. Dunning a so suggests that "this exposition hardly requires the warning given by Hegel, that he is dealing with the state not as a historical phenomenon, but as an intellectual concept. In the words of Hegel, "The state is organism that is, development of the idea to its destination." But it cannot be said that Hegel completely threw to winds the actual historical process, though he saw to it the historical process is shown to pass through the four-fold pre-determined process. In the words of Prof. Dunning, "Hegel's survey detects four great world historical political systems. Four systems are the oriental, the Greek, the Roman and the German. He makes the commonplace facts of familiar history fit themselves nicely into the categories and relations

of his logic, and shows that mankind through all the ages is marching steadily but unconsciously, along Hegelian lines, toward the Germanic perfection of the XIX century...”. Hegel stated in his book, *Philosophy of History* that *Geist* realized itself and freedom in the true sense of the term was realized only in the Ideal German State. In his own words “The Orient knew and to the present day knows only that one (i.e. the despot) is free; the Greek and Roman worlds, that some are free; the German world knows that all are free.” Such is Hegel’s generalization of the world historical process and his Philosophy of History.

#### **3.1.4 HISTORICISM**

In his description of the Mercy of God on Earth and also of the historical evolution of the state in six stages and the four-fold processes Hegel combines in himself the role of a metaphysician and a historian Prof. Lancaster has also beautifully described it in these words “Faced with such transcendental claims such as ‘The state is the Divine Ideas it exists on Earth,’ one is moved to ask whether Hegel talks about the state in General or about actual states. The answer is that he had both in mind. That history exhibits the working of Reason in the universe, is in fact, a necessary result from his basic premise that ‘the actual is the rational.’” While talking about the state in general he would suddenly start talking about his own state namely Prussia. While dealing with the unfolding of the *Geist* or Reason he wants to prove-that such unfolding took place in the world historical peoples such as the Orientals, Greeks and the Romans who had actually founded states. He wanted to show that the above-mentioned peoples had also represented the Universal Spirit or Reason or Absolute Idea, but in a partial manner, while the German people, according to him, represented it completely. ‘In his interpretation of world history, it was the national rather than the individual or any other association of individuals that formed any significant entity. The world history was nothing but the record of the movements of the *Geist*, expressing itself through the different nations or peoples of the world at different points of time in the spirit of the nation (*Volkgeist*). The *Geist* expressed itself partially in the earlier stages of development like Inorganic World, Organic World, Human Beings, Family, Civil Society on Bourgeois Society, but it got its true expression in the Nation State which is the true creator of art, law morals and religion. “Hence the history of civilization is a succession of national cultures in which each nation brings its peculiar and timely contribution to the whole human achievement. It is in the national state and only in the modern history of Western Europe, that this inborn impulse of the nation to create reaches self-conscious

and rational expression. The state therefore is the director and the end of national development.”

Hegel made his so-called Historical Method as the king-pin of the study of his political philosophy. In his studies, he wanted to introduce- the Historical Method in places of the Empirical Method earlier adopted by Locke and Hume. Hegel, himself, was a great historian of un-paralleled insight into the history of western culture. Due to his influence the subjects like history of religion, history of philosophy, and the history of law were made important subjects of investigation. The Historical Method could be applied to politics, economics, law, religion and philosophy. The Historical Method was supposed to replace methods of generalization and analysis and also to improve mode of empirical research. The Historical Method was teleological in as much the past and the further course of history was predetermined and no human volition, howsoever powerful could bring about any changes in it. Hegel had a set of pre-determined conclusions before him. In order to prove that those conclusions were correct, he sought the help of historical investigation. He made history only a tool. According to the dictates of his Reason he identified himself with the principle of Nationalism. He held that nation-state alone could complete the search for self-realization of the *Geist*. Not only had that he set his heart at the goal of modernization, unification and nationalization of Germany. He wanted to do for Germany what Machiavelli did for Italy to make a break-through towards unification and the emergence of a nation. Germany of his time was beset with two weaknesses namely, “particularism and provincialism.” Germany, in his time was not politically speaking a nation, though culturally they were a nation. In order to realise his set goal of making Germany a powerful nation under the stewardship of Prussian Monarch; his master, he sought the help of the historical method. As Dunning states, “The historical method meant a philosophy of history, or the discovery of a general direction of cultural growth, by which it was hoped that a scientifically defensible line could be drawn between advanced and back ward peoples, developed and primitive civilizations, progressive and retarded nations. The method assumed that, there is in nature, a single pattern or a law of development, which can be exhibited by a proper arrangement of subject-matter. This holds good for the whole evolution of society or for any of the chief phases of civilization, as well as for any sub-division of history.” In the whole historical evolution of mankind and the organisation a particular order or pattern or logic could be discerned, once the facts were seen in a proper perspective”. By this

process he arrived at an historically objective standard of values” (Sabine). In order to prove social and political truths the help of self-evident moral axioms like the Laws of Nature etc. was not necessary. Logical order of historical development could now be applied to the whole gamut of social and political philosophy in general and the history of national cultures in particular.

For the idea of Dialectic Hegel is indebted to Plato who used this method in his “Republic”. The word Dialectics is derived from the Greek word “Dialego” which means to discuss or debate. By his debating ability Socrates, in the “Republic” brought to light the contradictions by discussion in the view-points of his adversaries with a drive to arrive at the truth. Hegel was also indebted to the later Greek thinkers who believed that historical processes go by opposites. They believed that any thing, if pushed to the extreme, is bound to bring into existence its opposite which is likely to destroy it. There were instances in the Greek world itself that absolute monarch when pushed to the brink of despotism breeds violent revolution and the emergence of democracy. If democracy is converted into licence or mobocracy, again a despot or dictator snatches power and starts ruling. This was the reason why Aristotle advised always to avoid extremes and propounded his theory of a ‘Golden Mean’ and the mixed constitution. Hegel just got a clue from the above mentioned sources of Dialectic. He did not incorporate these ideas as such in his philosophy but gave them a different connotation. But he imbibed the basis of the Greek Dialectic. His study of philosophy and history made him realize that contradiction was the very moving principle of the world. Hegel thought of the world as endlessly moving equilibrium. According to Hegel, the evolution of the absolute Idea does not take place in a straight line. The spirit moves forward in a zigzag manner. The evolution of the Spirit is from the positive negative to X (The new idea born out of the mixing of the two). The X will again become the positive of the new trio and the progress will go forever. The Hegelian complex formulae is reduced to three simple words, Thesis, Anti-thesis and Synthesis, or Being, Non-Being and Becoming. Hegel has given a large number of instances of the progression of his famous trio which are given below in a chart:

<b>Thesis</b>	<b>Antithesis</b>	<b>Synthesis</b>
1. Art	Religion	Philosophy
2. Family	Civil/ Bourgeois Society	State
3. Despotism	Democracy	Constitutional Monarchy
4. Greek City	Medieval Christian State	Modern German State
5. Absolute Monarchy	Mobocracy	Democracy
6. Idea	Nature	Spirit
7. Inorganic world	Organic world	Human Beings

Such examples can be multiplied. This was a purely logical Method. The idea of anything denotes the opposite of it and we reach a conclusion after reconciling the two. The true nature of a thing can better understood if the contradictions are also known. Opposition and contrariety are universal properties of nature; this is at once a law of the cosmos and of thought. Everywhere forces grow into their opposites ... contrary forces supply the dynamic of history, Hegel thought of the world as an endlessly moving equilibrium, but balance can never be permanent; it merely gives a continuity and direction to change. Consequently, the opposition is never absolute. The destruction of one position in a controversial situation is never complete. Both sides are partly right and partly wrong, and when the rights and the wrongs have been properly weighted, a third position emerged, which unites the truth contained in both. The driving force he called 'contradiction'. In Hegel's logic contradiction means the fruitful opposition between systems that constitutes an objective criticism of each and leads continually to a more Inclusive and a more coherent system. Pleasure is best understood in opposition to pain, goodness to badness, and heat to cold. Hegel has tried to generalise this tendency and to make it applicable in all walks of life and his political philosophy, and the interpretation of the whole, historical and evolutionary process. According to Hegel there would be an endless chain of the triads, each thesis giving birth, after being blended with its opposite, to the synthesis of the two, and in its turn, each synthesis becoming the thesis of the next triad. As such the endless process of evolution goes, from times immemorial till the emergence of the German national and monarchical state. When a synthesis emerges out of the thesis and antithesis, no essential



and characteristic element of the two is destroyed. Rather their essence in the greater propensity is carried over in the synthesis. Thus the vitals of any phenomenon and civilization from the early stages of evolution can be said to be resented in the latest edition of the synthesis. Hegel conforms to the principle of physical sciences; particularly Chemistry, that nothing perishes in this universe but it may keep on changing in countless forms. According to Hegel contradiction was inherent in the nature of everything, except the Reason or the Spirit when it has reached its goal. Nothing is lost in the continuous evolution of the Spirit. In the words of Prof. Wayper, "...dialectic is a theory which explains how it is that history is the story of the continuous development of the Spirit. Since all the former steps of the Spirit are preserved in the new ones taken, it emphasises, the-essential continuity of that story of the increasing revolution of the Spirit."

In his theory of Dialectic Hegel attaches great importance to Contradictions, which, according to him, are essential to our very understanding of truth. According to Hegel every thought contains two movements-affirmative and negative. The contradictions implicit in the affirmative or the thesis become explicit. The affirmations implicit in the negative or the antithesis also become explicit. After a clash between the two an affirmation or restatement of the truth in both of them is made at a higher level or the "the contradictions are sublimated and combined in a new synthesis". Thus Hegel propounded a novel theory of synthetic logic according to which, the same statement may be both true and false at the same time. This means that till the attainment of final perfection by Spirit everything in this universe has some element of both truth and falsehood. He says "Finite things are contradictory in themselves". Thesis and antithesis confront each other in fiat contradiction so to say in a relation of struggle and opposition. Each must be developed to its last consequences before the contradictions can be sublimated in the synthesis. It is; not any of the external agencies which remove the contradictions. It is the Reason and Reason alone which is immanent in them, which removes the contradictions and promotes development. Contradiction or dialectic is therefore a self-generating or self-propelling process which does not need the help of any outside force to get moving. The dialectic was in short a new "mechanism by which thought propels itself, or the way in which Reason progressively embodies itself in institutions or history or society, in a series of propositions, no one of which is the truth, out each of which contains a part of the truth along with-error; the contradiction is transcended and a new and truer assertion achieved. He gave a novel

meaning to the word contradiction-the driving force of the whole process of evolution-a meaning which it never had in the formal and former theories of logic. Hegel claims to have invented a new logic, synthetic logic, by giving a decent burial to the old system of analytic logic.

Dialectic was not only a logical method of arriving at truth it was also a moral instrument for bringing about the unifications of Germany and its emergence as a great nation. It is not the sentiments or reason of an individual but the will of one individual and the national will that can bring about the desired transformation in the institutional framework with a view to achieve moral goal of any description. For Hegel such a moral goal for all German nationals was to achieve unification of Germany. The Dialectic not only fulfilled a historical necessity but also a moral necessity. In other words, it conceived, not only of the achievement of goal in absolute terms but also in relative terms. On absolute and philosophical plane, goal of the dialectic was the self-realisation of the Spirit or Geist or Absolute Idea or Reason. But, talking in relative terms, or practical and pragmatic terms, the goal or dialectic was the unification of the German Nation the stewardship of the then Prussian Monarch, whose philosopher guide was Hegel was. It was claimed by Hegel that no other dynamic concept world, except, Dialectic was capable of uniting relativism and absolutism with so much of flexibility. Hegel developed his philosophy in such manner that his relative or pragmatic goal could be logically derived from the absolute goals. For instance, Hegel held that Germany will become a nation state, not because the Germans wish it, but because it was the logical consequence of the historical evolution of the Spirit and was in line with the whole direction of the political development. Hence, whether or not the Germans wish it, the emergence of German nation-state was inevitable. The Evolution of Reason or Intelligence will definitely bring about the desired goal. The dialectic, therefore, united intelligence and will. In the words of Prof. Sabine, "Hegel's dialectic was in truth a curious amalgam of historical insight and realism, of moral appeal, romantic idealization, and religious mysticism." Throughout the history the Spirit has been changing shapes. Thus, as Wayper said, "Hegel's is a doctrine of change and of change constantly for the better, a promise of assured progress. Change is thus as strongly marked a characteristic of his teaching as conversation"

### 3.1.5 STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Like Plato, Hegel was also a great system-builder in the history of political philosophy. He starts with certain set of self-evident truths or premises, generally called in political philosophy. One of such premises was that ‘what is rational is real and what is real is rational’. In common parlance this phrase would mean that whatever exists is according to Reason and whatever is according to reason does exist. But, Hegel used these two words in very deep, obscure and philosophical sense. The cardinal principle of Hegel’s philosophy was the theory of the gradual unfolding of the Absolute Reason or Spirit or Geist or Absolute Idea; through the dialectical process. The Reason gets its complete Self-Realization in the State. So, according to Hegel the state was rational. As such the state is of the eternal and necessary essence of the Spirit. Now coming to the word “Real” following Aristotle, Hegel had held that the true nature of a thing or Reality is known when it is fully developed, as a whole, in its entirety. The true nature of Reason or Reality is known when it gets complete fulfilment, in its entirety, in the state as a whole. As such the state is real. By an algebraic theorem, now, we can prove that Real is Rational and Rational is Real. As the State=Rational, and the State= Real, hence the Real=Rational or vice versa. The state, according to Hegel, was the embodiment of both Rationality and Reality which were logically treated as synonymous by Hegel. Here Hegel uses the word Real as meaning fundamental or important. For Hegel, Real is not synonymous with ‘existent’. He understands by Reality that which is underlying and significant, not that which is empirical. In the words of Prof. Sabine, “But this was emphatically not what Hegel meant when he said that ‘Real is the Rational’, because he always distinguished between the real and that which merely exists. The Real is the permanent inner core of meaning in history in comparison with which particular events are casual, transient or apparent..... What exists is always momentary and to a large degree accidental, the mere surface manifestation of deep-lying forces which alone are real.” According to Hegel all states are rational as they represent the consummation of the historical process of the unfolding of the Reason. Whatever has happened so far was necessary in the process of the unfolding of the Spirit. No event could take place unless it was ordained by and found necessary by Reason in its search for fulfilment. Hence events have taken place according to a rational plan. Whatever happens, happen because the Spirit or Reason needs it and whatever the Spirit needs is right and rational He also believed that the Real world is, as it ought to be. No body can deny that

the Real state (as it ought to be) must be rational. Following his own logic, he proved that all states were, as they ought to be. Hence by logic he glorified the existing states and treated them as ideal and rational states which deserved obedience from their constituents. He entitled the state with such epithets as 'March of God (Absolute Reason) on earth' and 'Embodiment of Reason'.

While analyzing Hegel's state, it is necessary to see how the state, in a historical process, emerges out of the family and Civil (Bourgeois) Society. For Hegel, the state was the synthetic product of the family (thesis) and the civil society (antithesis). According to Hegel the physical evolution of the Reason comes to an end with the emergence of man on the scene. But the social evolution goes on further. In the above 'triad' the Family represents unit Civil Society represents Particularity, and the State represents Universality. In his theory of historical evolution of the state from the family Hegel closely follows Aristotle's logic, 'Man is by nature gregarious. He could not live alone, Hence in order to fulfil elementary needs of food, sex and primitive protection men are naturally inclined to live in a family a unity incorporating the rational idea of mutual love'. The Family was the first institutional embodiment of the Spirit in its search for self-fulfilment. The family to a limited extent represents the rational and ethical order. Hegel described his concept of family in the following lines: "The family, as the unmediated substantiality of mind, is specifically characterised by love, which is mind's feeling of its own unity. Hence in a family one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within its unity as the absolute essence of oneself... Marriage, as the immediate type of ethical relationship, contains first the moment of physical life secondly in self-consciousness the natural sexual union purely inward or implicit... is changed into a union on the level of mind, into self-conscious love. Its (Marriage's) objective source lies in the free consent of the person, especially in their consent to make themselves one person to renounce their individual and natural personality to this unity of one with the other. From this point of view their union is a self-restriction, but in fact it is their liberation, because in it they attain their substantive self-consciousness. They live, therefore, in a unity of feeling, love, confidence and faith in each other ..."

The institutions of family and marriage constitute a step forward in the joining of the particular selfish desires with the self-less universal Reason and a lesson in the sacrifice of the particularity of the individuals for the unity of the family and universality of mind if necessary.

Hegel's theory of family was conventional. There was nothing new about it. The family cannot fulfil all the complex needs of man, hence it is insufficient. The family is found to be too small for the adequate satisfaction of man's wants. The family, the rational idea of mutual love is thus thesis from which Hegel begins his analysis of the state.

But the Family is inadequate to satisfy the various needs and his multi-faced personality. In order to have a better fulfilment of their personality, the individuals by force of their nature develop wider organisation, namely civil society or bourgeois society in which they hope to lead ethical life. While the characteristic feature of family is the unity based on love, the diversity based on "contract and competitive self-interest" is the basis of bourgeois or civil society. A wide range of trade and industry is developed in bourgeois society. The diverse human needs are better satisfied in the civil society. To regulate properly the diverse interests and the rights of the individuals police force also comes into existence. But, according to Hegel, so far the state has not come into existence. Hegel distinguishes between the state and civil society. In the words of Prof. Dunning, "Civil society, however, appears in a new light. It is made to include those relations of individual to individual that turn upon the satisfaction of economic needs, the protection of property through the administration of justice and the care of general welfare through agencies of police and corporation". Though civil society performs more or less the same functions as the state, yet Hegel argues that the state is different from and superior to the former. The property is the product of civil society. The civil society evolves laws, though they may not be, necessarily just laws. In the words of Wayper, "The whole process of trade and industry in bourgeois society, becomes a new organisation for 'the supply of human needs so that man in that society is producing for his family, satisfying his own wants and at the same time serving his fellows which makes bourgeois society take on a rational and universal significance. While giving an account of civil society, Hegel gives an exhaustive narration of guilds and corporations, the estates and classes, the associations and local communities; by becoming their members, the individuals learn to think not only of their own interests but also of the interests of the whole group, to which they belong and thus develop social and cooperative instinct. In the words of Hegel, "But in developing itself independently to totality, the principle of particularity passes over into universality, and only there does it attain its truth and the right to which its positive actuality is entitled". The civil society so depicted by Hegel is a state, but it is of an inferior sort. It is based on material needs of human beings "that are not wholly private and

yet are primarily self-regarding ... but it is some-what less selfish than the family. Civil society, as such is a set of institutions with the function of educating the individual to the point where he sees what he needs, only by willing what all men need and imperfectly conscious of their interdependency. The Hegelian Civil Society was The State in embryo, the state in the making, a kind of state, but not a completely developed one, as it could not embody fully what he calls Reason or Geist. Civil Society's marked distinction is Competition, while that of the state is Co-operative Unity. The Civil Society does not represent that Organic, Universal and Rational Unity which the State Represents. In Civil Society also there are all the ingredients of the State, like the police, army, trading community, agriculturists. But they are all in such a frame of mind that they would seek their own interests in competition with others. The moment the members of the Civil Society start striving for the 'Universal Interests' of the community, it gets converted into the State. It is almost psychological change in the minds of the constituents that will make the state out of the civil society. As Sabine puts it, "the state is morally superior to civil society." But this moral superiority or psychological change is brought about by a class of devoted civil servants. Prof. Lancaster, analyse that "What is needed to make a real state, according to Hegel is the existence of a civil service charged with the care of the Universal Interests of the community. When a Universal Class of Civil Servants is created, civil society passes over into the state." The moment the individuals start identify' their interests with the interests of the community as a whole they will become an 'Organism'. The wills of individuals become the Will of the State. The State is the Organism and an Objectified manifestation and personification of the individual wills. The state becomes a moral person. The state is the successor, though, a morally superior successor of the civil society, in the evolution of mankind. But they can, in a given society, exist side by side. They are in fact mutually dependent. The civil society, even after the emergence of the state continues to perform the commonplace business providing public services, administering the law, performing police duties and adjusting industrial and economic interests. The state may direct and regulate them as need arises, but it does not itself perform them. Civil Society depends upon the state for intelligent supervision and moral significance. The state, however depends upon civil society for the means of accomplishing the moral purposes, which it embodies. But though mutually dependent, the two stand on distinct dialectical level. The state is not a means but an end State is the elimination of the process of human evolution. At different places Hegel has attributed to the states numerous high-sounding epithets

such as “March of God on Earth”, “The Divine Idea as it exists on Earth”, “Spirit personified”, “Realized Ethical Idea.” The basic difference between the civil society and the state is that in the former, the individual is for himself the sole end, in himself, while In the latter, the state is the higher end for which the individual exists. Certain features can be analysed in case of Hegel’s state:

- The first and foremost characteristic of Hegel’s State is that it has divine origin. Divine origin of the state in Hegelian terms means that it is the “culmination of divinely guided growth of absolute Idea or Reason or Geist”. It is, the “March of God on Earth.”
- Hegel’s state is an End in itself. Every other conceivable thing inside the state or outside it is a means to it. The state does; not exist for the Individuals. The Individuals exist for the state. It is not the Individuals who have made the state, it is just the other way round. The persons living in the Civil Society were not the perfect individuals or Citizens, after the state ushered into existence and made them moral and fit to be the constituents of the state.
- The state is a whole which is far greater than the parts, i.e. the individuals which compose it. Their significance or importance is only due to the fact that they are members of the state. It implies that the individuals must obviously be completely subordinate to the state just as the organs of the human body are subordinate to human organism.
- The state is unchecked by any moral law, for the state is itself the creator of morality. It is the state which has made the men moral. The individuals can never plead conscience or the moral laws against the state. Individual Conscience cannot tell us what is right and good for the community as a whole. The individual conscience must be informed by the tradition of community. The state is the best possible and the most appropriate interpreter of the wisdom of the past crystallised in the traditions or customs of the community. The state is above custom and morality. Hence whatever the state does is right. According to Hegel, the state is infallible. In case of conflict between the state and the individual, the state is bound to be invariably correct and the individual invariably wrong.

- The state is the true giver of the real freedom to the individuals. In the words of Hegel, “nothing short of the state is the actualization of Freedom”. The real Freedom, which is the product of the state manifests itself first in law, secondly, in the rule of inward morality, and thirdly in the whole system of social institutions and influences that make for the development of personality. Hegel, emphasises that Freedom consists in “complete obedience to the laws of the state.” He argues that the state is the Embodiment of Reason. The Laws of the state are the outward expressions of Reason. When the state is the embodiment of Freedom, all the individuals living under it are ‘Free’. The individual realises Freedom to the extent to which he identifies himself with the Spirit or the Essence of Spirit. There are two wills existing side by side in the individual mind i.e. Real will and Actual will. ‘Real Will’ represents the Rational will and takes care of the Interests of the community as a whole, while the ‘Actual Will’ looks after the personal and private interest of the individual alone. According to Hegel, freedom for the individual consists in subordinating the Actual will to Real/rational Will. By serving the interests of the community alone, the individual can get the fulfilment of his personality. The impulsive will being very powerful, the individual himself cannot subjugate it without the help of the state. The only way to be free is the voluntary submission of the impulsive will to Reason which is expressed in the State. According to Hegel, the individual is free only if he identifies voluntarily, willing and consciously with the laws of the state. ‘If the individual obeys the State due to fear of punishment, he is no longer free’. Hegel does not conceive of the Freedom in terms of the rights of the individuals. The state is omnipotent. The individuals do not possess any Rights against the State. He does not give any Rights of Speech, or Expression or Association to the individual in conflict with the state. Whatever rights the individual may seem to be exercising, can be exercised only within the four corners of Law. The individual has no right against that state, but within the state.
- The State is the Interpreter of the Customs of the Community which are indeed the “collective reason of the past”. The Interpretation comes in the shape of the Laws of the state. The state is the only fountain head of the laws of the states. It is the Creator of Social Ethics. The state is the only organisation which can tell us what is right and what is wrong.



- The state is infallible. Whatever the state does is right. In case of conflict between the individual and the state, the latter is bound to be correct and the former wrong due to the moral authority of the state. The infallibility of the state was the most important tenet of the philosophy of Hegel.
- The state is not only absolute in its relations with its subjects, it is absolute in its relations with other states. The state, in its relations with other states is not bound by any rules at all. The highest law is its own welfare. There is no such things as International Law, according to Hegel, because the states obey it so long as it is conducive to their interests. The state is sovereign in the true sense of the term. The state is self-sufficient.
- War is not an absolute evil. It is a virtue in itself. It brings to the fore-front the noblest qualities in man. It aids the moral development of the individuals. Success in war justifies war, irrespective of, what sorts of means are used. The victorious in war is the true representative of the World Spirit. 'War is to Virtue what mother is to the child'. War plays a great role in world history. In his words, "World History is the world court of Justice." In a particular war it is the World Spirit which decides which of the contesting states is its true embodiment. War is an instrument in the hands of the World Spirit to push through the development of the world on the lines of the Dialectic. Hence, according to Hegel, war is a sacred institution.
- In Hegel's state the individuals have no right to resist the commands of the state. They have not been given the right to resist as they are the creatures of the state. They are what the state has made them. The individuals are the organs of the organism-a body politic. Just as the parts of Human Body cannot revolt against the body the individuals cannot resist the state on whatsoever ground.
- According to Hegel the best form of government is the constitutional monarchy (of the type of Prussia of his time). It would be better if it is hereditary. Out of the three branches of the government, legislative is the 'Thesis' or universal aspect. The Administrative wing is the 'Anti-thesis' or particular aspect. The Monarch who represents the best in the two is the 'Synthesis'. According to Hegel sovereignty of the state resides in the Monarch and not in the people. The Administrative wing

which includes the judicial functions is harmonised by the Monarch with the Legislative wing. Hegel had a dislike for the Parliamentary System of England. He denounced the Territorial Representation of the Individuals in the Parliament. He propounded Functional Representation in the legislative wing. The interests of classes should be the basis of Representation in the legislative wing.

- These were the characteristics of the state of Hegel are applicable to an Ideal State-a state which exists only in Idea. But at numerous places Hegel, identifies his ideal State with Prussia. According to Hegel, the Prussian state of his time had reached the apex of the development of human society according to the Dialectic formulae and no further development was possible. There was nothing higher and more perfect than the Prussian State and beyond it in the evolutionary Process.

### **3.1.6 SUMMING UP**

Hegel's philosophy led the English idealists of the nineteenth century to revise liberalism and rid it of its abstraction that viewed the individual as a solitary and pleasure seeking animal. Hegel's theory gave rise to the sociological theory of politics, because he showed that political power was connected with the economic, social and cultural forces in the State. He gave a new emphasis and importance to the State and greatly enriched modern political philosophy. He grasped the connection between morals and politics and handled the same with a far greater insight than any of his predecessors had done. According to Prof. Sabine, "The philosophy of Hegel aimed at nothing less than a complete and systematic reconstruction of modern thought." He set forth a new intellectual method, the dialectic, which should bridge the gulf between reason, fact and value. In his political theory he set a value on the national state and its place in history which formed so small part of his influence. The social philosophy of Hegel had a direct and intimate relation to the national history of Germany. According to Maxey, "It will be many years before the full influence of Hegel's political thought can be measured. His contribution to the warring ideologies represented on the one side by Lenin and Stalin and on the other by Mussolini and Hitler, constitutes but one part of his significance, and is no more paradoxical than his influence in other directions. Both his view and his methodology have deeply affected the social science." Divergent streams of thought have also flowed from Hegel's subordination of the whole of civil society to the state.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
Course Title: **Western Political Thought**  
Unit – III: **Modern Thinkers**

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## **3.2 BENTHAM: UTILITARIANISM, THEORY OF STATE, GOVERNMENT, LAW AND ETHICS**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.2.0 Objectives
- 3.2.1 Introduction
- 3.2.2 Bentham's utilitarianism
- 3.2.3 Theory of State and Government
- 3.2.4 Law and Ethics
- 3.2.5 Summing Up

### **3.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- know Bentham's utilitarianism
- understand Bentham's theory of State and Government
- comprehend Bentham's views on Law and Ethics

### **3.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Jeremy Bentham was the founder of utilitarianism. He was born in London on February 15, 1748. He was the son of Jeremiah Bentham, who was a lawyer. His father wanted his son also to be a lawyer. He obtained a great reputation for Greek and Latin verse writing when he was at Westminster school. In 1760, he went to Queen's College, Oxford where he acquired a thorough acquaintance with logic. Then he went to Lincoln's Inn in England for legal studies in 1763. His mind was leaned towards scientific experiments and hence he could not succeed in the legal side. Since he found the work dull he gave up the same.

From the beginning he was interested more in the defects of the legal system than in mastering its details. Bentham went to Russia in 1785 to see his brother. His brother was an engineer and was employed for the creation of a modern agricultural and Industrial colony in the Ukraine. In 1792, the National Assembly of France conferred on him the title of a French citizen. Bentham was the chief promoter of the University College, London, which was founded in 1827. From a small college, it developed into the largest University of Commonwealth. Bentham was having a large number of persons as his collaborators and disciples. His first and foremost disciple was James Mill. Sir Samuel Romilly, a distinguished lawyer, David Ricardo, the great economist, J.S. Mill, a great philosopher, John Austin being the prominent figures, were some of his friends. Lord Shelbourn the distinguished Whig leader, who was the Prime Minister of England in 1782-83 was a friend of Bentham. Bentham was a great writer. He published as many as thirty works during his life time. Nearly twenty works were published posthumously. We find in his writings, law, political economy, education, church, language, local government, banking, social service, census, international organisation etc. Among them "Fragment on Government" was his first book published in 1776. It marked the beginning of philosophic radicalism. His other important works were, "Introduction to the Principles of Morals at Legislation", "Emancipate your Colonies", "Essay on Political Tactics", "Principles of International Law", "Manual of Political Economy" and "Church of England". He pleaded for annual elections, equal electoral constituencies, wide suffrage and secret ballot.

Bentham's sole insistence was on the principle of utility by which he meant "the greatest good of the greatest number" was based on the end of the state. Hazlitt wrote of him as late as 1825 - "His name is little known in England, better in Europe and best of all in the plains of Chile and the mines of Mexico. He has offered constitutions for the new world and legislated for future times ....". Bentham lived up to eighty-two. He worked very hard till the end of his life. His ambition had been no small one. According to Leslie Stephen, "he is said to have expressed the wish that he could awaken once in a century to contemplate the prospect of a world gradually adopting his principles and so making steady progress in happiness and wisdom." J.S Mill says, "A place, therefore, must be assigned to Bentham among the masters of wisdom, the great teachers and permanent intellectual ornaments of human race ...." The service of Bentham to political thought was enormous and also excellent. In the words of Doyle, "Jeremy Bentham stood out as the dominating philosopher

of the radical group”. He further says that “he was inductive scientist drawing conclusions from his laboriously collected data.” Referring to the death of Bentham in his ripe age he remarks that he died, “Venerated by a group of disciples as a patriarch, a spiritual leader, almost a God, with James Mill as his Saint Paul.”

Bentham, the English utilitarian philosopher was one of the principal influences on the reforming thought of the 19th century. He was primarily a legal reformer. Although Bentham wrote on the various aspects of the political state of his day, his distinctive field was Ethics and Jurisprudence. So the English men are greatly indebted to Jeremy Bentham.

### **3.2.2 BENTHAM’S UTILITARIANISM**

Bentham, had tremendous capacity of reading and writing voluminous books.. He collected huge material on subjects like political and legal reforms. But he was in the habit of writing piece-meal and of taking up new works without completing the works already in hand. Hence some of his works may not have even been published. It is some of his friends and admirers who compiled and edited his works and published his books. Better known of his works are “Fragments on Government” and “Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation.” In these two books and numerous pamphlets Bentham propounded the following political theories :-

By far the most important political idea of Bentham is his theory of Utility. As pointed out earlier, Bentham was not the originator of this idea. He borrowed it from Priestley and Hutcheson. But he gave such a shape to this theory and attached such a great importance to this idea that it became the cornerstone of his philosophical system-and also a watch-word of the political movement of the later Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century. As J.W. Allen says, “It seems to me that in Bentham’s ideas there was little or nothing that was original or even highly distinctive.” All his ideas are derived from earlier writers. But he assimilated all of them and turned them into a movement which ruled England throughout the nineteenth century.” In his book “Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation”, Bentham elucidates his theory of Utility. The key-note of this principle is that the state is useful only so long as it caters to the “greatest happiness of the greatest number.” The “greatest happiness” theory, in turn, is based on a psychological and hedonistic theory of “Pleasure and Pain.”

Pleasure-Pain” theory though complex enough, is explained by Bentham in a simple manner. According to Bentham human beings are creatures of feeling and sensibility. Reason is only a hand-maid of feeling or passion. . All experiences are either pleasurable or painful. That action is good which increases pleasure and decreases pain. That action is bad which decreases pleasure and increases pain. The yardstick of judging the goodness or badness of every individual’s actions is the pleasure-pain theory. In the words of Bentham “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do”. “Achievement of pleasure and avoidance of pain are not only the motivating forces of human behaviour they also set the standards of values in life. Now, according to Bentham what applies to individual morals, applies with equal force to the statecraft. That action of the state is good which increases pleasure or decreases the pain of the largest number of the individuals comprising it. All actions must be judged by this criterion. If the state promotes the greatest good of the greatest number it is good, Otherwise it is bad. As Sabine has put it, “This principle they (Utilitarians) held, to be the only rational guide, both to private morals and to public policy. The true function of jurisprudence is censorial, the criticism of the legal system with a view to its improvement. For such criticism a standard of value is required, and that can be supplied only by the principle of utility”. Bentham has also said “It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number which is the measure of right and wrong.” All actions of the state should aim at providing the greatest good of the greatest number. Hence utilitarianism implies both individualism and democracy.

The main idea of Bentham is that pleasure and pain can be quantitatively and arithmetically calculated and measured. According to Bentham it is possible to compare pleasures and pains. To enable us to measure pleasure and pain Bentham has given us his famous doctrine known as ‘Felicific Calculus’, upon which, according to Maxey, “his whole system of political thought was erected.” The sum of the interests of the several members composing it is the interest of the community. In calculating the greatest happiness, ‘each person is to count for one and none for more than one.’ According to Bentham following were the various factors for measuring pleasure and pain :-

1. Intensity
2. Duration
3. Certainty or uncertainty
4. Nearness or remoteness
5. Purity
6. Extent
7. Fecundity.

The first four factors are clear. Purity means that pleasure is one which is not likely to be followed by pain. Extent means the number of persons who are likely to be affected by this particular pleasure or pain. Fecundity means productivity. Bentham's formula of calculation is that we should sum up all the values of all the pleasures on the one side and those of the pains on the other. The balance or surplus of any of the sides will show whether it is good or bad. Bentham has given a detailed account of such calculations and measurements. As Maxey says it "To convince the reader that accuracy and objectivity were truly possible in such a calculation of tendencies rooted in pain and pleasure. Bentham proceeded to enumerate and analyze the principal pains and pleasures of mankind and then to give advice as to how they might be evaluated. By dint of his Felicific Calculus Bentham has tried to make Ethics and Politics as exact sciences like Physics and Mathematics. Here we must point out that for Bentham, what mattered was the quantity of pleasure and not the quality. In the words of Wayper "The doctrine of utility is a doctrine of quantitatively conceived hedonism it can recognise no distinction between pleasures except a quantitative one." If Bentham's theory is to be accepted it may mean only that it gives more pleasure and not that it gives better pleasure. This aspect of Bentham's theory was later criticised by his own disciple J .S. Mill. As a hedonist, Bentham was more concerned with the consequence than with the motive. If a particular law or action of the government produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number, it is immaterial, whatever may be the motive. Such is the Principle of Utility as enunciated by Bentham and as based on hedonistic calculus.

### **3.2.3 THEORY OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

The basic idea that Bentham developed was that of Utility. The other ideas about the state are just incidental. Regarding origin of the political society, Bentham out-right rejected the Contract theory. It held it as totally absurd. According to him there is no justification of children being bound by the oral or written words of their fore-fathers. He was too a down-to-the-earth-realist to believe in such type of abstract theories as theory of Natural Rights. All the rights are civil rights/and are within the state and are created by the state. Hence state possibly could not be created at any particular time by Contract for the protection of the so-called Natural Rights. According to Bentham, the basis of the state is the selfish interest of the individuals. They obey the state as it promotes their selfish interests, their life and property. The political society has existed and exists because it is believed to

promote the happiness of the individuals who compose it. The origin of the state is in the interest, welfare and happiness of and utility for the individuals. In the words of Bentham, “the probable mischiefs of obedience are less than the probable mischiefs of disobedience.” The state he says is like a sand-heap of individuals, the adhesive being the mutual interests of the individuals. The basis of the state is not contract but human needs and the satisfaction of the human needs is its sole justification. In the words of Dunning, “Every form of contract theory is rejected by Bentham. Contract, consent, agreement furnish no basis for political rights and duties. The ultimate reason, why men submit to the requirements of law and of government is not that they or their ancestors have promised to do so, but that it is in their interest to do so. It is the principle of utility that binds the individuals together. The state, according to the Utilitarians, is a group of persons organised for the promotion and maintenance of the greatest happiness of the greatest number of individuals comprising it. The end of the state is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The ultimate reality is the individual. The Benthamite view of state, Sabine says, is that “any corporate body, such as state or society is evidently fictitious. Whatever is done in its name is done by someone, and its good, as Bentham said is the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.”

According to Bentham state is the only ‘source of law’. The main purpose of the state is to frame laws which cater to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Law is the command of the sovereign and as such it is binding on the subjects. But the individuals obey the law of the state only because it promotes their interests. Wayper has put it in these words, “Because law is a command, it must be the command of a supreme authority. Indeed, it is only when such an authority is habitually obeyed that Bentham is prepared to admit the existence of civil society. His state, therefore, is a sovereign state. It is the hallmark of a sovereign state that nothing it does can be illegal.” Law is the only source of all rights of the individuals. There is no such thing as Natural Rights. All Rights are Civil Rights. The individuals can never plead Natural Law against the state. “Natural Rights,” says Bentham, “are simple nonsense: natural and irscriptible rights rhetorical nonsense, nonsense upon stilts.” The basis of political obligation is partly habitual obedience of the laws of the state by the individuals and partly the calculated self-interests of the individuals. Though he firmly believed that rights cannot be maintained against the state, yet he justifies opposition to the state if that opposition will produce less pain than the continued obedience. In Bentham’s



scheme of things liberty has only a subservient role to play. In Bentham's state, liberty is not an end itself. In the words of Weyper "Happiness is the only ultimate criterion and liberty must submit itself to that criterion. The end of the state is the' maximum happiness and not the maximum liberty." Such a concept of state can only be a democracy. Since direct democracy is impossible, the only alternative is representative democracy. Bentham's state is one in which all men have equal rights. The concept of equality of rights is not based on any abstract notion of Natural Law, but on the concrete idea that every individual seeks to pursue his interests to the best of his might. All individuals, have equal rights, including right of property in the eyes of law, though by nature they may not be equal. According to Bentham, protection of property is a major condition of achieving the greatest happiness. But at the same time he was convinced that law should aim at equal distribution of property and removal of gross inequalities.

In spite of the fact that Bentham, held that state should try to remove inequalities in property, he did not assign any positive role to the state. He was of the firm conviction that the state has only a negative role to play so far as the affairs of the individuals are concerned. The state cannot strive to make man good or to build up his character. The best the state can do is to remove obstacles in the way of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The state can only try to increase pleasure and decrease pain of the individuals. Bentham was in agreement with classical economists that the state should follow the policy of Laissez-Faire i.e., the least interference in the affairs of the individuals comprising it. In the sphere of economics, morals, personal behaviour, character etc., the state should leave the individuals as free as possible. There is no collective good or general will superseding the separate interests of the individuals. The state exists for the individuals and not vice versa. In this individualistic approach Bentham is closer to Hobbes than to any other political thinker. The state is only a law-making body and not an ethical association aiming at the moral good of the people. Its authority is restricted to making such laws as remove obstacles from the individuals getting the maximum happiness.

#### **3.2.4 LAW AND ETHICS**

The most original aspect of Bentham's political philosophy is in the sphere of jurisprudence and reforms in criminal law and prisons. There was no restriction on the legislative power of the state, not even the customs and conventions. The state may take help from customs

and established institutions but they are no checks on legislative competence of the state. In the words of Sabine “This distrust or custom and its complete subordination to legislation were among the principal characteristics of Bentham’s jurisprudence.” Bentham’s greatest achievement is that he tried to apply the principle of greatest happiness of the greatest number to all the branches of law, civil and criminal and to the procedural law and to the organization of the judicial system. For achieving this end, he suggested numerous reforms in civil and criminal laws and procedures. He was all out for simplification of English Law and International Law. He did not bother much about the form of government (though he preferred representative democracy to monarchy and aristocracy), but his “design for utopia was a comprehensive Code of law based on the principle of utility” (Maxey). According to Bentham, law should be intelligently adapted to promote the happiness of the individuals. As a jurist and legal reformer he suggested liberal reforms in British Law and procedure. The whole of the Nineteenth Century legislation of England is the result of his endeavours. Sir Henry Maine has aptly said, “I do not know a single law reform effected since Bentham’s day which cannot be traced to his influence. Bentham suggested ways and means by which Justice could be administered cheaply and expeditiously. According to him ‘justice delayed is justice denied’. He suggested that the Acts of the Parliament should be couched in simple and easily understandable language so that the lawyers may not cheat the public at large. He came down heavily on the legal profession. The highly technical, rigid, obscure, capricious and dilatory legal procedures prevailing in his time was nothing short of a conspiracy on the part of the legal profession to loot the public (Sabine). He suggested that there should be single-judge courts; as in the multi-judges courts responsibility is shirked. He also suggested that judges and other officers of the courts should be paid regular salaries instead of ad hoc fees. He also attacked the jury system. So far as punishment is concerned, he held that penalty is an evil out of a necessary evil. It is an evil, as it causes pain but it can be justified only if ‘it either prevents a greater future evil or repairs an evil already done.’ Bentham was firmly of the view that punishment should be commensurate to the crime committed and in no case it should exceed the damage done. He was against death penalty except in very rare cases. British Parliament passed an Act banning death penalty, except in very rare circumstances. This is the recognition, though late, of Bentham’s worth. He was in favour of eliminating other savage penalties also from the British legal system. He suggested numerous reforms in the treatment meted out to the prisoners. He spent a lot of money and time in developing a model prison.

He said that the punishment should be corrective and preventive instead of being retaliatory and revengeful. He developed a code of scientific penology based on utilitarian principles. He stated that the state should adjust the punishment to the offence in 'such a way as to restrain the offender from committing it, or at least from repeating it.' Bentham has given a detailed account of various punishments which should be meted out in particular circumstances. Subsequent reforms in English legal procedure and prisons were all inspired by Bentham. Sabine has rightly put it, "Bentham's work on jurisprudence provided the pain - according to which the administration of justice in England was completely revised and modernized in the course of the nineteenth century."

The other political ideas of Bentham can be easily stated. He was in favour of universal manhood suffrage. This principle is in accordance with his theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Time was not yet ripe for giving franchise to women. He pleaded the cause of annual Elections of the Parliament. This idea was mooted in order to make the parliament more representative of the changing public opinion. Members of parliament should be regarded as Delegates and not as Representatives. Second Chamber of Parliament namely House of Lords was harmful, hence it should be abolished. Monarchy was the representative of the privileged classes and hence should be abolished. He preferred a republican form of government. He suggested voting by ballot system.

Bentham's political ideas, particularly his theory of utility, has been criticised on the various grounds. He started with a wrong psychology. Human beings are not as coolly calculating about pleasure seeking, as he presumes them to be. He takes an over-simplified view of Human-Nature. Human Nature is too complex. Man is a bundle of desires of innumerable types and also of reason and intuition. It would be too much to say that man can seek pleasure only and nothing else. Man is more than a pleasure hunter. Sabine has aptly put it, "He had in fact no skill in psychological observation and no interest in it for its own sake. His effort to reduce psychology and ethics to the standard of Physics proved to be unsuccessful. Jones has pointed out that Bentham's principle of Pleasure- pain is insufficient. On the one hand, he says that man cannot, but seek his own pleasure and on the other, he argues that he ought always to aim at pleasure. These two positions are irreconcilable. There is contradiction in his two statements. On the one hand he says that man can only seek his own' personal happiness. On the contrary he says that he should strive to seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number. When by nature he cannot, but seek his

own personal pleasure, how can he strive for the general good. He is not able to reconcile his egoism with his altruism. Pleasures are always subjective. No subjective standards can be laid down. Human beings are not like set machines to enjoy objectively the pleasures. The quality of pleasure is as important as quantity of pleasure. To emphasise only the quantity of pleasure is going far away from reality. In the words of Jones "It seems rather to be the case that there are many qualitatively different satisfactions, which are only too often incapable of comparison simply in terms of more or less. This fact about human motivation is hidden from Bentham by his concentration upon the word 'pleasure'." His so-called felicific calculus is simply not the method of calculating quantitatively the pleasures. Quantitative measurement of such subtle and subjective sensations like pleasures is not possible. Pleasure is not like an entity, a physical object which may be added to, divided, parcelled out like a plate of cakes at a tea party. Pleasures, unlike physical objects, cannot be added or subtracted or divided. He identifies pleasure with happiness. But as we all know happiness is a much broader term than pleasure. Bentham asks us to directly aim at pleasure or happiness. But it is a psychological fact that happiness is derived indirectly while doing something else. Happiness is a too subtle and elusive thing to be acquired by directly aiming at it. Theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number implies logically that interests of 49% people can be sacrificed for the sake of 51 % which is not a correct theory according to the democratic principle. The state should stand for the interests of practically all the individuals comprising it. It is not known how the principle of 'every-one to count for one and no one for more than one' is logically derived from Bentham's hedonism. Carlyle criticised it as 'Pig Philosophy.' It attaches too much importance to baser and more sensuous pleasure, ignoring altogether the qualitatively superior types of pleasure. People do not always eat because they are hungry; sometimes they eat because they derive pleasure out of it. His concept that society is the sand heap of individuals is not correct. His view that the only adhesive that joins the individuals together is the calculated self-interest is also not correct. In fact it is the inherent gregarious instinct, implanted in the heart of every man that keeps the society together. Society is not something artificial as regarded by Bentham. Society is a natural organization, which was born with the man. He assigned too negative a role to the state. The state can do and has been doing positive good to the individuals. These are the days of welfare state. The state has profitably looked after the educational and economic affairs of the individuals. If only the negative role of removing obstacles is performed by the state the richer strata of society will become

still richer by exploiting more and more the poorer sections of the society. The state has to perform the positive role of raising the moral standards of its constituents. As pointed out in the beginning, Bentham was more of a legal reformer than a political philosopher. There are numerous philosophical ambiguities and contradictions in his system, some of which have been pointed out above. Benthamism is simple, appealing and understandable at the cost of depth of vision. Over-simplification is the greatest defect of his philosophical system. As Sabine has put it “Bentham was bankrupt in philosophical reasoning ... his was an ad hoc philosophy.” He also says that “In point of fact no member of the group including Bentham himself, was in any way remarkable for philosophical originality or even for a very firm grasp of philosophical principles. His contempt of history and well-established institutions is another draw-back ‘in his philosophy. Those institutions which have worked well in the past must be respected and allowed to continue. No person, howsoever brilliant and no nation howsoever resourceful can afford to start with a scratch. History has, after all, its own lessons to teach to the posterity’”.

### **3.2.5 SUMMING UP**

In spite of his philosophical ambiguities and shallowness of philosophical depth Bentham is regarded as one of the greatest political thinkers in the history of political thought. But for him the course of history would have been different. He influenced the course of events in the nineteenth century to such an extent, that all the reforms carried out in England and elsewhere followed the directions that Bentham had indicated. Sir Frederick Pollock has said rightly that every important ‘Reform of English law during the nineteenth century can be traced to the influence of Bentham.’ He has been one of the most influential political thinkers. In fact, the utilitarians held their sway during the later half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century though their impact was visible even in the later half of the 19th century also. As such some of the major contributions of Bentham towards the growth of political thought has been: Representative government and majority rule which are the hall-marks of modern democracy. This is the greatest contribution that Bentham had to make towards the growth of political thought. The government must be representative of the public opinion and strive for the safe-guard of the interests of the greatest number. The government must justify its existence by doing the best possible for the public. Bentham established that state, law and government have no super-human origin. They are born out of elementary human needs and they should justify themselves by satisfying those needs.

There should be elections and the representatives of the people should rule by majority system. Greatest happiness of the greatest number became the watch word. This is the type of government we are finding in all democracies, of course with slight modifications, depending upon peculiar circumstances.

Another important contribution of Bentham is the Analytical School of Jurisprudence. This school of jurisprudence is now well entrenched in English and American legal systems. As Maxey puts it, 'in the sphere of jurisprudence his influence was immediate and lasting. No man did more to unravel the complexities of medieval law or to introduce simplicity, clarity, and practical good sense into legal thinking.' His persistent propaganda led to the codification of civil, criminal and international law. Though this school is usually associated with Austin, yet Bentham is the father of this school. Austin "did little more than bring together systematically ideas that were scattered through Bentham's voluminous and not always readable works", says Sabine. Courts in English were given the shape, in due course, as Bentham had suggested in his writings. At present, the British legal system and the administration of justice are the most efficient and prompt in the world all thanks to Bentham. Bentham's theory of punishment has started a wave of penological reforms throughout the world. The administration of prisons has improved considerably. His dictum "each person to count for one, and no one for more than one." whatever may be its sources and whether derivable from hedonism or not, has given rise to the concept of equality in the voting system in modern representative democracies. The value of every person, howsoever rich and influential he may be, will be equal in the eye of law and in the working of representative democracy.

One of the major contributions of Bentham is his application of 'empirical method of investigation' to concrete problems of law and government. In this respect he influenced Marx also. Despite its logical deficiencies, the principle of greatest happiness of the greatest number became a watch-word for liberalism and progressive reforms. The legislators got a measuring rod to judge the worth of a particular piece of legislation. As Sabine has put it "The greatest happiness of the greatest number principle placed in the hands of the skilful legislator a practically universal instrument." Real significance of law and institution must be judged in terms of this principle. Bentham, unlike the idealists and the collectivists emphasised the view that the state exists for a man and not man for the state. This is the correct view of the relations between the individual and the state. The interests of the

individuals are primary, for whose protection the state ushers into existence. The interests of the community are the sum total of the interests of several men who compose it. The state and its interests are not something transcendental and abstract. The state is a means and not an end in itself. According to Wayper this is his greatest contribution. Maxey has rightly suggested, 'Bentham divorced politics and ethics almost as completely as Machiavelli'. He recognized no moral right to command and no moral duty to obey, nor did he see any moral considerations in the question of revolution. "The state is based on human needs and the obligation on the part of the individuals to obey the state lasts only so long as the state continues to satisfy those needs.

To conclude, we may say that although Bentham lacked originality and there were confusions and contradictions in his system. Yet his importance and achievements are to be judged by the amount of influence he exerted on the contemporary and future generations. That was the age that needed the reforms in the existing system most and he suggested most enlightened types of reforms. Englishmen are by nature conservative and believer in slow reforms and not revolutionary. He increased their belief in their essential reasonableness and therefore their conviction that reform is infinitely preferable to revolution. His suggestions brought about reforms throughout the world and proved to be beneficial to the man at large. Despite inadequacies in his thought, there are few thinkers in the history of social philosophy that have exercised so wide and beneficent influence as Bentham."

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**

Course Title: **Western Political Thought**

Unit – III: **Modern Thinkers**

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**3.3 J. S. MILL: LIBERTY, WOMEN EQUALITY,  
REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND  
UTILITARIANISM**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

**STRUCTURE**

- 3.3.0 Objectives
- 3.3.1 Introduction
- 3.3.2 Mill's Views on Women Equality
- 3.3.3 Mill's Utilitarianism
- 3.3.4 Mill's Ideas on Liberty
- 3.3.5 Representative Government and Utilitarianism
- 3.3.6 Summing Up

**3.3.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- know Mill's views on women equality;
- understand Mill's utilitarianism and his ideas on liberty;
- comprehend Mill's views on Representative Government and Utilitarianism.

**3.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

John Stuart Mill is a widely known nineteenth century British political writer. He was the last of the utilitarian and the foremost of the individualists. He was the eldest son of James Mill. He was born in London on May 20, 1805. James Mill had a very good plan to bring him up in the Benthamite lines. He was learning Greek by the age of three. At eight he



began to study Latin. He studied Greek and Latin classics which included those of Plato, Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Homer and Polybius. He also learnt algebra, geometry, the differential calculus etc. He studied political economy particularly Adam Smith and David Ricardo. His father was his teacher and constant companion. At the age of twenty three he left the Debating Society which he himself had founded. Before the age of thirty two he had already worked as the editor of the London and Westminster Magazine. J.S. Mill was appointed to a clerical post in the East India Company in 1823 and became head of his department in 1856. He continued in that post till 1858 when the East India Company was ended and the Government of India was taken over by the Crown. J.S. Mill's association with Mrs. Harriet Taylor, a woman of high character and brilliant mind paved the way for a great attachment towards her. He married her in 1851, two years after the death of her husband. Mrs. Taylor helped to humanise his revised version of utilitarianism. His view was that she was the originator of most of his ideas. After the ending of the company, he refused to accept an offer of a government post, preferring to retire from the administrative service. At the age of fifty nine, he entered Parliament. After his retirement he lived along with his wife till her death. He spent most of his time in France with his stepdaughter Helen Taylor, as a companion. He died on 8th May, 1873 at Avignon where he now lies buried in a tomb with his wife.

Mill's first great literary achievements were in the Westminster Review. By his pen he brought himself into prominence. He was a great writer and he wrote a large number of books, pamphlets and articles. In 1843, he published his 'System of Logic' which achieved immense success. He published 'the Principle of Political Economy' in 1848. It became his immediate and exceptional success. 'Considerations on Representative Government', 'Utilitarianism', 'The Subject of Women' were published respectively in 1860, 1861 and 1869. His Autobiography was edited by his daughter Helen Taylor and published in 1873 posthumously. The Three Essays on Religion, another posthumous work was published in 1874. Apart from this, his another most famous work 'On Liberty' was published in 1859. As the editor of the London Review, John Mill was a regular contributor to the journal from its start in 1834 until 1840. Green expressed his respect for him by echoing Gladstone's remark that Mill was a saintly man. According to C.L. Weyer, "In the whole history of Political Philosophy, there are few more appealing characters than his."

### 3.3.2 MILL'S VIEW ON WOMEN EQUALITY

It cannot be denied that Mill had rendered yeoman service to the cause of women. He did the same not only inside of the Parliament, but also outside of it. According to him sex should not be a disqualification to them. Women were denied jobs on par with men in public offices. They were thrown into the background on account of customs and prejudices. Hence, he stood for speedy and needy action of women emancipation. As a result, womenfolk achieved tremendous rights as against men; including right to vote. Women all over the world have got the right to vote and they should be grateful to J.S. Mill for his vigorous and rigorous advocacy of their cause. Mrs. Taylor was partly responsible for the same, for which they should show their gratitude to her also forever. J.S. Mill was as much interested in social reform as in political speculation. His sense of justice was early stirred by the social and legal disabilities of women. In the mid Victorian period, the condition of the women in British society was very miserable. The women were shut up from the Universities and the places of higher learning. They were not allowed to take part in public life. All the high posts and prizes were absolutely beyond her reach and she was prevented to exercise vote at an election. She was not entitled to contest election for the membership of Parliament. The only field of working for women was the home and hearth. The enemies of women's rights had the arguments that because of their outward artificial nature, they were incompetent to play a respectable role in national life. Mill argued that women's nature was the result of centuries of subjection and lack of opportunity. This inequality be regarded as highly unjust. He regarded birth as no basis of excluding women from the rights that they deserve. He said that person is deliberately created by nature for a particular calling or profession. If women, however, differ from men on ground of sex, this distinction of sex should not be made as a basis of distinction everywhere.

Mill was eager to emancipate women and was the first to plead their cause in Parliament. He believed that if women were gives equal opportunities with men the result would be beneficial to women, since freedom alone gives happiness and is valuable to the community in general, since society would benefit from the contributions made by the mental capacities of women. The higher education of women, the increased opportunities open to their talents and the extension to them of the franchise and of eligibility to public office were largely aided by his arguments and his efforts.

### 3.3.3 MILL'S UTILITARIANISM:

John Stuart Mill was son of James Mill, a close associate of Bentham. He grew up with Benthamism and was made to imbibe the spirit of Utilitarianism right from the childhood. He was groomed by his father to be a political thinker who could continue the Utilitarian tradition. But unfortunately he did not restrict the range of his studies to the Utilitarian literature alone. In addition, he studied Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Thucydides, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Goethe and many more thinkers of repute. For John Mill, Bentham's principle of Utility was a doctrine and a philosophy, the propagation of which was the avowed purpose of his life. By the time the older Mill passed away, large criticism was being levelled against Utilitarianism; that it was base, degrading, piggish, materialistic, unrealistic and fanatic John Mill, started writing in defence of Benthamism. His articles on the subject made a great impression and were regarded as an authentic exposition of the utilitarian view. But in his enthusiastic defence of Bentham's Utilitarianism Mill revised, altered and modified its basic tenets to such an extent that by the time he finished with the job, what emerged from his writings was something different from Utilitarianism. In the words of Wayper, "In his desire to safeguard Utilitarianism from the reproaches levelled against it, Mill goes far towards over throwing the whole Utilitarian position." J.S. Mill prove to be, says Dunning, the "most penetrating revisionist" of Benthamism so much so that with his passing away in 1873 there sounded the death knell of Benthamism and the latter passed away by absorption into later philosophical growths"

He says that self-interest of the individual was the only motivating force in Bentham's philosophy. Man was supposed to be cool and calculating in his pursuit of selfish pleasure and happiness. Man had no moral duty or obligations towards his fellow-beings. This was the general logical position which emerged out of Bentham's hedonism. But as Barker has put it: "In his 'Essay on Utilitarianism', he so far abandoned the principle of self-interest as to adopt the principle of self-sacrifice." In the words of Mill, "To serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own," was, in the present very imperfect state of the world's arrangements, "the highest virtue that can be found in men." This was the complete abandonment of Benthamite theory that man cannot but seek his own pleasure. Though Mill's modification is more appealing and more in accordance with the human experience yet at the same time it is the denial of Utilitarian philosophy. Although he did not abandon his utilitarian beliefs and radical ideas, he brought about a considerable change in the

original theory. For instance, he taught that happiness in life is obtained by making it not the direct end. Happiness can be sought by aiming at another object than one's own happiness. Happiness is only a by-product of some sort of pursuit. Speaking of the paradox of pleasure and happiness it is to be found only indirectly. Mill's position is more practical and satisfactory, and psychologically correct. In order to meet Carlyle's criticism that Utilitarianism is degrading, Mill sought to establish the non-utilitarian proposition that some pleasures are of a higher quantity than others. Bentham had laid emphasis only on the quantity of pleasure and ignored quality altogether. Mill tried to defend Utilitarianism by saying that pleasures differ in quality as well as quantity. Quantitatively superior pleasures, according to him are certainly preferable to the inferior type of pleasures. According to him some kind of pleasures are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend upon quantity alone. He leaves it to the testimony of those, who have experienced both the higher and lower pleasures, to decide whether pleasures of higher or lower quality are preferable. And their decisive testimony is that higher types of pleasures are preferable. Mill modifies Bentham's thesis and hold that as a source of pleasure, poetry is superior and preferable to pushpin or any other game. In the words of Mill, "It is better to be a human-being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied : better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool or the pig is of a different opinion, it is because they know only their side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides." By these modifications Mill tried to save the face of Benthamism, but confessing at the same time it is essential. Mill's alteration is no doubt a more correct reflection of human experience, yet it must be admitted that it is completely incompatible with Bentham's basic tenets. A true hedonist would not accept any other distinction between pleasures except a quantitative one. Quality of pleasure has no place in hedonistic philosophy. If quality of pleasure is admitted then the source of pleasure would become the criterion to Judge the goodness or badness of pleasure and not the pleasure itself. Mill's re-interpretation was different from the original Benthamite position.

Mill held that pleasures cannot be objectively measured. Pleasure or pain is only a subjective sensation which can be felt or suffered by the person concerned. Mill regards 'felicific calculus' to be absurd. He questions that who else can tell about the acuteness of particular

pain or intensity of particular pleasure, except the one who is experiencing those sensations? No outside agency can measure the pleasures and pains. Mill's position is more satisfactory and more in accordance with human experience, but at the same time it is a vital breach in the stronghold of Utilitarianism. According to Mill, the dignity of man is the final end of life, and not the achievement of pleasure or avoidance of pain. Seeking of pleasure or avoidance of pain would be too low or base a goal of life for human beings to fix. In his 'Essay on Liberty' he talks of higher spiritual values of life like 'Self-Realisation'. All animals seek pleasure and avoid pain. He asks then, what is the difference between a man and an animal? The only difference is that man has a sense of dignity while the animals do not have the same. Man should aspire to be one's true self instead of seeking baser and sensuous pleasures. The criterion for judging an action would be how far it enhances the dignity of man. Dignity of man became the yardstick, instead of pleasure.

The state according to Mill is a moral institution which exists to promote virtue among the individuals. Promotion of virtue is a moral and ethical and not a hedonistic one. For Bentham the state existed to increase pleasure and decrease pain of the individuals comprising it. According to Bentham, the individuals owe allegiance to the state only on purely selfish grounds. They have no moral obligation to obey the state. According to Mill the individuals have certain public duties and responsibilities towards, the state, which cannot be explained in terms of the principle of Utility. Mill's theory is more satisfactory, but it undermines the principle of Utility, given by Bentham. Some inner mass of feelings which can be termed as conscience makes us morally bound to the state. Some natural feeling 'for the happiness of mankind,' feeling of regard for the pleasures and pains of others makes the individuals morally bound to the state. Mill while making important alteration in Benthamism showed an extraordinary interest in Liberty. To a strict Utilitarian like Bentham, Liberty is always subordinate to the principle of Utility. But to Mill Liberty was something fundamental, "the proper condition of a responsible human being". . Liberty, for Mill is not only an individual good -but also a social good. Mill's 'Essay on Liberty' is one of the greatest English Classics. For Mill Liberty is an end in itself and not the principle of utility. This was a complete anti-thesis of Utilitarian position.

Bentham had rejected the influence of history, traditions, conventions, local conditions, habits and the past of a particular people. He had also held the view that-the theories based on all-pervasive principle of Utility were of universal application. He once said that

by applying the principle of utility he could legislate for any farthest country of the world. Mill, on the other hand, recognized the value of the past history of a particular nation or country. Behind the feeling of allegiance towards the state and the element of cohesion there are hidden centuries of existence. No country can have a complete feeling with the past. As pointed out earlier in the criticism of Bentham, the contempt of history and well established institutions was a draw-back in his philosophy. He wanted to apply universally his principle of Utility to all countries. As Wayper has pointed out "Bentham was a Universalist and Mill an historical relativist." Bentham would like to see democracy to be established in all the countries irrespective of the fact, whether people deserve it or not, whether they are fit for it or not because democracy is derivative from of principle of Utility. Mill, is all out for democratic form of government. But Mill would recommend democracy only if the people are fit for it. The difference in their approach is brought by Wayper in these words "Thus whereas Bentham justifies democracy because of the nature of man, Mill justifies it because of the condition of man." Here Mill's position is sounder and correct, but at the same time it is non-utilitarian. Mill ultimately comes to regard the state as a product of will rather than of interest. In the words of Wayper, "Mill recognises, as Bentham did not, that mechanistic theories of the state are fundamentally inadequate if they leave out the human will or they neglect the personality of men." Mill says that habitual fellow-feeling with other human beings and not the calculated self-interest is the basis of state. Mill never adopted the idealistic view of the origin of state. T.H. Green got viable clue from Mill for his theory that 'will not force is the basis of state'.

Mill assigns some positive role to the state, while Bentham had given a negative role to it. Bentham had restricted the state's jurisdiction only to the removal of obstacles in the way of individuals for getting the greatest happiness. The state could not interfere in the personal life of individuals nor could it interfere in the educational or economic sphere. But Mill wants the state to make all possible positive efforts to enable the individuals to realise their true self or higher self. He would like the state to legislate in spheres like 'land, industry, knowledge' which are monopoly of small minority, so that the life of the masses may become easier. Here Mill is having socialistic aspect in mind. Mill advocates 'compulsory education supported by the state.' He supports general inspection of the curriculum. He wants the state to legislate on the law of inheritance, factory regulations, working hours, wants the state to regulate the economic affairs of the individuals so that they may achieve

‘self-development’. Practically speaking by advocating the positive of the state Mill appears to be more utilitarian than Bentham. Mill modifies Bentham’s theory of ‘Everyone to count for one and no one for more than one’. Mill supports plural voting to give weightage to the more intelligent and educated classes. Here Mill is trying to defend Utilitarianism (as given by Bentham, his master and James Mill, his father), not realising that in the meanwhile he is destroying it. What emerges out of Mill’s defence of Utilitarianism is a transitional philosophy to make it easier to switch over to the Idealist School of Thought. Maxey also says, “In this interpretation of Utilitarianism very little of Bentham remains.” He has been claiming all the time that he is advocating Benthamism, but in fact his defence amounted to the complete abandonment of the same. Mill was sincere in his efforts of making Benthamism palatable to its critics, but he lacked the grasp and originality “to bring about a really coherent synthesis or philosophies so widely divergent.”

### **3.3.4 MILLS IDEAS ON LIBERTY**

Mill’s Essay on Liberty is a fine discourse on the definition of freedom in general and freedom of thought and expression in particular. He says that free discussion alone can nourish fruitful ideas. Not even the whole of mankind can coerce even a single dissentient into accepting the majority’s view-point reason being nobody knows that majority’s view may be incorrect. Truth will come out of free discussion If somebody’s views are suppressed, not only that truth will never come out, that particular individual’s development will be retarded, There cannot be any self-realisation or self-development of individuals without Liberty. For Mill, Liberty is not an abstract or Natural Right to be asserted by man but a concrete right to be judged by its utility. The criterion for judging it is the development of individuality. There should be free scope for the development of various types of character. Every human action should be directed towards the development of one’s individual self. Differences of views are the embodiments of different individualities and let every individual maintain his individuality, against heavy odds. It enriches the health and moral development of individuality and society; the two developments being complementary.

Liberty for Mill is the life-breath of society. At two different stages, Mill gives two different definitions of Liberty:

The first definition of Liberty given by Mill is that “Liberty is being left to oneself.” In Mill’s words “Over himself, over his actions and thoughts the individual is sovereign”. “All restraint

is an evil". These are some of the ideas of Mill on this aspect of Liberty's definition. Mill says that any interference with individual's liberty of action is not justified except to prevent him from doing harm to others. 'If by my action no member of the society is harmed, neither the society nor the state has the right to interfere with that action of mine over which I have the exclusive jurisdiction. Mill divides individual's actions into two categories :-(i) Self regarding: In the sphere of self-regarding actions of the individuals, they should be left totally free. Mill critically examines the legitimate degree of control that society and the state may exercise in the sphere of self-regarding actions. He takes the example of Drunkenness, which is a purely self-regarding action so long as it does not lead to disorder or cruelty or dangerous neglect of family. The society and the state should not interfere. They should not enforce prohibition or stop sale of alcoholic liquors to put any restrictions. But if it leads to disorder, it will become other-regarding action and the state will have the right too interfere. (ii) Other regarding action: in the sphere of other-regarding actions which involve and affect the interests of other members of society, the state and society can legitimately interfere. The state and the society should interfere only in such other-regarding actions alone "as produce positive, demonstrable harm to others." The state will be within its legitimate limit to enforce compulsory education. Lack of education to the children will certainly harm the society as a whole. If parents fail to give education to their children, the state should either force the parents to do so, or to arrange for the education of the children itself. Mill gives another example wherein the state can force the individuals to do something for their own benefit. The state can enforce conscription legitimately. In the words of Wayper, "It is legitimate to oblige a man to bear his share in maintaining society. Conscription is not to be regarded as an unwarranted infringement of his liberty". Mill abandons the Laissez Faire Theory and justifies state's interference in the sphere of business and industry to a legitimate extent.

The second definition of Liberty given by Mill is "Liberty consists in doing what one desires". This definition is very much different from the earlier definition. He gives an example. The state or society would be justified in preventing a man from crossing a bridge, which was known to be unsafe. Liberty consists in doing what one desires and he certainly does not have the desire to fall in the river. He has the desire of crossing the bridge. It would be better to frustrate this desire than to allow him to fall in the river, which is greater evil. This leads to much more positive activities on the part of the state than the earlier version. In the



words of Wayper, “This definition of liberty throws the door open to any amount of interference. Mill has gone far towards admitting the extremist idealist contention that one may be forced to be free.”

Mill is not concerned with any narrower concept of liberty. His concept of liberty is the liberty of the individual to develop, enrich and expand its personality to the fullest extent. It deals with the value and nature of human freedom, of the conflicts that arise between the citizen and the state and between the individual and the society. Not only that such freedom is useful to individual, but to the society as a whole. For Mill, liberty of thought and expression, freedom of discussion and investigation, freedom of self-controlled moral judgment, absolute freedom of feeling, sentiments and opinion on all subjects (speculative, religious, scientific, theological or literary), Liberty of expressing and publishing opinion, Liberty of states and political freedoms, are beneficial, both to the society that permits them and to the individuals that enjoy them. Mill aware about the dangers to the concept of Liberty. According to him dangers to Liberty come from two sources:

(a) from the state through the laws that could restrict freedom.

(b) unorganized but terrible power of general opinion; the society.

During his times, the influence of unorganized society, was more menacing than the power of the state. The demands of the state on the individual were fewer. On the other hand in many matters, “affecting his private and intellectual life, his love affairs, his views on religion, sex and science the individual found himself bound by a constricting orthodoxy... He would have to guard his words and actions with a care which he might find intolerable”. Mill knew the tyranny of the opinion of the public. He used to visit one highly polished and intelligent lady Mrs. Taylor, about five years his senior quite often, and used to draw inspiration and guidance from her in his political writings. At the age of 25, he had met Mrs. Taylor and this association continued for the whole life. This association he calls as “the most valuable friendship of my life”. After the death of Taylor, Mill married Mrs. Taylor. His association of about twenty years with a married woman and his subsequent marriage with a widow was a subject-matter of severe criticism from the public. It almost became a scandal. Mill found nothing wrong in his association with Mrs. Taylor but the society, found his conduct certainly objectionable. This became the background of Mill being more critical of the interference of the society than of the state in the individual’s

affairs. In his own words “in our time from the highest class to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. We fear our neighbours more and the policemen less.” This was the general tyranny of society which was much more than state power; a serious danger to individual and freedom. Mill found that the pressures of society were constraining man’s actions and were weakening their impulses and desires. Against this kind of restraints from the society Mill raised his voice. His voice was against the influence of outdated customs and practice. Mill was not against custom as such and speaks very highly of the value of custom. But he criticised only those customs or rules of society which don’t appeal to reason. His primary concern as a political thinker is that all the unreasoning assumptions, rates, customs and usages should be weighed and considered by the reflective and balanced judgement of thinking men. But his problem is not solved yet. He finds that the thinking men are, very few. He believe in the aristocracy of wisdom, and the wisdom of the few. As such he propounded the theory of plural voting for university graduates, scholars and other intelligent classes of society. If the age-old customs, and usages are screened by men of wisdom, the opinion of the public will no longer be a menace to liberty.

Mill, in his ‘Essay On Liberty’ discusses Liberty under three heads :-

- 1) The inward domain of consciousness; liberty of thought and feeling, including the liberty of expressing public opinions.
- 2) Liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character, of doing what we like.
- 3) The liberty of combination among individuals; freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others.

Mill is mostly concerned with the first type of liberty, namely the liberty of thought and expression. He briefly touches upon the other two types of liberty. According to Mill freedom of judgement is an inherent quality of a morally mature personality. A liberal society is one that recognises this quality and acknowledges the right of every such person to possess this quality. The freedom of thought and expression is most essential for the self-development and self-realisation of the individual. Such freedom of expression and thought is not only essential for the development of the individual’s personality, but it is necessary for the health and vigour of the society and the state. The state should frame its

laws, and the society should make its rules and curve out its institutions in such a way that this liberty of thought and expression is realized. This is essential for both the high type of moral character of the individuals and the high type of civilization. Mill believed in the error of judgement of many. The number was no criterion of rightness or wrongness of any decision. The majority was not infallible. It had no right to impose its judgement on the minority. 'Mill was the first political thinker to realise the impact of the tyranny of majority. In the words of Sabine "The threat to liberty which Mill chiefly feared was not government, but a majority that is intolerant of the unconventional, that looks with suspicion on divergent minorities, and is willing to use the weight of numbers to repress and regiment them. . . . . What Mill recognised and what the older liberalism had never seen, was that behind a liberal government there must be a liberal society." Mill realized the third and the most important factor, the first two being individual and government, in the realization of individual's liberty. In the words of Mill, "All mankind minus one is destitute of the right to coerce the single dissentient. The human race would be loser if one single individual is not permitted to express his opinion. His approach in his discussion on liberty of thought and expression is very rational. His view that truth emerges out of free discussion and free arguments actually appeals to reason. He is extremely convincing in demonstrating the fallibility of human reason. He recommends that when human reason is fallible, no person should be prosecuted or persecuted for holding an opinion, which is different from the popular or majority opinion. Quoting examples from history, he cites Socrates and Christ, who were both prosecuted for holding opinions different from the ones popularly accepted in their times. But later on people realised their mistakes and future generations worshipped them. Humanity has suffered a lot from such prosecutions. Mill espoused the cause of freedom and discussion with classic and convincing perfection. For Mill, Liberty is not an abstract or Natural right to be asserted but a concrete right to be judgment by criterion of development of individual personality. The individual personality or individuality is not something which goes against society. It is rather complementary. Individuality is both a personal good and social good. Mill's difficulty comes to lime-light when there is clash between the two goods-namely Freedom and responsibility, between the individual good and social good as represented by the state. The firm opinion of Mill is that society can never be more important than the individual. If the individual is good and the social good run in accord well and good. But when there is conflict, the freedom of individual will

prevail upon the social good. As Mill invariably prefers freedom as compared to social peace, he is one of the greatest individualists of all ages.

Having stated his case for freedom of thought and discussion, Mill proceeds in the rest of his essay to examine the legitimate degree of control which society and state may exercise over the individual. In the sphere of self-regarding actions which affect the individual alone no interference of the society or the state can be tolerated. The position is in connection with intellectually mature persons only. In the case of children, lunatics and peoples living in independent colonies, the society and the state can interfere even in the sphere of self-regarding actions. In the sphere of other-regarding action the state can interfere. Some of the examples of other-regarding actions are encroachment on other's rights, infliction on them of any loss or damage not justified by his own rights, falsehood or duplicity in dealing with other, unfair or ungenerous use of advantage over them, even selfish abstinence from defending them against injury. These actions and others like them are fit for moral reprobation by the society and punishment by the state. Some of the self-regarding actions which start affecting other will be classified as other-regarding actions and can be interfered with by the society and the state. He gives an example of a man who through incompetence of extravagance become unable to discharge his debts or support his family he may be justly punished by the society and the state. But this punishment is for the breach of duty towards family and the creditors and not for extravagance. A man trying to commit suicide may be prevented from doing so as the loss of his life will be between the self-regarding and other regarding actions may be a matter of endless dispute. The interference by the state or society in the case of a person trying to commit suicide is also justifiable from the angle of the other definition of liberty given by Mill, namely "liberty consists in doing what one desires." While trying to commit suicide he does not know that he does not desire to die. The society and the state know his desire better than him and thus can justifiably prevent him from committing suicide. Since, as gambling is harmful to the others, the state can interfere and regulate it. So far as freedom of thought and expression is concerned, the individual has the unfettered right and the society and the state have no right to interfere. As far as the liberty of action is concerned the society and the state can interfere only if action of any member harms others the good of the individual; physical or moral, is not a sufficient reason. So long as one does not become a nuisance to others, freedom of action and of association is unfettered from the interference of the state and society.

While criticizing Mill's theory it is said that there is no definite line of demarcation between the self-regarding and other-regarding actions. At various items and various stages the disputes may arise as to what is a self-regarding and what is an other-regarding action. Though Mill's exposition of Liberty is one of the best in the history of Political Thought, he was unable to reconcile the claims of Individual-freedom with the claims of order and social peace satisfactorily. He was emotionally attached to Benthamism so much that he could not get rid of it. Moreover, he started with, the premise of atomistic concept of individual. He sacrificed the social good at the altar of individual freedom. He defended the old theory of liberty with new arguments. As Sabine says "he represents a typical example of the futility of putting new wine into old bottles." Some times he talks of social legislation and socialism, but he could not do justice to social good and society as a whole so far as their relation to individual liberty was concerned. According to Sabine, "The fundamental difficulty with Mill's argument was that he never really analysed the relationship between freedom and responsibility. At times he retained the traditional view derived from Bentham that any compulsion or even any social influence is an abridgement of liberty. What Mill's theory of liberty required was a thorough going consideration of the defence of personal liberty on social and legal rights and obligations."

Barker criticised Mill as the "Prophet of an empty liberty and an abstract individual." What Mill gave to his individuals was not liberty in the true sense of the term. Liberty grows within the precincts of the society. He gives Liberty, more of a negative connotation, while Liberty, can be said as a positive term. Liberty as the freedom of being one's true self. This freedom can only be achieved by becoming a member of the organic social whole, and accepting willingly all social, control. Hence it is correct to say that Mill is prophet of empty liberty. Similarly, the type of individual that Mill envisaged, in fact, do not exist, in reality. Mill say that without individuals, society, cannot exist. It is agreed, but can the individuals exist without society. The answer is 'no'. The society cannot live without individuals just as the individuals cannot live without the society. The individuals and society are so related to each other that one cannot imagine to live without the other, Hence it is correct to say that Mill was the prophet of "the abstract individual."

### **3.3.5 REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND UTILITARIANISM**

Mill in his 'Representative Government' is mainly concerned with institutional reforms in the government, to make it more representative and more responsible. He wants the state

to do something positive in the sphere of education, factory law, economic life etc. In order to perform its duties well and exercise its power within limits every state must have a constitution. He defines constitution 'as a means of bringing the general standard of intelligence and honesty existing in the community and individual intellect and virtue of its wisest members'. He says that it is more directly to bear upon the government and investing them with greater influence in it, than they would in general, have under any other mode of organisation. According to Mill there will always be a single repository of ultimate power, whether by constitutional prescription or by unwritten custom. Mill in his book *Representative Government* talks about the reforms that can be brought about for the better working of the government. He mentions two schools of thought. One school, namely that of Contractualists to whom the government is only a machine, an invention. There is the other school of thought, of idealists, according to whom government are a branch of natural history, they are not made, but they grow they are the organic growths from the natures and lives of the peoples, and are not a matter of choice. Mill's position lies somewhere between the two. According to Mill, the state though a natural growth, do not resemble trees which once planted are growing, while men are sleeping. The government is to be nourished through proper care by the individuals. Government is an organization, acquired, evolved by the people, in course of time, by the habit of obedience of its laws and by actively participating in it, its type being dependent upon the local conditions of the people. He says that the government has to be worked by ordinary men and it requires for its existence and proper functioning not only their simple acquiescence but their active participation.

Mill's precise insight into the functioning of government can be judged when he points out that the following three conditions must be satisfied if the government is to function properly:-

1. The people must be willing to accept it.
2. They must be willing and able to do what is necessary to keep it standing.
3. They must be able and willing to do what it requires of them to enable it to fulfil its purposes.

Any sensible person would, admit that these three conditions are very vital for the functioning of any government. If any of these three conditions are not fulfilled, any form of government, howsoever promising it may look, will be a failure. Without the willing and active cooperation

of the individuals, any government, howsoever perfect it may be, cannot work. Mill then proceeds to inquire into and discuss the best form of government. In his quest for the best form of government he tried to introduce into any country the best institutions. According to Mill the best form of government is the representative government. 'Despotic government, however benevolent can never be a good government' as its subjects suffer in their intellectual, moral and political capacities. There is no such thing as a good despotism. The ideal representative government must safeguard the aggregate interests of the society as a whole. The Representative government must be supported by an active and critical body of citizens. The government should not be the representative of a minority, but the entire aggregate of community. The representative body should represent all classes. No class should be left out; otherwise its interests will be over-looked. The British Parliament remained always in his mind as the typical instance of such bodies. He suggested that the working classes and women also should be given representation so as to make the Parliament fully representative of the people. According to Mill, "the first element of good government was the virtue and intelligence of the human beings composing the community." On the same analogy, the foremost duty of the state is to foster these elements in the members of the community. The sovereign power of the state should reside in the organ of the government which is the representative of the people. In England, he said, practical supremacy of the state lies in the Parliament. He suggests that the sovereign body or the parliament should not be concerned, with the actual running of the government, but only with the controlling of the business of the government. The former task is to be done by the cabinet and the civil servants. The task of the Parliament is not to run the administration but to see that it is run by the proper persons. Mill was in favour of representative government, but it did not mean that representative government could be uniformly applied to all people. This government should be adopted by a people who are sufficiently advanced and trained in self-government.

Waypor says that 'Mill has been very distrustful of democracy, yet he is both a democrat and the greatest of English writers on democracy'. No one has insisted more vigorously that it is not suitable for all peoples. But no one has been more convinced that where it is possible it is the best of all governments. He has been considered as greatest democrat as he believes in these four concepts:-

- 1) Individuals' rights and interests are best defended by themselves and the state activity should be limited to the minimum possible.
- 2) The sovereign body in the state should be as far as possible truly representative of all the classes comprising the society.
- 3) Freedom is means to prosperity, and without prosperity there can, be no. happiness. Happiness is the ultimate goal of the life of every individual.
- 4) State exists for the individual and not the individual for the state.

Though, Mill highly, appreciated the merits of democracy, yet at the same time he is reluctant or distrustful in the sense that democracy can prove dangerous, if the local conditions are not yet ripe and if the people are not yet fit for the democratic way of life. According to Mill the following may be the negativities of democracy:

- The worst danger can come from the unjust nomination of the numerical majority; the majority government proved to be tyrannical and that it safeguarded only its own interests. As all the powers are concentrated in the government run by majority, the minorities can be coerced into submission by the force; of the might of the state.
- According to him collective mediocrity is another positive danger of democracy as pointed out by Mill. Mill is very much afraid of general ignorance, incapacity, and insufficient mental qualifications of the members who constitute the controlling body. He believes that there are very few thinking men in the society and the bulk of the masses are ignorant. The government which represents such huge majority of low-intelligence people is bound to be mediocre. He says that the masses can be educated gradually about their rights and obligations.
- Diffusion of power is another danger of democracy. Some powers are wielded by the parliament, others by the cabinet, others by the ministers and finally others by the civil servants. The democratic government generally cannot reach a quick decision, nor can it implement it promptly.
- Mill distinguishes between True and False democracy. The democracy of numbers which is the degeneracy of all governments is False democracy. Its principle of everyone to count for one and no body to count for more than one is the principle



of False democracy. It implies that any individual is as good as any other. It ignores the principle of nature that men are not gifted by nature with equal intelligence, virtue and health. The men of more intelligence should be given more weightage than a less intelligent man.

- The interests of the ruling faction of the majority parts some-times may clash with the aggregate interest of the society as a whole. When there is such a clash between the sinister interests of the ruling factions and those of the community, the class interests of the ruling faction will prevail. Here Mill says that even if the ruling power is apparently exercised by the numerical majority, the real power is exercised by the selected few for the promotion of the vested interests of the small fraction of the community, in suppression of the community as a whole.

Such were the dangers of democracy as pointed out by Mill. But he made efforts for making democracy safe for mankind. He suggested some safeguards and methods by which democracy can be effectively ensured and worked properly. First, education should be imparted to the individuals in the civic sense and the art of citizenship. Right type of education can make the citizens up to the mark and keep them aware of their rights and obligations. Second, 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. If the public is vigilant enough, no government can deprive them of their rights and rule over them in a despotic manner. Enlightened public opinion is the greatest safeguard against the dangers of democracy. Third, in order to avoid the rule of the ignorant, he suggests that more educated and intelligent classes should be given weightage in voting. The only device to ensure this is Equal Representation better known as, 'Proportional Representation'. The minorities should be given representation in proportion to their strength. According to Mill, True Democracy is one which will give due weight and influence to all the different elements of society. He suggests plural voting for men of worth and proportional representation for giving due weight to the minorities and intelligent sections of the society. He approved the Hare System of Proportional representation. Fourth, he suggested voting by open or public ballot. Fifthly, he suggested that, for safe-guarding the interest of those sections of society which would not otherwise be adequately represented in an assembly popularly elected, there should be a Second Chamber. The Second Chamber would curb the enthusiasm of the majority party in the lower chamber to recklessly pursue its own interests and would point out its weaknesses. Sixth, another

minor safeguard is that the M.P.'s should not be paid any salary. They should be treated as true representatives and not mere delegates. Seventh, he was in favour of extending the right to vote to women also. He was said to be advancing arguments of the twentieth century, while living in the nineteenth century. In his Essay on the Subjection of women he gives detailed physiological and psychological reasons for giving suffrage to women. His cause ultimately triumphed. Eighth, there should be universal suffrage and the workers and household servants should also be represented, evils of general suffrage should be mitigated:

- by restricting' the suffrage only to those who knew three R's i.e. who could read, write and perform the common operations of arithmetic. The state should make every endeavour, to make available educational facilities to all the citizens of the state.
- by restricting the franchise to only those who paid some prescribed minimum amount of taxes. This would make the voters and the legislator, both, more responsible.
- by giving extra votes to the superior elements in society. He wrote boldly in favour of such additional or plural voting. Criterion for such plural voting should not be property or Educational criterion is also not satisfactory. A person's occupation can be some sort of a good test. Foremen, merchants, bankers, professors etc. are likely to be more intelligent than the labourers. The maximum number of additional votes that can be allowed is only three. The clear motives behind the scheme of plural voting are Equality and Freedom in the true sense of the terms.

Ninth, indirect election is another safeguard of democracy. Indirect elections can mitigate the evils of democracy. In his time the Senate of the U. S. A. was elected by the state legislature. According to him, indirect election works -well where the electors have some other functions also to perform. The election of Rajya Sabha in India and that of the President of India are the examples of the indirect elections of the type that Mill desired. Tenth, expenditure on elections should not be borne by the candidates. The state should bear the expenses on election, reason being, the rich people, who can afford to spend large sums of money usually get elected with the sheer force of their money. Lastly, public servants should not be, popularly elected. They should be selected through competitive exams.

### 3.3.6 SUMMING UP

The study of Mill's ideas reveals that he was a democrat, but with some reservations. As a reluctant or distrustful democrat, he accepted democracy with a pinch of salt. Distrustful safeguards of democracy that he has provided clearly speak of his insight into the statecraft. This goes to his credit that where he was conservative, he was supporting well-established institutions. Such institutions that he supported are British Cabinet system, U. S. Senate, U. S. Supreme Court and Swiss and American Federalisms. He made innovations such as women's suffrage, competitive exams for the civil servants, proportional representation etc. Some of his safeguards against extreme democracy like plural voting and exclusions from suffrage, have been discarded by the various nations of the world. The Reforms Act of 1867 was a great tribute to him. Moreover, his boldness in advocating even unpopular theories which he considered to be correct is worth appreciating. As Maxey points out, "Contemporary liberals did not share Mill's apprehensions as to dangers of democracy. But the generations following both world wars have found in Mill much to approve. A half-century of experience with demagogism, bossism and pressure politics has brought democratic thought face to face with reality".

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### **3.4 T. H. GREEN: POSITIVE LIBERTY, POLITICAL OBLIGATION AND IDEALISM**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 3.4.0 Objectives
- 3.4.1 Introduction
- 3.4.2 Green's Idealism
- 3.4.3 Positive Liberalism
- 3.4.4 Political Obligation
- 3.4.5 Summing Up

#### **3.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- know Green's Idealism;
- understand Green's ideas on positive liberalism;
- comprehend Green's views on political obligation.

#### **3.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Thomas Hill Green was an English historian and philosopher. He was also a theorist and a reformer. Born in the year 1836 at Yorkshire he was the son of a clergyman. He was educated at Rugby and the Balliol College, Oxford. He became Professor of moral philosophy in 1878 at Oxford. He was not only a philosopher, but was thoroughly interested in the practical politics of his country. He was elected to the Oxford Town Council by the people. For some years he served on the governing body of a system of schools in Birmingham. According to him, the basis of sound government was the local government

of the country. Many of his lectures were published after his death in 1882. In 1879 he delivered his first lecture, "Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation." His other publications are "Prolegomena to Ethics," "Lectures on liberal Legislation," "Freedom of Contract" and "Lectures on the English Revolution." Green's philosophy is taken from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel. Green agreed with the view of Aristotle that the supreme function of the state was to make it possible to realize their common good. Green borrowed from Rousseau the idea of moral freedom of man. In the purely metaphysical field Green was closer to Hegel. But in ethics and politics Kant was having great on him. He was Kantian in outlook. According to Green, the State is the product of human consciousness. 'Human consciousness postulates liberty. Liberty involves rights and rights demand the State'. It was an ethical institution which was essential for the moral development of man. The important function of the state was to enforce rights. The State might use its force since it expressed the general will of the people. To him "will not force is the basis of the State." In his "Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation" he states that the people obey the State because it contributes or can contribute towards their moral life. According to him, "the function of the government is to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible, and morality consists in the disinterested performance of self-imposed duties." The state was neither absolute nor omnipotent. It was limited both from within and from without. He believed in the 'Universal brotherhood of man.' The right of every individual to life involved a check on the authority of the state.

Green was an individualist. He never regarded the State as an end in itself. It was a means to end and that end was the full moral development of the individuals living within the State. It is the duty of the State to do everything for the free development of moral personality; but it should not do those things which are against such development. He described the General Will as 'the common consciousness of a common good.' He differed from Hegel in his idea of freedom. Many criticisms have been levelled against the theory of Green. His theory of sovereignty is not satisfactory since it is based on General Will. Further he failed to note the sub-conscious factors that influence the actions of men in the states. Again in his theory of punishment he appears to forget totally the emotions of the people. His economic ideas regarding property are unsatisfactory since it leads to danger. Barker says that "Green was both a soaring idealist and a sober realist." Thus, the ideas of Green have been criticized by many modern writers.

### 3.4.2 GREEN'S IDEALISM

T. H. Green, as an idealist, differs from the classical liberals in regard to the basis of the state. The classical liberals like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau had faith that government rests upon the consent of the governed. To them all states originated with the social contract whereby each man voluntarily agreed to enter into civil society. All governments, therefore, derived their power from the consent of the people. Moreover, if the government abused this power, people had the right to revolt. Green totally rejects the contractual basis of state, on the ground that, it is false historically and logically. He was realistic enough to realise that most of the states hold their origin due to the process of conquest by force, rather than by voluntary contract of their members. Government as Green said, 'rests upon will, not force'. The basis of the state is neither consent nor force, but it is will. This conception of Green becomes more clear when he analyses Austin definition of sovereignty. Austin defined sovereignty in these words: "If a determined human superior not in the habit of obedience to a like superior, receives habitual obedience from the bulk of a given society, that determinate superior is sovereign in that society and the society (including the superior) is a society political and independent." What is the basis of that habitual obedience which the bulk of a given society renders unto a determinate superior? It cannot be explained simply in terms of the coercive power of the determinate superior, as no ruler, however absolute or despotic, could long command the obedience or allegiance of the bulk of society by force alone. Green concluded that which determines this habitual obedience' is a power residing in the common will and reason of men i.e. in the will and reason of men as determined by social relations, as interested in each other, as acting together for common ends. It is a power, which this 'universal rational will' exercise over the inclination of the individual, and which only needs exceptionally to be backed by coercive force.

Green agreed with Austin that legal sovereignty must reside in the government consisting of a number of people, but he said that behind this legal sovereign is the general will and this general will determines the habitual obedience of the people. People habitually obey only those institutions which perhaps, unconsciously, fully represent the general will. The general will is the true sovereign of the community That is why Green says that 'will, not force, is the basis of all true and lasting states.' Green puts less metaphysical interpretation on the term general will than was done by Kant and Rousseau. Green believes that it is the common consciousness for common good or general will which is the basis of state and

not force. It is by willing consent of the nation that men can be kept united. Neither the government can hold the society by force nor it is desirable to do so. Green differs from Rousseau in regard to his views concerning general will, which he conceived as the basis of the state. To Rousseau, the general will is the will of the state. It is the actual sovereign which suddenly comes into existence at the time of the social contract. But to Green 'the general will is the will for the state and not the will of the state'. It is not the actual sovereign but the real sovereign behind the actual sovereign. His general will is not that general will in whose name many crimes have been perpetrated. He believes that even before the formation of the state, family and tribal groups had a feeling for common good and thus possessed a general will. Though the general will was before the state, but in its most logical and correct form it is the basis of the state. As such, 'will, not force is the basis of the state'. Green holds that man owed allegiance to the state and to the laws of the state, not due to any contract, but because the state was an institution devoted to social good. If the laws of the state are not in accordance with the general will, or when the law is not devoted to the good of the community, it loses its claim to the allegiance of the people. He further claims, that over any long period of time men do pay allegiance to the state and obey the laws of the state, only because they realise, perhaps unconsciously, that the state and the laws of the state are for the common good. Force and fear, inspired by brute force may cause men to obey a conqueror for a limited period of time. But in the long run, institutions merely based upon force and fear crumbles to pieces. Men habitually render obedience only to those institutions, which are felt to be in accord with the general good as conceived by the general will. He insisted that even the absolute monarch can last long if it rests upon the consent of the nation; if it inspires loyalty in its subjects and voluntary submission to the established law on the part of the majority.

But this does not mean that force will not be there in any state. Force must be present in a state to repress the antisocial elements, rebels and criminals. But for the smooth and peaceful working of its machinery the government must satisfy public opinion. In other words, it must be based upon will. Will is the essence of the state. Force is the criterion of the state. The state needs force to repress anti-social elements, but it does not contribute to the essence of the state. Green points out, "William the conqueror was able to exercise the royal power in England by force, but he and his successors were successful only, because their laws had the support of the public". Even in modern governments, particular laws are

imposed by states and people obey them because of fear. Such an attitude cannot last long. It tends to weaken the authority of the government. That government can work successfully which is in accordance with the wishes and desires of the people. Thus, all this makes Green's statement true even today that will, not force, is the basis of the state.

However, Green was criticized for this statement of Green. According to John Bowle, "By asserting that 'Will not Force' was the basis of State, Green was giving his political ideas a dynamic neo-Hegelian aspect. Will, in this context, was hardly a happy term for so instinctive a process, but Rousseau's idiom is generally misleading. To modern minds, who take for granted the Importance of the fabric of society, and the massive life which institutions spontaneously generate, this assertion of the, social frame work as against the executive will not seem startling. At the time it seemed, an innovation. The new fields which Green and his followers re-discovered through the study of Greek and German political thought were soon charted and examined by English sociologists. A part from the cardinal work of Durkheim in France, Graham Wallas and L.T. Hobhouse were later to enrich this neo-Hegelian awareness of the life of society. With the development of a more precarious situation in the twentieth century, the unconscious drives of society were to be regarded with greater distrust. But by the turn of the century, the objectives of both liberal and scientific humanists were destined to coincide. Both realized the importance of institutions for the development of personality, both desired to use them for the furtherance of good life, both desired a democratic society and the extension of humane values. They believed in the integrity, the importance and the goodness of free personality..

### **3.4.3 POSITIVE LIBERALISM**

Green, as an idealist inspired by Kant, Hegel, Plato and Aristotle gives a very logical concept of the state based on free moral will. Behind his concept of the state, lies the idea of eternal self-consciousness, which communicates to human consciousness, the idea of social good, and to whose perfection in turn, human consciousness is ever seeking to attain. In his book 'Lectures on Principle of Political Obligation' he holds that the state is the product of human consciousness. This position occupied by Green's political system is very well summed up by Barker when he says, "Human consciousness postulates liberty, liberty involves rights and rights, demand the state."



Human Consciousness Postulates Liberty: Starting from liberty, Green starts his political speculations with the problem of freedom or liberty, because human consciousness postulates freedom as the necessary condition of its growth and development. To Green, it is self-conscious nature of man that differentiates him from other lower animals. Thus to be self-conscious, man is determined to reach the goal of eternal consciousness, which is the ultimate reality in this universe. "In order to reach this goal, the true self of each man, which is fundamentally good, needs only favourable conditions to develop and express his goodness". Green insists that the chief function of the state is to create by force if necessary, the requisite favourable conditions and not to do anything which may interfere with the individual's freedom to cultivate an ideal character. Green agrees with Kant that one thing in the world which has absolute value is the goodwill, and the goal of human life is-moral activity which is only possible when the individual enjoys full freedom. As such Green describes the role of state as negative, so as to remove the hindrance that lies in the way of our doings which are worth doing.

Green is influenced by Kant and his view of freedom also bears close resemblance with that of Hegel, who regards state as positive in nature. Green holds the middle path. Green did not accept either view. Green solved the dilemma by developing the concept of positive freedom by which he means "a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying some thing worth doing or enjoying, and that too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others." A society can be said to grow in freedom when its members are in a position to develop their powers of contributing to the social good, when they are able as a body to make the most and the best of themselves. As such Green's view of freedom possesses two qualities:

- i) It is the positive principle of doing or enjoying things which are worth doing or enjoying, and at the same time to be enjoyed in common with others; liberation of all the powers of men for social good.
- ii) It is determinate, as it is freedom to do something of a definite character and not freedom to do anything and everything. It is a power to pursue those objects which make one's live better. As Barker says, "It is a determinate freedom to do something of a definite character, something which possesses the quality of being worth doing and not any and everything."

Human consciousness postulates liberty and the freedom lies in self-realization, However, this self-realization is only possible by enforcing a system of rights. 'Under such a system' each recognises in his fellow and each claims from his fellow that he shall recognise in him the power of pursuing ideal objects. He also each makes a claim of its recognition by all, because each is of like nature with his fellows, and the objects of all are common' (Bhagat).

According to Green, no one, 'therefore' can have a right except (i) as a member of society and (ii) of a society in which some common good is recognized. There may be no right without a consciousness of common interest on the part of members of a society. Every moral person is capable of rights, i.e. of bearing his part in a society in which the free exercise of his powers is secured to each member, through the recognition of each others. Only through the process of rights can the power of the individual, freely to make a common good his own, can be given. Rights are what may be called the negative realization of this power. In certain circumstances Green permits the individual to resist. An individual has the right of offering resistance to the state when its laws deprive him of those conditions which are necessary for a freely willed and morally determined life. An individual can resist the state where the authority commanding it, is separated from the whole system of rights and order, that the latter will not be effected by resistance to a particular law. According to Green, rights are related to morality. Individual rights are the expression of morality and recognition is given by the moral consciousness of the community. "Rights are relative to morality, in the sense, that they are conditions for attainment of moral end. Recognition is given to him by moral consciousness because it knows that they are necessary conditions of its own satisfaction."

Every man possesses eternal consciousness in view of which he needs freedom. This freedom is only possible through a system of rights. These rights are enforceable and, have to be enforced because a right which is not enforced ceases to be a right. There is a need of power that can enforce rights and punish those who break the rights of the individuals. So rights demand a state which can enforce these rights. A true state, to Green, is one in which power is exercised according to law for the maintenance of rights. According to Green, 'it is not the coercive power as such, but coercive power as exercised according to law, written or unwritten for the maintenance of the existing rights of the citizens from external and internal invasions that make a state'. He says that the state or the sovereign characteristic institution of the state does not create rights, but gives fuller expression to it

rights already existing. It secures and extends the exercise of power which men, influenced in dealing with each other by an ideal of a common good have recognized in each other. It gives direction to that common good, which have already been secured to each other as a consequence of that recognition. It is not a state unless it does so. However necessary a factor' the force may have been in the process by which states have been formed and transformed, it has only been such a factor as co-operating with those idea without which, rights could not exist. These ideal realities state that force is subordinate in the creation and development of states. As such the state is the product of human consciousness, human consciousness postulates liberty, and liberty involves the rights, and the rights demand the state.

#### **3.4.4 POLITICAL OBLIGATION**

In regard to the sphere and function of the state, Green holds that state is a natural institution necessary for the moral realization of the individual. State for him is a means to an end and that end is the full moral development of the individuals who compose it. He believes, as Wayper writes, 'that everyman has a worth and a dignity which forbids his exploitation for any purpose whatever. The object of Green's most important political work, 'The Principle of Political Obligation,' was to demonstrate, on the basis of his general moral philosophy, 'the ethical position of the state, the extent to which political authority is justifiable and obedience to law, morally obligatory' (Coker). Political institutions he held are to be judged according to their contribution to the development of the character of the citizens. For a man to live a life which he can call his own life, normally speaking he must be able to count on certain freedom of action in the attainment of his aims. This is possible, where there is a common recognition by members of the society, in which he lives, that such freedom is for their common good. This recognition is expressed in laws. So, when an individual submits to the authority of the institutions through which laws are formulated and executed, he is simply allowing his life to be regulated by conditions, without which he would be unable to live a life really his own. As such the function of the law in state is to assist man to realise his reason; that is his idea of self-perfection by acting as a member of a social organisation in which each contributes to the better being of all the rest.

Green's state is limited from within as well as from without. From within, it is limited by the fact, that law can take cognizance of external acts of man only. It has nothing to do with motives. It can only remove obstacles which come in the way of the individual in the

development of his personality. Under certain circumstances an individual can also resist the state. The external factor of limitation to state is international law. A state cannot live in isolation and has to develop its relations with other states. As such states are to live in the light of the conception of universal brotherhood. According to Green the function of government is to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible, and morality consists in the performance of self-imposed duties. The function of the state is thus limited to negative action, the removal of hindrances to freedom. As Barker says, "the state has no positive moral function of making its members better, it has the negative moral function of removing the obstacles which prevent them from making themselves better." Green says that action freely self-determined, in the sense of being determined by free will, acting under sense of duty owned by oneself to oneself is the only moral action. To the inwardness of such a will all state action must in its nature be external. However, in the name of removal of hindrances to individual's self-realizations, Green allows the state a very large field of action. Green advocated that the state should prevent the wealthy land owners from throwing land out of cultivation or turning it into forest. Also the state should encourage big land-owners to break up their estates into small tenant-owned farms. The state should regulate the system of free compulsory education. He saw that there was much removal of obstacles to be done, which cannot be stopped by any plea, either of natural rights or vested interests, or any other rights or again by any doctrine. He insisted that government should close down liquor shops. He was interested in prohibition. State may ask its citizens to limit or even altogether, give up buying and selling alcohol in order that they may become free to exercise the talents which God has given to them. The state should protect individual property because 'property' was a necessary condition for the free play of capacity, which can be exerted for the common benefit; it is a means of realising a will which in all possibility is a will directed to social good.

According to Prof. Doyle, the function of the state was essentially it must release men in order that they should fulfil their personalities. The function of government is to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible, and morality consists in the disinterested performance of self-imposed duties, it is negative but moral. According to Prof. Sabine, "State cannot make men moral, it can do much to create social conditions in which they are able to develop a responsible character for themselves. At the very least it can remove many hindrances to such development, as it does, for example, by recognizing that children

have a right to education.” Green advocated that state should control health and housing schemes. He thought these institutions necessary for the development of one’s personality. Green speaks of the state; negative form of as the remover of obstacles. ‘In the final analysis what matters most in life must remain within the province of the individual, the development of his moral nature’. Prof. Maclyer while criticizing Green’s ideas on state activities points out: “He is considering what the state can and, therefore, should do to secure the conditions within which man can act as a moral being, but the poles of his thought are still the individual and the state. He does not consider how both are affected by the existence of association with instrumentalities other than political law. Had he done so he would have seen what the state should do, but also what the state is permitted to do; surrounded by other powers, limited by definite organization of other kinds, fulfilling functions of their own ways. Whereas prophets like Carlyle and Ruskin contended themselves largely with a criticism of the ugliness of industrialism, Green accepts the new order and tries, to work out a theory of state action consistent with actual conditions. He do not question the desirability of political democracy. What he sees is that accompanying political democracy, there must be as much social and economic democracy as is implied in substantial equality of opportunity. In spite of the abstract treatment of actual political and social problems, he senses the sort of things that citizens must be concerned with if a free society is to endure. A welfare state must necessarily be a very powerful one. By way of proposing different functions, which are merely positive in nature, Green seems to be the originator of the 20th century idea of the welfare state.

Green views that the individual may be justified in disobeying the state. Hegel has put too much emphasis on the state and regarded it essentially divine in origin. As such it may be looked upon with great reverence and awe, and the individual has no right to rebel against the state. But Green, gives to an individual the right of resistance. In this approach Green appears to be similar to Locke; an English philosopher, who has also given to his people the right to rebel against the state. However, the difference between the two is that where the latter gives his people the right to resist the former insists that there can never be any right to disobey the state, for state alone is the source of rights. Green does nothing to make the path of resistance easy. Moreover, he holds that resistance can never be justified merely because legislation runs against personal inclination. His concept of rebellion is sober and persistent. Here the question arises why he gives people the right to resist? To

Green, this is due to the conflict between the natural rights and obedience to the rules of law. The conception of natural rights depends upon the fact that the actual and legal scheme of rights recognized by a given community at a given time is not necessarily perfect. There are other rights, other conditions, necessary for the free development of a capacity actually existing in individuals or groups, which in actual law are not recognised, but which nevertheless is to the common benefit to recognise, since the capacity means a capacity for doing something for the common good. To distinguish such rights from legal rights we may give them the name of natural rights. The natural rights are not the rights of primitive and solitary individuals. They are innate in the constitution of men when living in a society of other men and are the natural or proper conditions of life in such a society. These natural rights may be recognised by the general social conscience and yet not be recognised by its laws. They may, indeed, only be recognised by those, perhaps the merest minority, who claim their possession. As such the natural rights are a necessary condition of a full general welfare. But when there is no implicit acknowledgement of the claim to the natural rights or there is a gap between the natural rights and the legal rights or rule of law, the resistance in the name of such rights loses its moral justification and becomes genuine or natural. The wider the gap between the natural and legal rights, the more is the scope of conflict, the lesser the gap and the lesser the conflict. As such, Green believes that due to conflict, the problem of resistance is bound to rise in a democratic community, where the people may readily claim to disobey the law or acts of a government, which is merely the law or act of an opposite party and is only based on a temporary majority which has perhaps been gained on some other issue.

As an example Green questions, whether a sympathiser with the cause of the negro slave resist the master's legal right of property over the slave in the name of the natural rights of the slave to be a free man? His reply was that the answer to the question on the law for the natural right was acknowledged, as recognized by the social consciousness. He said that the sympathiser had no right to sacrifice the law of the land for the sake of a negro. He could not be allowed to risk social order and disturb the existing system of rights for the sake of adding a new element to that system. When the natural rights were already recognised by the society, there did not arise any question of sacrifice. However, when there was no common social consciousness the right to resist the authority of the state could not arise.

Green gives the people the right to disobey the state; it is not an absolute right. He lays down a number of conditions for the right of individuals to resist the state:-

- Green says, men, that in resisting the state, they should always be aware that they will probably be wrong, for the state will be speaking with the wisdom of ages, and that may be presumed to be greater than the wisdom of an individual.
- He says that resistance cannot be justified simply because some legislation runs counter to personal inclinations. In his words; “There can be no right to disobey or avoid any particular law on the ground that it interferes with any freedom of action, any right of managing his children or doing what he will with his own,” because whatever the state does, it is for the general good.
- He says that disobedience is not always preferable because it leads to confusion and anarchy.
- If the state passes one law which you want to oppose, but there are hundreds of laws which you obey. Green says, should you disobey the state for one particular law?

If the state fails persistently in resuming the high moral purpose for which it exists, it loses its claim upon the allegiance of the latter. But claims against the state must be made with great circumspection.

The resistance to governing authority must fulfil two conditions: (i) One should be sure that definite social good is obtainable through successful opposition. (ii) One must be convinced that the substantial part of the community shares his opinion. According to Barker instead of rebelling for the sake of the natural right, people must resort to propaganda to get recognition for it. Green agrees that there are occasions when one must refuse to give obedience to the law of the state. He says that if one must resist, the choice can be of no one else. He also states that one may not have the right to resist, but one may be right in resisting. Resistance is justified only on special grounds. According to Wayper, when all warnings are uttered, Green will ultimately agree that there are occasions when man, if he is to be true to himself, and, at whatever cost, must refuse to give obedience to the state. Knowing an that can be urged against, Green says, ‘if you must resist, you must, and the choice can be no body’s but yours. You will never have the right to resist, but you may be

right in resisting it'. However, Green insists that disobedience should be based on non-violence. As such we can say that it was Green who gave the gospel a peaceful resistance, which was later on followed by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian nation.

### **3.4.5 SUMMING UP**

Green's contribution to political thought was that he put liberalism as sounder footing, humanized individualism and tamed idealism (Gupta). He injected into this turbid conflux of ideologies a liberal political philosophy in which social expediency was the dominant principle, a philosophy in which the concept of social expediency was raised to an ideal, by the insistence of its author, that expediency be determined by the moral obligation of the state to create an environment favourable to the full realization of what is best in every individual. He gave to rights and liberty a positive content and was the real philosophical father of the "welfare state". In this, he revitalized liberalism.

As an active liberal in politics, Green supported a representative form of government. According to Green, the right to free life is the essence of citizenship. But it is subject to restriction by the state which has to use force in order to repel a force opposed to freedom. According to him the object of punishment is neither to inflict pain on the criminal in proportion to his moral guilt for it is rather impossible to assess this proportion nor to bring about a moral reformation of the criminal as all true reform comes from within.

Green viewed that right to resistance was possibly justifiable and not obligatory. He rejected the meaning given to the term "Natural Law" by writers like Hobbes and Locke. He also rejected the idea of the State of nature as advocated by the writers of the social contract theory. According to Green, State was a society of societies. The rights exercised by the State over the different societies were one of adjustment. The state adjusted for each system of rights internally. It also adjusted the system of rights to the rest externally. The part and parcel of his theory of State action was the problem of punishment. The will of the criminal was anti-social. It was a force opposed to freedom. Punishment was a force directed against the force of the criminal. The primary object of punishment is not to reform the criminal but to create terror in his mind. The future prevention of crime is the chief object of punishment. Punishment should create a terror which will prevent others from committing the crime.



As for property he held liberal views. He was neither a protector of private property nor as out and out critic of it. Again it is stated that he was neither a socialist nor an individualist. Every individual must have the opportunity to acquire property because everyone has the capacity to partake of common social good. That capacity is different from man to man. As a result there was inequality in the possession of property. If a few property owners interfere in the affairs of others, it was the duty of the state to interfere. He stood for a class of small proprietors tilling their own land. In case of war he says that war was never absolutely right. It was a cruel necessity. It was a moral wrong, whoever may be the wrong doer, destruction of life in war is a wrong. Green refused to accept the view that wars were inevitable. Wars did not exist because states existed. Wars existed because states did not fulfil their duty of maintaining the general rights.

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## **4.1 KARL MARX I: DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM, HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND ALIENATION**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 4.1.0 Objectives
- 4.1.1 Introduction
- 4.1.2 Marx 's Method: Dialectical Materialism
- 4.1.3 Historical Materialism
- 4.1.4 Theory of Alienation
- 4.1.5 Summing Up

### **4.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to know:**

- Marx's theoretical propositions on dialectical materialism
- Marx's views on historical materialism
- Marx's concept of alienation

### **4.1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The philosophy of Marxism is of paramount importance in the contemporary world. It purports to give a theory of social change and a scientific philosophy which help in understanding the laws of social development. It provides for a revolutionary programme for the emancipation of the exploited classes and suggests revolutionary methods for changing the present society. It wants to establish society on a rational basis in which 'man shall not be exploited by man.' A society in which all will live in peace, harmony and comfort; enjoy true freedom and liberty having the full opportunity to develop their

potentialities and personality. In fact, this society – which the Marxists call the Communist society - shall be a ‘classless’ and ‘stateless Society’ - a really ideal society. The Marxian philosophy came into being as a reaction to the failings of liberal ideology. Over the years, its gospel of revolution spread like a wildfire and engulfed many countries of the world. Today, Marxism reigns in many parts of the world and, therefore, its proper understanding is very essential for us. However, before we discuss ‘Marxism’ in detail, it would be quite in order to give a brief biographical sketch of the father of ‘Marxism’ i.e., Karl Heinrich Marx. Karl Marx, the father of Marxism or modern socialism, was born in Trier (Treves) in the Rhineland province of Prussia (Germany) on May 5, 1818. His father, Herschel Marx who originally was a Jew, but in 1824, the family embraced Christianity to avoid persecution. At that time young Marx was unable to understand the significance of this change. But later on he realized that religion was being used by fanatics as an instrument for persecution. Whatever may be the truth behind, the fact remains that Marx became an atheist and became an avowed enemy of religion. As an intelligent and child, Marx, at the age of seventeen joined the University of Berlin as a law student. In 1841, Karl Marx took his degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Jena on the subject “The difference between the Natural Philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus.” In 1843, he married Jenny, the daughter of Freiherr Ludwig von Westphalen with whose family he had close and intimate relations.

From the very beginning Marx was a great rebel. His radical views made him a suspect in the eyes of authorities and even prevented his employment as a university teacher. Because of his bad handwriting he was denied even a clerical job. He tried his luck in the army too, but was declared unfit for it. Finally, he entered the profession of journalism and began to edit a paper entitled “*Rheinische Zeitung*”. However, its publication too was stopped by the authorities after a year. He then went to Paris, where he struck up a firm and lasting friendship with Friederich Engels. Engels became his life-long friend, disciple and collaborator. In 1845, in Brussels (Germany) Karl Marx founded an organization called “the German Working Men’s Association.” In 1847, Marx and Engels founded together the “International Communist League”, with Engels as its first Secretary. Together they drafted the famous Communist Manifesto in 1848 which even today is a gospel and the Bible for all communists. In 1849, he settled down in London and remained there till his death which happened March 14, 1883. In a speech over his grave in High Gate cemetery,

Friedrich Engels declared that, “his name and works will endure through the ages.” Karl Marx was an intellectual giant and a prolific writer. In 1847, with the aid and help of Engels, he prepared the Communist Manifesto. Laski described it as “one of the outstanding political documents of all times.” According to Bertrand Russell, the Communist Manifesto is “the best contribution that Karl Marx made to the history of Political Thought.” It contains his most lucid, clear and compact statement regarding his conception of the struggle between classes in human history; the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in modern times; the inevitable destruction of capitalism; and a programme of action for the working classes to establish a classless and stateless society.

Another important and life-work of Karl Marx has been Das Capital. It consists of three volumes. The first volume was published in 1867 during his life time. The second and the third volume of Das Capital were edited by Engels after the death of Karl Marx in 1883. They were published in the years 1885 and 1894 respectively. Regarding Das Capital, it is said : “The appearance of this book was an epoch-making event in the history of International Socialism ... It was conceived as a comprehensive treatise on the laws of morphology of the economic organization of modern society, seeking to describe the process of production, exchange and distribution as they actually occur, to explain their present state at a particular stage in the development constituted by the movement of the class struggle.” Besides numerous articles and pamphlets, the other important works of Karl Marx are the following:

- (1) *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847).
- (2) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).
- (3) *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach* (1845).
- (4) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1894).
- (5) *Civil War and the Class Struggle in France* (1849).
- (6) *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1891).
- (7) *Revolution and Counter Revolution*.

Karl Marx can be described as one of the most influential thinkers of our age. Since the later half of the 13th century his ideas and ideology has been a source of revolutionary

changes in human thinking and behaviour. His writings compelled both the capitalists and non-capitalist to change their relations with the workers and it impelled the workers to rise from their slumber sleep and come together for action in order to secure their rights. He became the chief architect and instrument of labour movements in almost all the societies and at international level. He is regarded as the father of scientific socialism.

#### **4.1.2 KARL MARX METHOD: DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM:**

As Plamenatz notes, “Marxism is not only a theory about society, it is an entire system of Philosophy”. In fact the basic and starting point of Marxism or Marxist method is the dialectical materialism. Dialectic means discussion. Marx came under the influence of Hegel’s idea at the University of Berlin. From him he borrowed the dialectical method. Hegel held the view that the social and human evolutions has not been is straight line. On the other hand, it moved in a zig-zag manner. It consisted of contrasts, negations and contradictions. Each stage in human history gave birth to its opposition the anti-thesis. As a result the interaction of thesis and anti-thesis gave birth to synthesis, which reconciles the opposite tendencies present in the earlier system on a new and higher level. Hegel considered spirit to be the ultimate reality. As such Hegel developed a philosophy of history which saw progress as contingent upon the dialectical clash of idea in a sequence of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis.

Marx borrowed from Hegel the dialectical method. He viewed that progress results from the conflict of the opposing forces. Marx said that the clash is due to the material forces, and ideas are only product of the material environment in which men live. According to Marxian dialectics, contrary forces are present in every stage of society and constitute the moving force in history. The present capitalist stage is also living with its anti-thesis, the proletariat. The capitalists and the workers are in conflict with each other. The outcome of this class struggle will be the establishment of a society where there will be no classes and no class struggle. Marx not only taught materialism, but also a particular aspect of it i.e. Dialectical materialism. It is the most important part of Marxism philosophy. Through a revolutionary dialectic process matter evolves. The social revolution which follows is of a higher order, as it aims at the abolition of all classes and the creation of a classless society. Marx held that matter and not the ‘spirit’ or idea was the ultimate reality. A society organized for production, in which there shall be no exploitation of one class by the other was the goal of the evolutionary process. According to him the world by its nature develop in

accordance with the laws of movement of matter. He stressed that different social ideas and theories that appeared at various phases of history were merely a reflection of the material laws of society.

In developing Dialectical materialism, Marx did an adaptation of Hegel's dialectical method. His central theme was matter or the material forces which brought about a change in the society. Matter for him is the ultimate reality. Changes in the society occur on account of the changes and operation of the material forces. So he holds that the causes of historical development are economic causes and not the nations. Dialectical materialism is moving towards a society perfectly organized for production without any class distinctions and without exploitation.

Marx based his dialectical materialism on the three laws of dialectics initially proposed by Hegel:-

#### **4.1.2.1 The Laws of Transformation of Quantity into Quality and vice-versa**

According to this principle, changes take place by quantitative transformation until there comes a point which Hegel describes as 'node', beyond which a thing cannot change while remaining the same. Here an example can be given that water turns into steam at 100°C and into ice at 0°C. Due to this abrupt change at one moment water is water, at other a steam, and at another ice. Similarly the progress in society is effected by sudden jumps. Marx describes this jump as revolution. According to him change is inevitable in society. He says that monopoly capitalism represents the last stage, beyond which capitalism no longer develops. After having come into existence, it will also develop quantitatively until a stage is reached when the dialectical leap or jump takes place and it is transformed into socialism.

#### **4.1.2.2 The Law of the Unity of the Opposites**

The second law which becomes the basis of Marx Dialectical materialism is the law of the unity of the opposites. Marx believes that in each society there are negative and positive forces. These two, far from being opposite represent no absolute difference e.g. just like a road which is to the east is automatically to the west also. As science has also proved that each unity within itself contains polar opposites such as positive and negative poles of the electron and they are interdependent. In the same way Marx says in a capitalist society

there are two opposites, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. They are opposed to each other but they are inter connected and cannot develop without the help of each other. So he makes use of contradictions in the society to explain its evolution and growth. Lenin describes this thought of Marx as the ‘salt of Dialectics’.

#### **4.1.2.3 The Law of the Negation of the Negations**

Marx says that thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis are various stages of evolution. The thesis falls to the ground and breaks on account of internal contradictions which gives way to anti-thesis to remove the existing contradictions. It (anti-thesis) also further breaks down, which gives way to synthesis. So after the breakup of thesis and anti-thesis, synthesis is evolved and developed. The synthesis negates the anti-thesis which was the first negation (of thesis). It is in this context that Marx calls it the “negation of negations”.

On the basis of these three laws. Marx explains the changes in society which according to him are inevitable. This trio formulae of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis finds representation in the form of feudalism, capitalism and socialism. The internal contradiction of feudal society give way to its negation i.e. capitalism. In capitalism itself, there are contradictions although it is in advanced stage than the other one. These contradictions are in the form of class struggle and antagonisms. These contradictions lead to a new advance in the society represented by socialism. Socialism which comes out of capitalism is the ‘negation of negation’. The central point of this concept is inherent in things and phenomena; for all things having something which is dying away and something which is still developing. The struggle between the opposites constitutes the process of development.

#### **4.1.3 HISTORICAL MATERIALISM**

Historical materialism is the extension of the principle of dialectical materialism to the study of social life and its evolution. It seeks to explain social evolution in terms of certain permanent laws of social change. It has the elements of historical study of the past and analytical account of the present social structure and prosperity, unfolding the future. Marx interpretation of history is called materialistic or economic interpretation. His contention is that the economic causes or the material forces are fundamental in social change. Historical materialism is a joint contribution of Marx and Engels. It is the application of the principle of dialectical materialism to the development of society. According to C.L. Wayper ‘Man’s very survival depends upon the success with which he can produce, what he wants from

nature. Production is therefore the most important of all human activity. Men in association produce more than men in isolation’.

Interpretation of history and historical materialism came as a reaction against the ideal interpretation of history. According to Idealists, men work by virtue of ideal influences. Ideas and not matter are the ultimate reality that determine the course of history. Marx held that reality was in the other way wrong. He says that history must be interpreted only in the light of economic circumstances (development). According to Marx every social system has an inner unity of its own. Social, economic, cultural and religious systems are all linked by a common economic structure. He distinguishes between the essential and the primary base of social structure and the secondary factors which take their birth in the materializing of the primary factors. In other words, he distinguishes between the fundamental and the super structure of the society. The latter is based upon the former and any change in the former necessitates a change in the latter. This fundamental structure is the foundation, made of the methods of production of material means of life and of the relation of production. This relation constitutes the economic system of the economic structure of society. Thus it is the primary factor which determines the super structure of the society. Whenever changes occur in the modes or in the relation of production the whole social pattern undergoes a change. The changes produce corresponding changes in ideas and institutions.

The state is the executing agency of the dominant class. It is the power that is employed by a dominant class to sustain the existing relations of production. State is the result of the class antagonism of the society, corresponding to the modes of production. Society is always split into two major classes i.e. those who own the means of production and those who do not own the means of production (the haves and have not). But those who had been dominating politically under the old methods of production are based to resist. The conflict is inevitable. In the conflict the new class that dominates the society “economically” is successful. When it comes to power it seeks to change the character of legal, political and moral institutions of a country so that they may be helpful in the maintenance of their dominance.

Every system of production has gives rise to into principally mutually hostile classes; free man and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf. Marx here applies historical materialism to explain both past history and future possible evolution. He distinguishes between five



states of production i.e. Premature communal stage, Slave stage, Feudal stage, Capitalist stage and Socialist stage.

- First: Premature communal stage : Means of production are socially owned.
- Second: Slave stage : The slaves work for their masters.
- Third: Feudal stage : Feudal lord potentially owns the serfs since the serfs can have some property.
- Fourth: Capitalist stage: Capitalist owns the means of production but not the labour, though they are compelled to work for them.
- Fifth: Socialist Stage: Which has not come into existence (workers themselves own the means of productions). This will happen when capitalism reaches its fullest development, but then it would be abolished because of its inherent contradictions.

From the view of production each of these stages represents an advance upon its predecessor. It being in accordance with the dialectical principle. This application of historical materialism to the past history results is an interpretation of history which helps Marx in calling the capitalists as reactionary element, and working class the revolutionary in its present stage, and also argues that destruction of the present order is foredoomed as was the feudal stage. The victory of the struggle will be of workers because the trend of future is with them. Capitalist society will be replaced by the proletarian state and ultimately the classless society would be established and dialectic history will pass into its final stage.

#### **4.1.4 THEORY OF ALIENATION AND FREEDOM**

Karl Marx developed his theory of alienation in his early writings, particularly in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). Using the German words *Entfremdung* (to estrange, make alien, rob) and *Entäusserung* (to alienate, part with, sell, externalize), Marx outlined various ways in which human beings become alienated in their lives, particularly in the course of the labour process. According to Marx, human beings experience a loss of control over their lives and over the creations that constitute

the basic institutions and processes of society, such as the state and work. This alienation or estrangement means that human beings have a sense of living in a world that is alien and hostile, and they experience their lives as meaningless, unsatisfying and worthless. Ultimately human beings live their lives in a way that is less than fully human; they are dehumanized.

Marx derived his theory of alienation from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's notion of alienation and his own critique of Hegel. For Hegel alienation referred to the process of "Spirit" (*Geist*) externalizing itself in the creation of reality, but failing to grasp that the world was not something external to Spirit. Spirit, through human consciousness, gradually comes to realize that the world is the creation of Spirit, and in so doing overcomes alienation. Marx, treading in the footsteps of the "Young Hegelians" and Ludwig Feuerbach critiqued and moved away from this notion of alienation rooted in idealist philosophy. Following the line of thought developed by the Young Hegelians and by Feuerbach in particular, Marx identified the problem of religious alienation where human beings create the notion of God and attribute to this creation idealized features of themselves. Having created God and projected on to it our most essential features, we then give it an independent existence and bow down to worship this entity that is entirely our own creation. This process sees the externalization of our essential features and the fashioning of an alien entity out of them which then has a power over us.

In religious alienation we become separated from our essential selves, and this occurs in an even more significant way in the labour process. Human productive activity is fundamental to us, not just as the way in which we produce our subsistence, but also as the way in which we develop and express our human potential. However, in class society, and in capitalism in particular, the process of production is a process by which individuals become alienated. First, individuals are alienated from what they produce. For example, a worker in a factory creates a product which is then sold by the factory owner when, where, to whom and at what price he sees fit. The worker has no control over the product that he has created. Secondly, an individual is alienated from the conditions of the work process, that is, he has no control over the process of production, does not own the tools of production and, increasingly under capitalism has to perform dull, repetitive tasks requiring little imagination, skill or creativity. Thirdly, an individual is alienated from his "species-being," that is to say, he is unable to develop and express his essential human characteristics. Human beings, according to Marx, are essentially productive creatures and it is in the

course of producing that we distinguish ourselves from animals. Unlike animals human beings produce consciously, planning their actions and using imagination and creativity. Human beings can exercise their will and not just act according to instinct, and they are also essentially social and cooperative, but all these characteristics are denied in the labour process in capitalism. The restrictions placed on us by a class society where the majority do not have free access to the means of production, where there is a highly specialized division of labour, and where control is exercised over our labour by bosses and impersonal market forces serve to prevent work from being the enriching and fully human activity it should be.

In his later years, and especially in *Capital*, Marx stopped using the term “alienation,” a term he used frequently in the 1840s and the 1850s. In his attempts to redefine and reconfigure the concept of alienation as the central experience of capitalist subjects, Marx amplified it with the concepts of commodity fetishism and machine labour. In this amplification, the concept of alienation comes to define a world determined solely by economics. The illusions produced by capitalist making come to determine the possible range of human thinking.

In short, Marx’s concept of Alienation informs us that we are alienated from both aspects of our species-essence under capitalism. We already briefly noted the first: that we are alienated in productive activity. We can now see that this is also a way of being alienated from our species-essence. Under capitalism the vast majority of the workers work in a way that does not engage their distinctively human properties. Rather than exercising their creativity, their ingenuity, their ability to respond to many varying challenges and situations, they produce in a dumb, repetitive, single-track fashion. They produce as animals do, rather than as humans should. It has been said that for many workers the part of the day in which their abilities are most engaged is the drive to and from work. Thus, as we saw, Marx says many of us feel human only when we are not working.

The second way in which we are alienated from our species-essence merges into the final category: alienation early writings from other human beings. Here the essential point is simply that we do not appreciate our ‘species-life’ for what it is. Rather than conceiving of ourselves as members of the vast scheme of co-operation just described, we think of ourselves as people who go to work to earn money, and then go to shops to spend it. We are people with tunnel vision. As Marx somewhat obscurely puts it: we use our species-

life as a means to individual life. In other words the way in which we pursue our self-interest would not even be possible if we did not have a communal species-essence. Yet we utterly disregard this communal aspect of our lives. We barely give a thought to the question of who will use the things we make, and even less to how the objects we purchase came into existence. We screen everything off except our immediate consumption decision.

For Marx the solution to the problem of alienation is communism; the overthrow of capitalism with the abolition of the division of labour and private property will make de-alienation possible. The individual attain their freedom when they understand the operation of capitalism and how capitalist relations alienating humans. In later course of time, Marx's conception of freedom has proved to be extremely effective in "changing the world." Marx's concept of freedom exposed some important weaknesses of the early nineteenth-century version of liberalism and the freedom it talks about.

In contrast with the liberal view of freedom, Marx saw freedom as one's ability to exercise conscious control over natural environment and over social forces in which we are part of. He criticizes liberal capitalism for obstructing humans' freedom in many ways. If poor people cannot afford to buy a great many things, liberalism consider it as a lack of capacity and not as a limitation on their freedom; for Marx poor people are poor because someone else is extracting the resources produced by the poor, hence poverty, a rich's imposition on poor, is enforcing limitations on human freedom.

For Marx, the realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and not towards the end of accumulation and concentration of wealth. In the words of Marx, "Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it,

though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite”.

In many ways Marx helps clarify how the realm of necessity would need to be reformed to allow for greater individual self realization through the actual exercise of the capacity for self determination, thereby enabling people to discover an intrinsic value in the act of producing to meet society’s material needs in association with others.

#### **4.1.5 SUMMING UP**

In this lesson we have discussed Marx’s concepts of Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism and Alienation. The basic laws of dialectical materialism, which we have studied above, furnish the key to understanding universal motion and development in the material world, reveal their sources and driving forces which are contained in internal contradictions. These laws disclose the leap-like, progressive character of development; they show that reality makes progress through constant replacement, through negation of the old by the new.

One of the most important aspects of Marxist philosophy making it qualitatively different from the preceding philosophies is the attainment of organic unity of materialism and dialectics. Study of the general picture of the world’s development is an important task of materialist dialectics. Marxist dialectics regards development as a movement from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex, as a leap-like, revolutionary process.

the concept of historical materialism of Karl Marx is an important element in his theory of social development. While developing a scientific theory of social development, Marx questioned and contrasted the idealistic views of earlier thinkers with a materialistic interpretation of history. By showing the inviolable unity of social phenomena and their material basis, Marx’s concept of socio-economic formation completely overturns idealistic and metaphysical social theories which were predominant in pre-Marxist philosophy. The concept of formation also puts an end to the non-historical, abstract views of social life and shows that there is no such thing as society in general, but only a concrete historical society, i.e., a society which, to quote Marx, stands “at a definite stage of historical development, a society with a peculiar distinctive character”.

As we studied above, the subject matter of historical materialism is the study of society and the laws of its development. These laws are as objective, i.e., independent of man's consciousness, as the laws of nature's development. In contrast to the concrete social sciences, historical materialism studies the most general laws of social development. As an integral part of the Marxist world outlook, historical materialism furnishes a scientific, dialectical-materialist interpretation of phenomena of social life. It solves such important general problems of historical development as the connection between social being and social consciousness, the importance of material production in people's lives, the origin and role of social ideas and of their corresponding institutions. Historical materialism enables us to understand what role the people and individuals play in history, how classes and the class struggle arose, how the state appeared, why social revolutions occur and what is their significance in the historical process, and a number of other general problems of social development.

Historical materialism arose as a result of the generalisation of people's practical experience throughout history and the achievements of the social sciences, and it is absolutely inconceivable outside of them. On the other hand, without historical materialism, without a knowledge of the general laws of social development no social science can develop fruitfully. It enables historians, economists and other scholars to find their way in the intricate maze of social phenomena and determine the place and significance of each phenomenon in social life. The premise of historical materialism that society's spiritual life depends on economic, material relations between people, helps to trace the sources of various theories and views and correctly assess their role in history.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
Course Title: **Western Political Thought**  
Unit – IV: **Socialist Thinkers**

## **4.2 LENIN: IMPERIALISM, PARTY, STATE AND REVOLUTION**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 4.2.0 Objectives
- 4.2.1 Introduction
- 4.2.2 Lenin's theory of Imperialism
- 4.2.3 State and Revolution
- 4.2.4 Lenin's Theory of Party Organization
  - 4.2.4.1 Party: A Conscious Keeper of the Working Class
- 4.2.5 Summing Up

### **4.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- understand Lenin's theory of Imperialism;
- comprehend Lenin's views on State and Revolution;
- know Lenin's proposition about Communist Party Organization.

### **4.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Lenin, who championed the cause of proletariat and established the dictatorship of the Communist Party, didn't belong to the Proletariat class. He was the son of an Inspector of Schools, a government employee. He was born in 1870 and brought up in reasonable luxury. His real name was Viladimir Iluich Ulianov. In his 17th year of age he was forced to be a revolutionary, when once he heard that his brother was hanged to death on a charge

of plotting against the Czar. Then he was a law student in Kazan university. The university authorities, ignoring the condition which influenced Lenin to become a revolutionary, expelled him from the university. However, he took his degree as a private student from the St. Petersburg University in 1891.

His revolutionary spirit, together with the ability to give an able leadership attracted to him a huge following and also enabled him to achieve what he had undertaken. Not minding the difficulties he experienced, he worked hard to create an atmosphere to foment a revolution as desired by Marx. The success he achieved in the revolution placed him in the position of possessing the government. The difficulties he faced were overcome by him which of course earned for him a credit to be known in history as an extraordinary theoretician and a practical politician. His works among others are 'Imperialism - The highest state of capitalism', 'State and Revolution', 'Left-wing Communism', etc. His contributions to political thought are born of his experience while attempting to implement the thoughts of Marx. Lenin's greatness lies in demonstrating the so far unattainable Marxian thoughts. Lenin, having full conviction in the dialectical and historical materialism as brought out by Marx, fomented a revolution in Russia and made it public that Marxism is not an empty thought but a living force. While doing so he did not follow every step as shown by Marx. As a sagacious politician he adopted and conditioned the thoughts of Marx to make them suitable to Russia. While Lenin was placed on the highest chair of the Russian government, his wide and varied experiences enabled him to understand the obstruction caused, to curtail the spread of communism.

#### **4.2.2 LENIN'S THEORY OF IMPERIALISM**

Theory of capitalistic imperialism is one of the most important contributions of Lenin to the Marxist doctrine. He formulated this theory before the revolution when he was living in exile in Switzerland. He published "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism", in the year 1916. In this he explained the Marx's earlier argument that monopoly capitalism inevitably attempts to ensure its further development by absorbing foreign territories and exploiting their resources and native peoples. Marx had anticipated that revolution will take place in the industrially advanced countries, where the wealth would go on concentrating into fewer and fewer hands and the number of the proletariat would go on increasing. This will lead to revolution to be staged by the proletariat. According to him, revolution was



thus inevitable. In accordance with Marx's explanation and the sequence of occurrence, socialism should have come in the Western Europe, i.e. countries like France, Britain, Germany. But this did not come out to be true. Marx could not anticipate the advanced stage of capitalism, which Lenin called imperialism. Marxian predictions about the gradual decline and ultimate overthrow of capitalism by a revolution of the workers appeared to be false when in the post - Marx years, the capitalist systems of Europe and the USA began becoming stronger and the conditions of workers started becoming improved. The emergence of signs of socialist revolutions in feudal societies against the Marxian predictions to the contrary, compelled Lenin to restate, explain and elaborate Marxism, particularly Marxian view of capitalism as its own grave digger. The strength gained by capitalist states and the emergence of their imperialism made it essential for Lenin to explain the way the capitalism would come to an end in the days of imperialism and wars in international relations. In fact Lenin became responsible for filling this gap in the Marxian explanation of the advent of socialism in the industrially advanced countries.

Lenin held that competition had carried capitalism to a monopolistic position, which went far beyond that which had prevailed in Marx's time. Monopoly became the rule in the capitalistic system. Lenin in his, *Imperialism-the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, wrote, "competition becomes transformed into monopoly. The result is immense progress in the socialisation of production. In particular, the process of technical invention and improvement becomes socialised. Production becomes social, but appropriation remains private. The social means of production remain the private property of a few. The general framework of formerly recognized free competition remains, but the yoke of a few monopolists on the rest of the population becomes a hundred times heavier, more burdensome and intolerable." In an industrialised country, the expansion of capitalism leads to the rise of monopoly capital which comes to exercise a control over the state power. The ever increasing production of goods, the increase in surplus value assets and the limited avenues for investment in domestic markets compels the capitalist to find and capture markets abroad. Result being these capitalists shift their surplus capital to the backward countries and invest it there. The conditions of the workers of the home country are improved. Therefore, they become tools into the hands of the exploiters and do not sympathise with the workers of the colonies. In the words of Prof. M. J. Harmon, "Surplus capital is exported for investment in the backward countries of the world. New production facilities are created

there, where the cost of labour and raw-material is low and the profits are high. This is the policy of imperialism.” Capitalism expands and turns to imperialism. The capitalists then start exploiting the people of their imperial colonies. In this task the workers of their own country get involved and the bourgeoisie of the dependent societies. The profits from these exploited areas are so great that part of them can be used, are being used to bribe and corrupt, the upper strata of the proletariat’ of the imperialist countries. If it were not for the imperialism, the workers of those countries would long ago have reached the revolutionary stage. As it is, the crises engendered by unemployment, under consumption, and other features of capitalism are checked by the use of profits squeezed out of the proletariat of backward countries. A part of the workers in the imperialist countries, corrupted by their capitalist master, join with those masters in the exploitation of their fellow-workers abroad.

According to Lenin the capitalists, having already plundered their own markets, look greedily on the ‘underdeveloped’ areas of the world, where they could get their raw materials, and in turn, could sell their finished products. The capitalists could stay off internal problems by giving their own workers such ‘sops’ as slightly higher wages and fringe benefits. Hence, Lenin inferred, ‘the underdeveloped areas of the world have been forced to take the role of the proletariat in the twentieth century’. Imperialism represents the highest stage of capitalistic expansionism at this stage capitalists of different capitalist-imperialist countries get engaged in competition and struggle for domination at the international level. This naturally is bound to lead to war among the imperialists, which is bound to end capitalism-imperialism. In other words, Lenin advocates that war would end the stage of capitalistic imperialism, i.e. capitalism, its highest stage of development. Thus Lenin answered several issues, viz.

- Capitalism develops into imperialism.
- Imperialism leads to war.
- The end of capitalism-imperialism comes through war among the imperialists.
- Development of capitalism into imperialism prevents its death for some time.

- In the era of capitalism-imperialism the workers of the capitalist countries join hands in the exploitation; let loose upon the people of the underdeveloped countries.
- In the era of capitalist-imperialism, the centre of exploitation shifts from the capitalist countries to the backward countries/colonies. Due to this development, the chances for the coming of socialist revolutions in backward colonies become bright.

By such logic, Lenin was successful in answering several questions like: Why capitalism had come to stay? Why there was little sign of revolution in capitalist countries? How will now capitalism get destroyed? Why there were chances of revolution in backward countries? Explaining Lenin's theory of capitalist-imperialism, Rodee, Anderson, Christo and Green write, "Lenin argued that the advanced capitalist countries had temporarily postponed catastrophic economic crisis by finding new markets in the under-developed countries of the world. The expropriation of 'surplus value' from workers-had been internationalized through the spread of colonialism. The world war that began in 1914 should be understood as an imperialist war waged by the great powers in the interest of greater colonial domination. Imperialist expansion also enabled the bourgeoisie to buy off its indigenous proletariat through the distribution of some of the profits expropriated from foreign and less class conscious workers. The war was a temporary boon to the flagging capitalist economies, enabling the bourgeoisie to appeal to the proletariat in terms of more secure employment as well as patriotic devotion. The consequences, for Lenin, were obvious; The proletariat of Western Europe had been 'duped' and was most appropriately characterized by false consciousness.

His theory of imperialism can be summarised as follows: He says that capitalism in Western Europe did not lead to inevitable doom because of the 'sops' given to the workers by the industrialists and the surplus capital which was shifted by them to the colonial lands. In this way the finance-capital get an outlet and the workers' wages in the capitalist countries became good enough. In this way the capitalism get transformed into imperialism. Lenin held the view that prior to imperialism the class struggle and the revolutionary spirit were confined to individual countries. Now capitalism had become international and more advanced countries hindered the growth of less developed regions of the world. He said

that the possibility of the revolution was greater not in highly industrialised countries but in the countries which were the least developed. The revolutionary zeal was most intense in these countries. Lenin further stated that it was not the size of the proletariat that was necessary to stage the revolution, but the revolutionary character which was to decide where revolution was to take place. Lenin said that Russia in 1917 was the weakest link in the chain of capitalism and therefore ripe for revolution. Lenin's thesis was that imperialism generates conditions very favourable for a direct attack on 'citadel of capitalism'. It not only creates international wars that greatly weaken the belligerent capitalist states. "It reinstates class struggle as a permanent force in capitalist society, and thereby convenes an international proletariat that its interests can be served only by an international social revolution".

#### **4.2.3 STATE AND REVOLUTION**

The nature of state and society during the era of dictatorship of the proletariat was explained by Lenin and adopted according to the requirements of the circumstances. According to C. L. Wayper, the dictatorship of the proletariat as a doctrine has yet another implication of the greatest importance. It necessitates a new version of Marx's teaching on the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin exactly did this. Stalin wrote while defining Leninism that "Leninism was the theory and tactics of the proletariat revolution in general and the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular." Indeed Lenin did not stop his task at that, as a true follower of Marx, Lenin said, that a Marxist was one who extern the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat. After the proletarian revolution had been staged in Russia, Lenin portrayed the new order in his work *State and Revolution-1917*. He based his thesis on the model of the Paris Commune. He held that the revolution will destroy the bourgeois state and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in its place. In simple words, Lenin accepted the Marxian principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat but he changed it to the dictatorship of the Communist Party as the Vanguard of the Proletariat.

Lenin's view of the dictatorship of the proletariat can be further discussed under two categories: (a) as the instrument of the proletarian revolution and (b) as a form of the transitional state in which the proletariat rule over the bourgeoisie. Explaining Lenin's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat under the first head, i.e. as the instrument of proletarian

revolution, Stalin observed that the progress and the sweep and achievements of the proletarian revolution acquire flesh and bones through the dictatorship of proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the instrument of the proletarian revolution, its organ, its most important main stay, brought into being for the purpose of; firstly, crushing the resistance of the overthrown exploiters and consolidating the achievements of the proletarian revolution and secondly, carrying proletarian revolution to its completion. It means that the proletariat could liquidate the bourgeoisie and overthrow its power without dictatorship, but it may not be able to retain its victory and reap the rewards of fruits of the revolution without the dictatorship of the proletariat. In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be required to consolidate the results of the revolution and vanquish the resistance and counter-revolutionary activities of the landlords and the capitalists overthrown in the proletarian revolution. Under dictatorship of proletariat Lenin advocated the organisation of state as people's republic, police as people's police, bureaucracy as people's service and army as people's army. If Lenin hadn't had adopted this approach of the dictatorship, after the successful revolution against the Kerensky government, the counter revolutionaries, assisted by the foreign powers, may have succeeded in restoring the old bourgeoisie.

As regards the second aspect of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a form of transitional state in which the proletariat rule over the bourgeoisie, certain features can be high-lighted in this connection. Firstly, it continues to be a state like the capitalist order which it replaces, but the difference between the new order and the old one is that, in the former a small minority exploits and suppresses a large majority. Opposed to this in the new order, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the large majority exploits and suppresses a small minority, i.e. the capitalists and the landlord class. The new state i.e. the socialist state namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, is compelled to use violence for coercion and suppression of its foes by their stubborn resistance to it. The capitalist class cannot hope to regain power even through their international connections. Lenin further observed that the proletariat would exercise force for suppressing their enemies by calling the new order as a dictatorship. Lenin defined dictatorship as power based directly on force and unrestricted by any law. In simple words, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be power obtained, and continued or maintained by violence against bourgeoisie. It means that there was to be little place for liberties for the bourgeoisie. This type of system involved a complete liquidation of the old order and the substitution of entirely new one represented

and controlled by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin denounced the parliamentary practices, as they are institutions and agencies of bourgeoisie suppression and domination and therefore these were of no value to the working class. In actual practice, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather dictatorship over the proletariat. The communist party was to be the sole instrument of exercise of all power society and over all classes of people and the party was to be concentrated in the hands of the selected few. It was to work on the principle of democratic centralism, which in practice results in the apparatus of the party becoming a substitute for the party. He further explains that the central committee of the party becomes a substitute for the apparatus and ultimately the dictator himself substitutes for the central committee.

Lenin on Religion and State: Like the other Marxists, Lenin was opposed religion. Religion found no place in his philosophy and thought. He denounced the philosophy of Tolstoy on this issue and described him as the “exhausted, hysterical, Russian intellectual.” Lenin’s attitude towards religion finds best explanation in the following extract from his writings. He says, “We, therefore, reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and forever immutable moral law on the pretext that the moral world too has its permanent principles which transcend history and the difference between nations. We maintain, on the contrary, that all former moral theories are the product, in the last analysis, of the economic stage which society had reached at that particular epoch. And as society hitherto moved in class antagonisms morality was always a class morality.” Again “But is there such a thing as communist ethics. Is there such a thing as communist morality? Of course, there is. It is frequently asserted that we have no ethics, and very frequently the bourgeoisie says that we communists deny all morality. We say that morality is wholly subordinated to the interests of the proletariat. We deduce our morality from the facts and needs of the class struggle of the proletariat. At the basis of communist morality lies the struggle for strengthening and completing communism. For us, morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletarian class struggle”

Lenin expressed the view that religion was used as a tool by the exploiters to exploit the poor people and the, working class. According to him, “Fear created the Gods. Fear of the blind forces of the capital-blind, because its action cannot be foreseen by the masses—a force which in every step in life threatens the worker and the small businessman with sudden, unexpected accidental destruction and ruin, bringing their in beggary, pauperism,

prostitution and deaths from starvation-this is the tap-root of modern religion. The party of the proletariat demands, that the government shall declare religion as a private matter, but it does not for a moment regard the question of fighting against the opium of the' people, the right against religious superstition as a private matter. We demand that religion be regarded as a private matter as far as the state is concerned, but under no circumstances can we regard it as private matter in our own party.”

Lenin's adaptation of Marxism to Russia, it is said that one of the greatest contributions of Lenin. Lenin was a Russian, of the Russians and he had a deep understanding of the Russian realities. As a Marxist revolutionary, Lenin believed that revolution was possible in Russia only under certain conditions. The Czar must be defeated in war and there must be a group of highly disciplined and professional revolutionaries, who must be able to take over the Government of the country. Lenin held that there was going to be a war and Russia was sure to be defeated in that war but the problem was how to train revolutionaries who could take over in the event of Russia's defeat in war. Lenin had thus to experience a very big hurdle. The Marxian view was that a revolution could take place only in a country where there was full-fledged industrial capitalism. According to Marx, there were no shortcuts to revolution. Revolutionary movements could arise spontaneously and could not outrun the underlying industrial and economic conditions which gave birth to them. However, Russia at that time was mainly an agriculturist country. In spite of this handicap Lenin came to the conclusion that a successful revolution could be led by the creation of a small disciplined and centralised party. There were genuine Marxists like Plekhanov, who did not accept the thesis of Lenin. His critics state that if there were to be no democracy within the party, the masses will not get the education which was a necessary condition of socialism. Lenin was more interested in making men carry out his policy than in justifying it theoretically.

#### **4.2.4 LENIN'S THEORY OF PARTY ORGANISATION**

Leninism is a sort of a body of theories, which involve elaboration, supplementation and modification of Marxism for taking into account the developments which took place after Marx, or the developments which Marx could not anticipate. Therefore, Lenin aimed, at adaptation of Marxism to the necessities of Russian Revolution of 1917 and the period that followed. The task was difficult but Lenin did it nicely. Marx believed that the workers

could organise themselves with the development of industrial capitalism. He had stated in his programme of action that the course of historical development, as it pertains to the means of production, would lead to conditions that would make revolution inevitable. According to Marx, capitalism would lead to competition and the competition, in turn, would reduce the number of the capitalists and increase the number of proletariat. The conditions of the workers will go on worsening. But at the same time, the workers would become concentrated in big cities due to the development of large industries and resultant large scale production. They will learn to operate the instruments of production. The workers would develop a class consciousness due to their increasing misery and hardship. As a result they will organise themselves. The workers at one place will come in contact with the workers of other place and ultimately the proletariat would lead the working class to revolt, destroy the bourgeoisie state and create their own state-the dictatorship of the proletariat under the rule of the vast majority. Marx was of the view that this type of process will be inevitable and will not be required to be artificially accelerated. But this prophecy of Marx did not come out to be true. The conditions, which developed in several western countries after Marx wrote, did not provide endorsement to the Marx's theory. The living standards in these countries improved for the working class and the workers started enjoying some success in influencing the legislative process; in getting legislation enacted in their favour. Thus the proletariat seemed to be getting less inclined towards the violent revolution than before. Therefore, some socialists tended to re-interpret Marx's ideas which could explain their inherent contradictions and give greater help to the democratic application of the principles. They accepted parliamentary activity to capture political power through peaceful and constitutional means.

Lenin did not accept fully the Marxian idea of organisation of working class. He came out strongly for the organisation of a party of workers. He did not fully agree with the account of the organisation of the proletariat and the views of the socialists of Germany and France who stood for reform and not for revolution to achieve socialism. Instead of depending on the proletariat to bring about the revolution, Lenin presented his thesis of the party organisation. He was interested in retaining and restoring the revolutionary qualities of Marxism. He was aware of the fact that the socialists of England, Germany and France and few other countries had some reason to be optimistic with regard to the opportunities offered by liberal democracy. But Lenin had a different experience. His experience was



based on the oppressive Czarist regime. Therefore, he had doubts in the prospects of democracy in mitigating the harshness of the regime in the near future. These experiences influenced Lenin in forming a theory of party organization. He tried to give a new role, and different status and role for the proletariat, which set him apart from the more moderate schools of socialist thought. This added to the prestige and reputation of Lenin and he turned out to be a major leader of the revolutionary wing of Marxism.

Lenin believed that Marx was wrong in anticipating that the proletariat would develop a revolutionary class consciousness, which will lead them to conflict with the capitalists without leadership, assistance and stimulation from without. The methods of the capitalists had been more subtle than Marx had assumed. Moreover, the various concessions offered to the proletariat, by the capitalist dominated democratic governments had led them to believe wrongly, that the goal of socialism could be achieved in the same manner. Thus, the proletariat had become the victim of the circumstances of their activities. They were confined to trade unionism and they came to be contented with the improvements of wages, hours of work and other working conditions. But these types of organisations could not infuse revolutionary spirit, which was required for bringing socialism. As such, Lenin laid emphasis on the organisation of a party to be led by professional and militant persons, who could work on behalf of the proletariat. He strongly advocated the organisation of workers into a party, which was to be guided and controlled by the more conscious and committed among the workers.

According to Lenin this revolutionary body (Party) was not to follow the parliamentary methods. Its main task was to mobilize the masses and the working class for a frontal attack on the capitalist regime. Therefore, Lenin placed emphasis on leadership and discipline on the militant spirit and a strong and effective political organisation. A party organised on these lines will not tolerate any factionalism and minority had to follow the views of majority in accordance with, the principle of democratic centralism. Writing about the Lenin's theory of party, Prof. Harmon points out, that revolutionary class consciousness must be implanted in the minds of the proletariat by the revolutionary intellectuals of the enlightened bourgeoisie. Only this group is capable of rising above the environmental restrictions created by the capitalist class. The workers themselves are too involved with the day-to-day problems of making a living. It is too much to ask that they should develop an understanding of the intricacies of historical materialism, to know the forces acting upon them, and to form the

organization which will enable them to establish their own society. Only professional revolutionaries, able and willing, to devote their lives to these leaders must educate, propagandise the worker, thus creating the revolutionary spirit that characterizes the proper level of proletarian class consciousness. The revolutionary fervour of the masses may be stimulated in this manner, but even this spirit of revolt does not produce in the proletariat a sufficiently high level of socialist consciousness to permit transition from a capitalist to a communist society. This can only be accomplished during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat; here the final elements of bourgeois mentality will be eliminated under the guidance and supervision of the intellectual leaders of the proletariat. The party programme in this conditions will be the following.

Workers to be guided by class conscious workers and intellectuals. The workers, according to Lenin, will have to be guided and prepared for the revolution by a group of intellectuals, who would form the core of the party which we can be called the communist party. It will be this leadership which will create class consciousness and direct the working class towards revolution.

Party as an organization of disciplined workers who are committed to revolution. Lenin further says that socialism can only be brought about by a party headed by a small and highly disciplined group of the professional revolutionaries. In short, he says that the working class will have to be guided by a party, which is to act as the vanguard of the proletariat. This party must be capable of working secretly. Lenin had the case of Russia in his mind, possibility of organizing the mass party to achieve socialism through the casting of ballots, was practically non-existent. According to Prof. Harmon, "Lenin's design for a party consisting of an elite corps of leaders, whose function is to guide the masses was carried over into the operation of the government after the revolution in Russia. And it became the prototype of the parties totalitarian regimes of all kinds in the twentieth century." In simple words, Lenin conceived the requirement of a party which should consist of a carefully picked body of the intellectual and moral elite. Its function would be to preserve the principles of Marxism and to provide guidance to the working class before and after revolution. The sole function of the party would be to promote the good of the working class. It will be the sole judge of what was right and in the interest of the proletariat. Summarising Lenin's conception of party, Sabine observes: "The party thus becomes the staff organisation in the struggle of the proletariat to gain power and to retain it after it has

been gained. It is the “vanguard” of the proletariat, the most self-conscious and at the same time the most devoted and self-sacrificing part of the working class. Marxism is the creed that holds it together, and organisation is the principle that makes it powerful.”

#### **4.2.4.1 Party: A Conscience keeper of the Working Class**

From the above discussion it is evident that where as Marx held the view, that the emancipation of the proletariat would be the work of the working class itself, but opposed to this Lenin believed that the socialist class consciousness will have to be injected into the working class by a group of radical intellectuals who shall form the core of the party. He wanted the movement of workers to be entrusted to the professional revolutionaries who could work day and night for the cause of the revolution. Lenin further stood for a centralised hierarchical structure for the party. He aimed at organizing a group of selected and disciplined leaders at the top, who would be in command of the party and give directions to all other members of the party. These commands of the central leadership were to be implemented by the local organs of the party. He emphasised time and again the need of the professional revolutionaries to infuse socialist consciousness among the working class. As such, Lenin believed in a strong leader, who could guide the party and the workers. It is with this background, Leninism prepared the ground for a general secretary of the party, who could guide the entire mass of the people.

Commenting on the Lenin’s theory of party Prof. M. J. Harmon writes, “Lenin’s theory is more elitist and less democratic than Marx’s.” Marx had also believed that a few intellectuals were capable of grasping ideas, which arose outside of the capitalist frame of reference, but he had not gone so far in his elitism, as to assume the necessity of leaders to provoke and guide a revolution and the proletarian dictatorship which would follow it. To Lenin, democracy meant that the leadership should keep in touch with the masses-neither lagging too far behind nor being too far ahead of them. It did not mean ascertaining what the people wanted to be done and doing it, for the judgement of the masses of the people was seriously defective. Within the party itself an attempt was made to combine a measure of democracy with one of discipline through the formulation of the principle of democratic centralism. This principle requires, that the party members elect their own officials on all levels and that officers be accountable to those who elect them. It demands, however, strict party discipline and insists upon the absolute subordination of the minority to the majority when decisions are made, and the binding quality of decisions of the higher upon

the lower levels of party organization. In practice the centralistic aspects of democratic centralism have been more in evidence than the mass democratic setup.

Lenin assigned a very important role to the party and within the party to a group of disciplined and seasoned leaders. Lenin's theory of the party was criticised by some of his contemporaries. Among them mention can be made of Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Plekhanov offering strong resistance to Lenin's scheme of the party. George Lichtheim observed, "The Leninist model in fact amounted to the political expropriation of the proletariat and its subjection to a dictatorial machine operated by the Bolshevik leadership, a leadership which was essentially self-contained and irremovable." Lenin believed in the revolution from above rather than the revolution from below, which was objected to, by various thinkers. Trotsky was another critic of Lenin. He challenged Lenin's concept of the party. He denounced Lenin as a party disintegrator. In his 'Our Political Task' written in 1904 Trotsky rejected Leninist approach in the 'working of the working class movement'. He put forward the plea that Lenin's methods led to this - the apparatus of the party substitutes itself for the party, the central committee substitutes itself for the apparatus and finally a single dictator substitutes himself for the central committee." Lenin was wrong in assigning a key role to a hard core of the working class, in which supreme position was to be in the hands of the selected and militant few. Among these selected few he gave the dominant position to the single leader. Following Trotsky's line of criticism, it can be said that Lenin's thesis of the party organisation leads to one man show in the working class movement. Rosa Luxemburg, also repudiated the Leninist approach. She was a firm believer in the revolutionary initiative and drive and spontaneity of the working class. Another critic, Plekhanov advocated the formulation of a mass party on the German pattern, and not a party of the limited and selected few as advocated by Lenin. He denounced Lenin as an autocrat. He even went to the extreme of charging Lenin with the accusation of aiming at bureaucratic centralisation and transforming party members into cogwheels and screws.

#### **4.2.5 SUMMING UP**

In spite of these attacks on Lenin's concepts the enjoys paramount importance. In his theory he depicts practical wisdom and statesmanship. He stood in favour of tactical compromises in the cause of revolution. Thus, it will not be wrong to say that he succeeded, where others failed because of the simple fact that he was not only successful in organising but also in using a highly organised and disciplined party of the workers for securing the

socialist revolution in Russia. Lenin's Estimate – Lenin was a great leader of practical wisdom. As a great organizer, agitator and revolutionary he occupies a very important place in the theory and practice of socialism. He was a great thinker and had a farsighted vision to anticipate or visualize the shape of things to come. He studied society (the Russian society) its different situations, its many contradictions and conflicting ideas and provided remedies to cure those ills which had eaten into the very vitals of society. He rendered yeoman service to Marx. He made Marxism up to date in the light of certain needs and developments which Marx had not anticipated. It will not be wrong to say that without his services to Marxism it must have died a natural and inevitable death. His services to Marxism are exactly the same as rendered by J.S. Mill to Benthamism in England which could save it from decay and death.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
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Unit – IV: **Socialist Thinkers**

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### **4.3 Rosa Luxemburg: Critique of Revisionism, Party and Socialist Society**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

#### **STRUCTURE**

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- 4.3.3 Rosa Luxemburg: A true Marxian
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#### **4.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Rosa Luxemburg (1870-1919) was an articulate spokesperson and theoretician of the German Left and one of the founding members of the German Communist Party. There were two things that stood out in her as a person. The first was her total commitment to an idealized version of Marxist theory of revolution and the second when she challenged

Lenin by defending democracy against the claims of the Russian communists. In spite of her virulent criticisms, she was referred to, by Lenin in 1922 as an 'eagle of the proletarian revolution'. Luxemburg represented in the trust sense the democratic tradition within revolutionary Marxism. She was equally a valiant defender of orthodox Marxism against revisionism or social democracy. Luxemburg, in her career, combined the roles of an activist and a theoretician of socialism in general and of the left-wing variant in particular. Socialism to her was ultimately a moral vision, spiritual transformations, not just the success of dialectical materialism, but the emancipation of the humankind. Luxemburg was not an orthodox Marxist. Marx to her was no more than the best interpreter of reality, which explained her innocent style of writing. This was evident from her analysis of imperialism. Since capitalism did not show any internal signs of collapse, she began to search for an external explanation. Luxemburg's critique of Leninism goes back to the early part of the twentieth century when she, like Trotsky, rejected Lenin's model of party organization. Revolution to her was as real as it was to Lenin, symbolizing the idea of uninstitutionalized and spontaneous revolution. People's participation was the key issue, whether it was related to organizing a revolution or governing a system. She stressed on a close relationship between activists and intellectuals as she herself was a personification of this belief. In her perception, a distinction was to be made between an intellectual and a bureaucrat and not between an intellectual and an activist because for her, an intellectual, like an activist, and unlike a bureaucrat, was not opposed to change. The Weberian analysis of the utmost necessity of bureaucracy in the modern capitalistic legal-rational structure had no influence on her.

#### **4.3.2 BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE**

Luxemburg was born on 5 March 1871. She was the youngest of five children, three boys and two girls, and was born to Elias and Line Luxemburg. Zamosc was her birthplace. After being partitioned from Poland, it was first under Austrian rule until 1809 and then came under Russian rule in 1815. It was predominantly a Jewish township and found itself at the cultural cross-roads of Austria, Poland and Russia. The Jews of this town were the most cultured communities in Poland. The Luxemburg family did not lead a conscientious Jewish life. Within their home, they spoke and read German and all of Rosa's siblings had German names-Maximilian, Josef and Anna. Luxemburg being a quiet child and was a voracious reader familiar with both German and Polish classical literature. In 1873 the

family moved to Warsaw. Here she developed disease of the hip, which was wrongly diagnosed as tuberculosis and, as a result, wrongly treated. Bedridden for a whole year, she used the time productively by teaching herself to read and write. The illness left a permanent deformation of the hip which made her limp. She developed a keen interest in literature. At the age of nine, she had translated German poems and prose into Polish. At the age of thirteen, she wrote a poem to felicitate the visit of the German Emperor William I to Warsaw. In 1884 she joined the second girls' high school in Warsaw. This was primarily a Russian speaking school. The 1880s saw the zenith of socialist activity. She became acquainted with the writings of Marx and Engels in 1887. She moved to Zurich in 1889 when she enrolled herself at the university to study philosophy, natural sciences and mathematics. In 1892 she moved to the faculty of law. She graduated with two doctorates from the University of Zurich, one in law and the other in philosophy. In her doctoral thesis 'The Industrial Development of Poland' (1898), she argued that the development of industrial capitalism in Poland was heavily dependent on Russian market and the Polish economy would remain a part of the Russian economy. The analysis of this book formed the basis of the political programme of the Polish Social Democratic Party. During this time Luxemburg was deeply involved in the socialist movement, and Zurich at that time was one of important centers of Russian revolutionary Marxism. She worked closely with the Russian exiles such as Plekhanov, Axelrod and Lenin. In 1897 Luxemburg married a German Gustav Luebeck in order to escape her designation as a foreigner, but the marriage ended very soon. It took five years for her to obtain a divorce. In 1897-98 she visited Paris and Berlin. Luxemburg's visit to Germany was momentous for she became associated with German Social Democracy for the next 20 years. In the revisionist debate within the SPD, she was one of the most articulate defenders of the German Left. She contributed to the German Communist Party's theoretical organ (NeueZeit) and later became an assistant to its founder and editor, Kautsky. She also edited several radical provincial dailies and the party's daily paper 'Vorwarts'. She became a teacher of Marxian economics at the Central Party Primary School. Luxemburg was actively involved with the 1905 Russian Revolution. Temporarily she became close to Lenin as both viewed the 1905 revolution as a bourgeois one, to be carried under the proletarian leadership. She laid down the tasks for the Polish and the Russian proletariat and translated these revolutionary events for the benefit of the German socialists. From 1905-1919 as a leader of the extreme left-wing of the German Marxist movement she opposed Germany's entry into the First World War. Later during



the 'Spartacus Uprising' in Germany, the centralizing tendencies of the German Communist movement, on being outvoted by her party, she hesitantly did not support a doomed 'putsch' (a coup) which had the arms nor the popular support required for its success.

Luxemburg refused to leave Germany. While in hiding for two years she tried to reconstruct the party but was seized and arrested with Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck. Along with Liebknecht she was brutally murdered by the Prussian officers on 15 January 1919 while being taken to the prison. Though the murderers' were known, nothing was done to arrest and charge sheet them. Jogiches stayed back in Berlin to bring the culprits to book. However, two months later, he too was murdered. Luxemburg was a small built, fastidious person. She was tidy, very conscious of her appearance, especially her clothes and shoes, and careful about her walking style. In spite of her reputation as 'Red Rosa', she remained self consciously a woman. She was against the woman's liberation movement of her time though she shared an intimate friendship with Zetkin, the chief spokesperson for women's cause. Luxemburg was not an easy person to get along with. Being passionate, she developed quick attachments which made her touchy too. In morals, her position was quite rigid. She cherished privacy. She felt drawn only towards intelligent persons. She was not fond of Kautsky, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Plekhanov and Trotsky. She was harsh on those who displayed personal weaknesses. Her tastes were conservative and classical.

### **4.3.3 ROSA LUXEMBURG: A TRUE MARXIAN**

Luxemburg was fluent in Polish, Russian, German and French, and spoke English and Italian very well. Though her family did not share her socialist convictions yet they did everything for her whenever she was in prison or hiding from the police. Her death brought a vacuum within the German Communist Party. She was truly among the last of the great socialist leaders of her time and perhaps a very 'civilized voice in the cause of international socialism'. She started writing, and after a time, became one of the main contributors to the most important Marxist theoretical journal of the time, 'Die NeueZeit'. Invariably independent in judgment and criticism, even the tremendous prestige of Karl Kautsky, its editor, who was called as 'the Pope of Marxism' did not deflect her from her considered opinions once she had become convinced. Rosa Luxemburg entered heart and soul into the labor movement in Germany. She was a regular contributor to a number of socialist papers - in some cases their editor - she addressed many mass meetings and took part energetically in all the tasks the movement called upon her to perform. Throughout, her

speeches and articles were original creative works, in which she appealed to reason rather than emotion, and in which she always opened up to her readers a wider and grander horizon than they had known before. At that time the movement in Germany was split into two main trends, one reformist and the other revolutionary, with the former growing in strength. Germany had enjoyed continuous prosperity since the slump of 1873. The workers' standard of living had improved uninterruptedly, if slowly; trade unions and co-operatives grew stronger. Against this background, the bureaucracy of these movements, together with the increasing parliamentary representation of the Social Democratic Party, moved away from revolution and lent great strength to those who were already proclaiming gradualism or reformism as their principle. The main spokesman of this trend was Eduard Bernstein, a disciple of Engels. Between 1896 and 1898 he wrote a series of articles in *Die Neue Zeit* on problems of Socialism, more and more openly attacking the principles of Marxism. A long and bitter discussion broke out.

Rosa Luxemburg, who had just entered the German labor movement, immediately sprang to the defense of Marxism. Brilliantly and with magnificent drive, she attacked the spreading cancer of reformism in her booklet 'Social Reform or Social Revolution'. Soon afterwards, in 1899, the French Socialist Millerand entered a coalition government with a capitalist party. Rosa Luxemburg followed this experiment closely and analyzed it in a series of brilliant articles dealing with the situation in the French labor movement in general and the question of coalition governments in particular. After the fiasco of MacDonald in Britain, of the Weimar Republic in Germany, of the Popular Front in France in the 1930s and the post Second World War coalition governments in the same country, it is clear that the lessons drawn by Rosa Luxemburg are not of historical interest alone. In 1903-04 Rosa Luxemburg indulged in a polemic with Lenin, with whom she disagreed on the national question, and on the conception of party structure, and the relation between the party and the activity of the masses. In 1904 after insulting the 'Kaiser' (the emperor) she was sentenced to three months imprisonment, of which she served a month. In 1905, with the outbreak of the first Russian Revolution, she wrote a series of articles and pamphlets for the Polish party, in which she developed the idea of the permanent revolution, which had been independently developed by Trotsky, but was held by few Marxists of the time. While both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, despite the deep cleavage between them, believed that the Russian Revolution was to be a bourgeois democratic one, Rosa argued that it would develop beyond the stage of bourgeois democracy and would either end in

workers' power or complete defeat. Her slogan was "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat based on the peasantry."

However, to think, write and speak about the revolution was not enough for Rosa Luxemburg. The motto of her life was, 'At the beginning was the deed', and although she was in bad health at the time, she smuggled herself into Russian Poland as soon as she was able to do so (in December 1905). The zenith of the revolution had by then passed. The masses were still active, but were now hesitant while reaction was raising its head. All meetings were forbidden, but the workers still held meetings in their strongholds, the factories. All workers' papers were suppressed, but Rosa Luxemburg's party paper continued to appear daily, although printed clandestinely. On 4 March 1906, she was arrested and kept for four months, first in prison, then in a fortress. Thereafter she was freed, on the grounds of ill health and her German nationality, and expelled from the country.

#### **4.3.4 CRITIQUE OF REVISIONISM**

In her critique of revisionism and reaffirmation of orthodox Marxism, she raised the key issue of whether socialism could be achieved through reforms in a gradual manner, or revolutionary action is the only possible way. The option was between reform and revolution, and she opted for revolution. In accordance with this theoretical framework, she accused the social democrats for equating reforms with revolutionary class struggle and for positing social reform as the sole and final aim thus departing from the main essence of socialism. Luxemburg considered Bernstein's views to be important for their potential to move away revolutionary authoritarian socialism but also cautioned against their opportunistic character. The essence of her criticism as articulated in *Social Reform or Revolution* (1899) was that if Bernstein was right, then socialism had no *raison d'être*. She rejected the latter's revisionism on three grounds; firstly, that trade unions were incapable of making structural changes, secondly, that social reforms were not the means by which the workers gained control of society, and thirdly, that the capitalist class was strengthening its rule by tariff protection and militarism. And by the final goal which doesn't mean any conception of future state, but which must proceed the establishment of some future socialist society i.e. conquest of political power by the state. Such a goal, Luxemburg contended, was necessary to give the proletariat a sense of purpose in its struggle against capitalism. Like Sorel, she understood the need for a myth in creating proletarian consciousness. Though not an opponent of reforms, she regarded them as the means for preparing the working class for

a revolution as it gave them practical experience, the education to realize the need to overthrow the capitalist state and free themselves from the bonds of wage slavery. Luxemburg was confident that daily reforms would not automatically ensure socialism. She contended that Bernstein's equation of democracy with socialism was wrong for democracy and was a device used by the capitalists to conceal the real and true nature of the exploitation of the masses. She agreed with Lenin's emphasis on spontaneity after the 1905 revolution in Tsarist Russia whereby the proletariat would directly struggle against the capitalist state machinery. She was critical of the policy of the English trade unions for they lacked the consciousness to achieve socialism. Luxemburg asserted that the efforts of the trade unions to improve working class conditions and parliamentary struggle for democratic reforms would be socialistic only if their final aim was socialism.

In her work 'The Accumulation of Capital (1913)', she analyzed the conditions of economic growth under capitalism. She contended that pure capitalism by itself could not generate conditions required for its development. It was the expansion into non-capitalist areas that sustained capitalist production necessitated due to accumulation of capital which was the result of lack of demand to absorb the increasing supply of goods. During the imperialist phase of capitalism this difficulty was solved by production of arms which not only absorbed domestic capital but created new markets in the colonies. The customs and tax policies of a state played an important role in the economic development of capitalism, especially during its imperialist phase. She criticized Marx for ignoring the historical conditions that affected the accumulation of capital. She contended that Marx analyzed the historical conditions that led to the rise of capitalism and concentrated on private accumulation. She believed that the relationship between capitalism and pre-capitalism constituted a source of tension and international conflict. This led to a series of wars and social revolutions which started the process of the decline of capitalism. Many thinkers like Bukharin, Kautsky, and Lenin etc rejected the major arguments of the book and even questioned whether the problems raised by Luxemburg were important ones. The Marxists took the view that though capitalism would be destroyed by its multiple contradictions; it was difficult to forecast the exact circumstances in which this would happen. Many, particular her Leninist critics, doubted whether there could be an automatic collapse of capitalism. If that happened, then it would inculcate passivity in the proletariat and the party. Paradoxically, the Keynesian

revolution, which highlighted the lack of purchasing power as responsible for the breakdown of capitalism rehabilitated Luxemburg's thesis.

Luxemburg considered trade unions as necessary for protecting the standard of living of the working class and shielding them from the immanent tendencies within capitalism, namely, impoverishment and unemployment, but her theoretical insights compelled her to spell out the limits of trade union struggle. Due to objective processes at work in capitalist society, the struggle of trade unions is transformed into a kind of labor of Sisyphus (The toil of Sisyphus is a metaphor for all difficult and repetitive labor that is frustrating and unrewarding). However, this labor of Sisyphus is indispensable if the worker is to obtain at all the wage rate due to him in the given situation of the labor market, if the capitalist law of wages is to operate, and if the effectiveness of the depressive tendency of economic development is to be paralyzed, or to be more exact, weakened. But a proposed transformation of the trade unions into an instrument or gradual reduction of profits in favor of wages presupposes, above all, the following social conditions: first, a halt to the proletarianization of the middle strata of society and to the growth of the working class; second, a halt to the growth of the working class, a halt to the growth of labor productivity, i.e. in both cases, a reverse to pre-capitalist conditions.

#### **4.3.5 PARTY AND SOCIALIST SOCIETY**

##### **4.3.5.1 Leninist Model of Party: Luxemburg's' critical assessment**

Luxemburg made spontaneity vs. party organization the main focus of her critique of the Leninist model of party. Central to her conception of revolution was the notion of 'spontaneity'. By spontaneity she did not mean blind impulse which is shorn of ideological self-awareness. She never denied the need for creative leadership. To her, the socialist revolution could only occur through the cooperation and comradeship between the revolutionary masses and leaders like herself who did not impose on the workers their own 'correct' vision of political struggle. She desired a dialectical reciprocity between the spontaneity of the masses, the intellectuals and the political leaders. This was very similar to the Gramscian conception of proletarian intellectuals which meant total amalgamation of the intellectuals in the proletarian struggle. The Russian revolution of 1905 convinced her that mass strikes were the most effective form of revolutionary action. Kautsky disagreed with Luxemburg for assuming that a few months of accidental, disorganized strikes without

a unifying idea of plan could teach the workers more than thirty years of systematic work by parties and trade unions. She was confident in the spontaneous uprising of the workers and rejected the Leninist conception of the need for a vanguard party. The task of a proletarian party was to awaken the revolutionary consciousness in the masses and kindle a desire for socialism, but this could not be done by conspiratorial methods. Luxemburg was critical of Lenin's extraordinary faith in ultra-Centralism, his implicit contempt of the working class-its own creative impulses and purposes-his distrust of all spontaneous developments and of spontaneity itself. She visualized his future party as one in which the central committee could and would perpetuate itself, dictate to the party and have the party dictate to the masses. She pleaded for the autonomy of the masses, respect for their spontaneity and creativity, respect for their right to make their own mistakes and to be helped by them. Her polemic ended with words so often quoted, 'historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest central committee'. This can be considered as the core of Luxemburg's theory of non-authoritarian majoritarian socialism. Although she criticized Lenin's conception of the vanguard party, she did not object, as Kautsky did, to the Leninist notion that revolutionary consciousness would be instilled in the workers movement from without. She accepted this idea as she believed that the party would become the vehicle of proletarian class consciousness and that its task was to turn theory into practice by creating a spontaneous movement. For Luxemburg the party was the self-organizing proletariat, not the proletariat organized by professional functionaries of the revolution. Marxism for her was not merely a theory of the: historical process but an articulation of the consciousness, latent though it might be as yet, of an actual workers movement. When that consciousness took shape, i.e. when the spontaneous movement achieved theoretical self-knowledge, the distinction between theory and practice would cease to exist, the theory would become a material force, not in the sense of being a weapon in the struggle, but an organic part of it.

#### **4.3.5.2 Party and Class**

Rosa Luxemburg has been accused of mechanical materialism, a conception of historical development in which objective economic forces are independent of human will. This accusation is totally unfounded. Hardly any of the great Marxists has laid greater stress on human activity as the determinant of human destiny. She wrote that, men do not make history of their own free will, but they do make their own history. The proletariat is dependent

in its action on the given degree of maturity in social development existing at the time, but social development does not proceed independently of and apart from the proletariat, and the proletariat is as much its cause and mainspring as it is its product and consequence. The action of the proletariat is a determining factor in history, and although we can no more jump over stages of historical development than a man can jump over his own shadow, still, we can accelerate or retard that development. The victory of the Socialist proletariat will be the result of iron historical laws, and it would depend upon a thousand steps in previous, laborious and all-too-slow development. However, it will never be fulfilled unless the material conditions brought together by the historical process are vitalized with the life-giving spark of conscious will power generated in the great masses of the people. Following the line of thought propounded by Marx and Engels, Rosa Luxemburg believed that consciousness of the aims of socialism on the part of the mass of workers is a necessary prerequisite for achieving socialism. Rosa Luxemburg wrote, "Without the conscious will and the conscious action of the majority of the proletariat there can be no Socialism".

The programme of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus), drafted by Rosa, states that 'The Spartacus League' is not a party that wishes to succeed to power either over the working class or by means of it. The Spartacus League is merely that part of the working class most convinced of its object; it is the part that directs the broad labor movement to its historical function at every step; at every single stage of the revolution it represents the final socialist aim and in all national questions the interests of the proletarian world revolution. It says that The Spartacus League will never assume governmental authority, except through the clear unambiguous will of the vast majority of the German working class; in no other way except through its conscious concurrence with the views, aims and fighting tactics of the Spartacus League. The proletarian revolution can only achieve clarity and maturity going step by step along the hard path of suffering, bitter experience, through defeats and triumphs. The victory of the Spartacus League is not at the beginning but at the end of the revolution; it is identical with the victory of the many (millioned mass of the socialist proletariat). While the working class as a class must be conscious of the aims of socialism and the methods of achieving it, it still needs a revolutionary party to lead it. In every factory, on every dock and on every building site, there are more advanced workers; that is, workers more experienced in the class struggle, more independent of the influence of

the capitalist class - and less advanced workers. It is up to the former to organize into a revolutionary party, and try to influence and lead the latter.

Rosa Luxemburg said that 'this mass movement of the proletariat needs the lead of an organized principled force'. The revolutionary party, while conscious of its leading role, must beware of slipping into a way of thinking that the party is the fountain of all correct thoughts and deeds, while the working class remains an inert mass without initiative. Through the theoretical analysis of the social conditions of struggle, Social Democracy has introduced the element of consciousness into the proletarian class struggle to an unprecedented degree; it gave the class struggle its clarity of aim; it created, for the first time, a permanent mass workers' organization, and thus built a firm backbone for the class struggle. However, it would be catastrophically wrong for us to assume that as from now on all the historical initiative of the people has passed to the hands of the Social Democratic organization alone, and that the unorganized mass of the proletariat has turned into a formless thing, into the deadweight of history. On the contrary, the popular masses continue to be the living matter of world history, even in the presence of Social Democracy; and only if there is blood circulation between the organized nucleus and the popular masses, only if one heartbeat vitalizes the two, can Social Democracy prove that it is capable of great historical deeds.

The party, in consequence, should not invent tactics out of thin air, but put it as its first duty to learn from the experience of the mass movement and then generalize from it. The great events of working class history have shown the correctness of this emphasis beyond all measure of doubt. The workers of Paris in 1871 established a new form of state; a state without a standing army and bureaucracy, where all officials received the average worker's salary and were subject to recall, before Marx began to generalize about the nature and structure of a workers' state. Again the workers of Petrograd, in 1905, established a Soviet (workers' council) independently of the Bolshevik Party, actually in opposition to the local Bolshevik leadership and in face of at least suspicion, if not animosity, on the part of Lenin himself. Therefore one cannot but agree with Rosa Luxemburg when she wrote in 1904: The main characteristics of the tactics of struggle of Social Democracy are not 'invented', but are the result of a continuous series of great creative acts of the elementary class struggle. It is not through didactic teaching by the party leaders that the workers learn. As Rosa Luxemburg countered to Kautsky and company: They think that to educate



the proletarian masses in a socialist spirit means the following: to lecture to them, distribute leaflets and pamphlets among them. But no! The Socialist proletarian school does not need all this. Activity itself educates the masses. Finally, Rosa Luxemburg comes to this conclusion that 'the mistakes committed by a genuine revolutionary labor movement are much more fruitful and worthwhile historically than the infallibility of the very best Central Committee. Placing such emphasis on the creative power of the working class, Rosa Luxemburg nonetheless inclined to underestimate the retarding, damaging effect that a conservative organization may have on the mass struggle. She believed that the upsurge of the masses would sweep aside such a leadership without the movement itself suffering serious damage. She wrote in 1906 that if, at any time and under any circumstances, Germany were to experience big political struggles, an era of tremendous economic struggles would at the same time open up. Events would not stop for a second in order to ask the union leaders whether they had given their blessing to the movement or not. If they stood aside from the movement or opposed it, the result of such behavior would be only this: the union or Party leaders would be swept away by the wave of events, and the economic as well as the political struggles would be fought to a conclusion without them. And it was this theme that Rosa Luxemburg reiterated again and again.

To understand the roots of Rosa Luxemburg's possible underestimation of the role of organization and possible overestimation of the role of spontaneity, one must look at the situation in which she worked. She had to fight the opportunist leadership of the German Social Democratic Party. This leadership emphasized the factor of organization out of all proportion, and made little of the spontaneity of the masses. Even where they accepted the possibility of a mass strike, for instance, the reformist leadership reasoned as follows: the conditions in which the mass political strike will be launched and the appropriate time - as, for instance, when the union treasuries were full - would be determined by the party and trade union leadership alone, and the date fixed by them. It was their task also to determinate the aims of the strike, which, according to Bebel, Kautsky, Hilferding, Bernstein and others, were to achieve the franchise or defend parliament. Above all, this precept must remain inviolable: that nothing is done by the workers except by order of the party and its leadership. It was with this idea, of the mighty party leadership and the weak masses, that Rosa Luxemburg joined battle. But in doing so she may have bent the stick a little too far. Another wing of the labor movement with which Rosa Luxemburg had to

contend was the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). The PPS was a chauvinistic organization; its avowed aim was the national independence of Poland. But there was no mass social basis for its struggle; the landlords and bourgeoisie stood aside from the national struggle while the Polish working class (looking upon the Russian workers as their allies) had no desire to fight for a national state. Under these conditions the PPS adopted adventurist activities such as the organization of terrorist groups, and so on. Action was based not on the working class as a whole, but only on the party organizations. Here too, the social process counted for little, the decision of the leadership for everything. Here also she stressed the factor of spontaneity. A third trend in the labor movement with which Rosa battled was syndicalism, a mixture of anarchism (without its individualism and with a much-exaggerated emphasis on organization) with the trade unions. The main base of this tendency was in France where it spread its roots in the soil of industrial backwardness and lack of concentration. It gained strength after the series of defeats suffered by the French labor movement in 1848 and 1871, and the betrayal of Millerand and the Jaures party, which developed suspicion among the workers of all political activities and organizations. Syndicalism identified the general strike with social revolution, rather than looking upon it as only one important element of modern revolution. It believed that the general strike could be touched off by an order, and the overthrow of bourgeois rule would follow. It thus again emphasized and oversimplified the revolutionary factor; that is, that the voluntary and free will of the leaders, independent of the compulsion of a mass upsurge, could initiate decisive action. While renouncing this voluntarism, German reformists developed a similar trend. Where the French syndicalists painted a picture of the mass strike and revolution, the German opportunists, in making a laughing stock of it, threw out the whole idea of mass strikes and revolutions. At the same time as Rosa battled against the German brand of voluntarism, she fought the French edition in its syndicalist form, showing it to be essentially a bureaucratic denial of workers' initiative and self-mobilization. The main reason for Rosa Luxemburg's overestimation of the factor of spontaneity and underestimation of the factor of organization lies in the need, in the immediate struggle against reformism, for emphasis on spontaneity as the first step in all revolutions. From this one stage in the struggle of the working class, she generalized too widely to embrace the struggle as a whole. Revolutions do indeed start as spontaneous acts without the leadership of a party. The French Revolution started with the storming of the Bastille. Nobody organized this. There was no party at the head of the people in rebellion. Even the future leaders of the

Jacobins, for instance Robespierre, did not yet oppose the monarchy, and were not yet organized into a party. The revolution of 14th July 1789 was a spontaneous act of the masses. The same was true of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and February 1917. The 1905 Revolution started through a bloody clash between the Tsar's army and police on the one hand, and the mass of workers, men, women and children, on the other, led by the priest Gapon (actually an agent provocateur of the Tsar). Here also the workers were not organized by a clear decisive leadership with a socialist policy of its own. Carrying icons, they came begging their beloved 'little Father' (the Tsar) to help them against their exploiters. This was the first step in a great revolution. Twelve years later, in February 1917, the masses, this time more experienced, and among whom there were a greater number of socialists than in the previous revolution, again rose spontaneously. However, after being triggered off by a spontaneous uprising, revolutions move forward in a different manner. In France the transition from the semi-republican government to the revolutionary one, which completely annihilated feudal property relations, was not carried out by unorganized masses without any party leadership, but under the decisive leadership of the Jacobin party. Without such a party at the helm, this important step, which demanded an all-out fight against the Girondists, would have been impossible. The people of Paris could spontaneously, leaderless, rise up against the king after decades of oppression. But the majority of them were too conservative, too lacking in historical experience and knowledge, to distinguish, after only two or three years of revolution, between those who wanted to drive the revolution as far as it would go and those who aimed at some compromise. The historical situation required a struggle to the bitter end against the party of compromise, the allies of yesterday. The conscious leadership of this great undertaking was supplied by the Jacobin party, which fixed the date and organized the overthrow of the Gironde on 10 August 1792 down to the last detail. Similarly the October Revolution was not a spontaneous act but was organized in practically all its important particulars, including the date, by the Bolsheviks. During the zigzags of the revolution between February and October, the June demonstration, the July days and subsequent orderly retreat, the rebuff of the rightist Kornilov putsch - the workers and soldiers came more closely under the influence and guidance of the Bolshevik Party. And such a party was essential to raise the revolution from its initial stages to its final victory. While accepting, that Rosa Luxemburg underestimated the importance of such a party, one should not say too little of the really great historical merit of Rosa Luxemburg, who in the face of prevailing reformism emphasized the most important power that could

break the conservative crust - 'that of workers' spontaneity'. Her enduring strength lay in her complete confidence in the workers' historical initiative

Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to leaving the mass workers' party did not cover any concession to reformism. Thus at a conference of Spartacus on 7th January, 1917 the following her resolution was passed which says that 'The Opposition stays in the Party in order to thwart and fight the policy of the majority at every step, to defend the masses from an imperialist policy covered over with the mantle of Social Democracy, and to use the Party as a field of recruitment for the proletarian, anti-militarist class struggle'. Rosa Luxemburg's reluctance to form an independent revolutionary party followed her slowness to react to changed circumstances. It was a central factor in the belatedness of building a revolutionary party in Germany. In this, she was not alone. Actually Rosa Luxemburg made a clearer assessment of Kautsky and Co., and broke with them long before Lenin did. For some two decades Lenin looked upon Kautsky as the greatest living Marxist. In 1910, at the time of Rosa Luxemburg's debate with Kautsky on the question of the path to theoretical mouthpiece. In 1907 Rosa Luxemburg had already expressed her fear that the party leaders, notwithstanding their profession of Marxism, would flinch before a situation in which decisive action was called for. The climax came in 1910, with a complete break between Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky on the question of the workers' road to power. From now onwards the SPD was split into three separate tendencies: the reformists, who progressively adopted an imperialist policy; the so-called Marxist centre, led by Kautsky nicknamed by Luxemburg as the 'leader of the swamp' which kept its verbal radicalism, but confined itself more and more to parliamentary methods of struggle; and the revolutionary wing, of which Rosa Luxemburg was the main inspiration. In 1913 Rosa Luxemburg published her most important theoretical work 'The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Explanation of Imperialism.' This is one of the most original contributions to Marxist economic doctrine since Capital. In its wealth of knowledge, brilliance of style, analytical aspect and intellectual independence, this book, as Mehring (Marx's biographer) stated, was the nearest to 'Capital' of Marxist work. The central problem it studies is of tremendous theoretical and political importance: namely, what effects the extension of capitalism into new, backward territories has on the internal contradictions rending capitalism and on the stability of the system. On 20th February, 1914 Rosa Luxemburg was arrested for inciting soldiers to mutiny. The basis of the charge was a speech in which she declared, "If they expect us to murder our French or other

foreign brothers, then let us tell them, 'No, under no circumstances'." In court she turned from defendant into prosecutor, and her speech, published later under the title 'Militarism, War and the Working Class', is one of the most inspiring revolutionary socialist condemnations of imperialism. She was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, but was not detained on the spot. On leaving the courtroom she immediately went to a mass meeting at which she repeated her revolutionary anti-war propaganda. When the First World War broke out, practically all the leaders of the Socialist Party (SPD) were swept into the patriotic tide. On 3 August 1914 the parliamentary group of German Social Democracy decided to vote in favor of war credits for the Kaiser's government. Of the 111 deputies only 15 showed any desire to vote against. However, after their request for permission to do so have been rejected, they submitted to party discipline, and on 4 August the whole Social Democratic group unanimously voted in favor of the credits. A few months later, on 2 December, Karl Liebknecht flouted party discipline to vote with his conscience. His was the sole vote against war credits. This decision of the party leadership was a cruel blow to Rosa Luxemburg. However, she did not give way to despair. On the same day, 4 August, on which the Social Democratic deputies rallied to the Kaiser's banner, a small group of socialists met in her apartment and decided to take up the struggle against the war. This group, led by Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin, ultimately became the 'Spartacus League'. For four years, mainly from prison, Rosa continued to lead, inspire and organize the revolutionaries, keeping high the banner of international socialism. The outbreak of the war cut Rosa Luxemburg off from the Polish labor movement, yet her own Polish party remained loyal throughout to the ideas of international socialism.

The revolution in Russia of February 1917 was a realization of Rosa Luxemburg's policy of revolutionary opposition to the war and struggle for the overthrow of imperialist governments. She followed the events from prison, studying them closely in order to draw lessons for the future. She stated that the February victory was not the end of the struggle but only its beginning, that only workers' power could assure peace. From prison she issued call after call to the German workers and soldiers to emulate their Russian brothers overthrow the Junkers and capitalists and thus, while serving the Russian Revolution, at the same time prevent themselves from bleeding to death under the ruins of capitalist barbarism. When the October Revolution broke out, Rosa Luxemburg welcomed it enthusiastically, praising it in the highest terms. At the same time she did not believe that uncritical acceptance of everything the Bolsheviks did would be of service to the labor

movement. She clearly foresaw that if the Russian Revolution remained in isolation a number of distortions would cripple its development; and quite early in the development of Soviet Russia she pointed out such distortions, particularly on the question of democracy. On 8 November 1918 the German Revolution freed Rosa Luxemburg from prison. With all her energy and enthusiasm she threw herself into the revolution. Unfortunately, the forces of reaction were strong. Right-wing Social Democratic leaders and generals of the old Kaiser's army joined forces to suppress the revolutionary working class. Thousands of workers were murdered; on 15 January 1919 Karl Liebknecht was killed; on the same day a soldier's rifle butt smashed into Rosa Luxemburg's skull. With her death the international workers' movement lost one of its noblest souls. "The finest brain amongst the scientific successors of Marx and Engels", as Mehring said, was no more.

#### **4.3.5.3 Review of Bolshevism**

Luxemburg's belief that the workers movement would not be manipulated or forced into a tactical mould by the party leaders' was at the heart of her criticisms of the Bolshevik regime. She regarded the Bolshevik revolution as the most important outcome of the First World War yet she criticized the regime from the standpoint of her ultimate Marxist faith; the spontaneity of the masses in the Russian Revolution (1918) which was published posthumously in 1922. She rejected the arguments of Kautsky and the Mensheviks that, in view of Russia's economic backwardness, a coalition with the liberals and the bourgeoisie had to be forged. Instead, she agreed with Lenin and Trotsky that the party had to seize power when it was politically feasible. She also rejected the social democratic principle that the party gain a majority and then think about capturing power. The proper method was to use revolutionary tactics to gain a majority, and not the other way around. Luxemburg was categorical that the party, having seized power, could not maintain itself by terror and reject all forms of political freedom and representation. The turning point of the Russian revolution was the dissolution of the constituent assembly. Lenin and Trotsky abolished general elections altogether, basing their power on the soviets. The latter declared that the assembly summoned before the October Revolution was reactionary and that universal suffrage was unnecessary, as it did not properly reflect the true feelings of the masses. Luxemburg reproached Lenin, not with the neglect or contempt of direct, rank and file democracy, but rather with the exact opposite, namely the exclusive reliance on council democracy and the complete elimination of representative democracy; dissolution of the

constituent assembly in favor of the soviets alone. Her arguments, in reply to Trotsky's explanations, were that the masses could influence their representatives after the elections were over and can make them change their course. The more democratic the system, the more effective would such pressure be. Though democratic institutions in themselves may not be perfect, to abolish them would paralyze and eventually eliminate public life. The restrictions on press, on suffrage and on the right of assembly made the rule of masses a mockery.

Socialism could not be replaced by administrative decrees for it had to be a live historical movement. If public life was not properly controlled, it would become the province of a narrow clique of officials, and this was bound to lead to corruption in political life. Socialism involved the spiritual transformation of the masses which could not be brought about by terrorism. There was a need for flowering of democracy, a free public opinion, freedom of elections and press, and the right to hold meetings and form associations. Otherwise, it would lead to the entrenchment of the bureaucracy, and the soviets, considered to be the true representatives of the laboring class, would be further crippled and eventually impotent. The dictatorship of the proletariat would be replaced by the dictatorship of a clique. Luxemburg was of the opinion that the basic error in the theory of Lenin and Trotsky, and also of Kautsky, was to consider democracy antithetical to dictatorship. Kautsky, in fact, had decided in favor of bourgeois democracy and the Bolsheviks for the dictatorship of a handful of people. The proletariat was supposed to exercise their dictatorship as a class and not as a party or as a clique.

Luxemburg argued that it was true that the Bolsheviks had come to power under circumstances in which full democracy was impossible. But having seized power they made a virtue of necessity by seeking to impose their own tactics on the whole of the worker's movement, turning the distortion of an exceptional situation into an universal rule. They were to be commended for seizing power in Russia but the socialist cause was a matter for the whole world and not for a single country. The mass of the proletariat is called upon not only to define the aims and direction of the revolution with the clear understanding. It must also, itself through its own activity, nurse socialist, step by step, to life. The essence of socialist society is that the great working mass ceases to be a ruled mass and instead lives and controls its own political and economic life in conscious and free self-determination. Thus, from the highest offices of the state down to the smallest

municipality, the proletarian mass must replace the outdated organs of the bourgeois class rule- the federal councils, parliaments, municipal councils with their own class organs; the 'workers' and 'soldiers' councils. Further, the proletarian mass must fill all posts, supervise all functions and measure all state's requirements against their own class interests and against the tasks of socialism. And only in a constant active interrelation between masses activity fill the state with socialist spirit.

It raised the question regarding the scope of democratic rights and liberties within the dictatorship of the proletariat. Luxemburg considered proletarian dictatorship as a more direct and extensive form of democracy which would involve comprehensive democratic procedures and freedoms, elections, freedom of the press, of opinion and of assembly. She criticized the Bolshevik policy of dividing large landholdings among peasants, for that created a new and powerful class of proprietors as enemies of socialism. Luxemburg also disapproved of their policy towards nationalities, an issue that remained unresolved in Marxism. She perceived the

oppression of one nation by another as a consequence of capitalism and believed that the socialist revolution would resolve it since it would end all forms of oppression. Till then fighting for national independence would harm the cause of revolution and destroy the international solidarity among the workers. She contended that national movements were always in favor of a particular class. Since no class could represent the national cause on an economic basis, the matter ended there and then. Even on this issue, she was oblivious of social realities. As a thorough Marxist, she accused the social democrats for the outburst of nationalism in 1914

and the resulting collapse of the International. She did not support the independence of Poland or, in general, the right of nations to self-determination.

#### **4.3.5.4 Visualization of a Socialist Society**

In 'What Does the Spartacus League Want?', Luxemburg outlined the certain measures to protect the socialist revolution which are: disarmament of the entire police force and of all members, confiscation of all weapons and ammunitions stock, workers' militia, abolition of command authority of officers and non-commissioned officers, expulsion of officials and capitulation's from all soldier's councils, replacement of all political organs by workers'



and soldiers' councils, establishment of a revolutionary tribunal to try the criminals responsible for starting the war, and immediate confiscation of all food-stuffs. The political and social measures included: abolition of all principalities, establishment of a United German Socialist Republic, elimination of all parliaments and municipal councils, and establishment of workers and soldiers councils, election of workers councils in Germany by the entire adult population, election of delegates of the workers' and soldiers' in the entire country to the central council of the workers' and soldiers' councils which would elect the executive council as the highest organ of legislative and executive powers, to maintain constant control over the activity of the executive council and to create an active identification between the masses of workers' and soldiers' councils in the nation and the highest governmental organ, right of immediate recall by the local workers and soldiers' councils and replacement of their representatives in the central council, right of the executive council to appoint and dismiss the people's commissioners as well as the central national authorities and officials, abolition of all differences of rank, all orders and titles and complete legal and social equality of the sexes. Miliband says that the pyramid of councils that Luxemburg proposed in 1918 dealt with the question of direction and democracy by creating an executive council with strong legislative and executive powers representing the dictatorship of the proletariat but not amounting to it. The difference between Lenin and Luxemburg rested on their different perceptions of the organization and the role of the workers party. While Lenin believed that the working class-consciousness had to be instilled from outside, Luxemburg believed in creative spontaneous arousal of consciousness from within.

#### **43.5.5 Socialist Democracy**

Like many socialists of her era, Luxemburg followed Marx in avoiding systematic speculation on a post-capitalist society. She considered that the task of building socialism was for the workers themselves and that creating hypothetical blueprints of the future was a futile and pointless exercise. As a result, much of Luxemburg's writing is directed towards understanding and criticizing capitalist society. In her earlier writings such as 'Introduction to Political Economy' and 'The Accumulation of Capital', when socialism is defined, it is figured primarily as the abolition of private property and a transition from a capitalist to a socialist production process consisting of the creation of a planned economy and the social ownership of productive assets. By this she meant that production would be planned

by a central democratic committee in a rational manner to meet human needs rather than leaving decisions about the investment of capital in private hands leading to the 'anarchy of the market'. She wrote that in capitalism there is 'the disappearance of any kind of authority in economic life, any organization and planning in labor, any kind of connection between the individual members'

The Russian Revolution and the spread of revolutionary activity throughout Europe led to a greater need for the further specification of the society socialists hoped to create. In response to the evolving political situation, from 1917 onwards, Luxemburg developed a more expanded conception of the norms and institutions that would be required for a transition to a socialist society. She went further than the simple equation of capitalism with anarchy and socialism with a planned economy to discuss how socialism required 'the fundamental transformation of the entire economic relations'. For Luxemburg, socialist democracy was best conceived not as the abolition or transcendence of democracy, but as the extension of democratic principles of organization throughout society to major social institutions which are currently governed by non-democratic authority structures. Of all the socialist theorists of her era who supported mass socialist parties, Luxemburg was the most strident about the democratic nature of the goals of socialism. There are similarities between her position and Karl Kautsky's support for the twin goals of democracy and socialism, but here also Luxemburg articulated more explicit formulations regarding the democratization of social institutions and the need for a vibrant public sphere and engaged citizenry. She was critical of the Bolsheviks for dismissing bourgeois democracy as a sham that could be discarded in the pursuit of a socialist society. She criticized Trotsky's remarks about refusing to be 'idol worshippers of formal democracy'. She considered the project of creating a socialist democracy to consist of a move 'to replace bourgeois democracy and not to eliminate democracy altogether'. Luxemburg's concept of a socialist democracy was predicated on the 'the active participation of the masses' extending democratic principles from the political sphere to create the conditions for a participatory society. The positive development of building socialism required not simply a decree of the abolition of private property, but more thoroughgoing changes at the level of individual factories, workshops and other points of production. She wrote that transforming productive assets into 'the common property of the people' was only 'the first duty of a workers' government', following

which, 'the real and most difficult task begin, which is the reconstruction of the economy on a completely new basis'.

There are three major elements to this shift that are worth emphasizing: the extension of democratic principles to nondemocratic authority structures; the transformation of labor and the cultural shift in everyday practices and mentalities that Luxemburg thought must accompany these institutional changes to make a socialist democracy possible. The first relates to how the democratization process could be extended beyond the narrow confines of the state. Luxemburg agreed with Marx that the political revolutions of the 18th century were only partially complete. The movement to democratize the state was most successful in achieving executive and legislative authorities based on elections organized around political parties and universal suffrage. However, this democratic movement achieved far less in other important social institutions in which large differences in power and influence between individuals remained firmly entrenched. She argued that many institutions required further transformation including corporations, economic regulatory institutions, schools, universities, the media, cultural institutions, the civil service and political parties. Immediate demands issued by the Spartacus League during the German Revolution also mention the army, 'the food, housing, health and educational systems', municipal councils, the police force, all banks, mines, smelters, together with all large enterprises of industry and commerce and 'the entire public transportation system'. Two more specific examples that Luxemburg mentions in her article 'The Socialization of Society' are large enterprises in industry and agriculture. She does not see it as important for small-scale farming and craftsmen to be included in the initial processes of socialization because their economic holdings are not as essential to the organization of society and she considered that in time 'they will all come to us voluntarily and will recognize the merits of socialism as against private property'.

Luxemburg recognized that a socialist society required a more thoroughgoing process of transformation beyond top-down nationalization efforts and the rational determination of the economy. Her central concerns were the institutions that played a major role in sustaining and reproducing 'public life'. Just as the implementation of democratic norms in the political sphere granted them legitimacy, for Luxemburg 'the same thing applies to economic and social life also'. In each of these social institutions, the whole mass of the people was to take part in it. It was imperative for Luxemburg that the process of democratizing authority

structures be a pathway for citizens to play a more active role in a self-determining society. She envisioned socialism as enabling individuals to overcome the alienation of capitalist society and to reassert their authority over social institutions through public control and participation. Luxemburg also argued that the introduction of workplace democracy at the level of the individual firm would change the way the labor process would be organized. If the threat of poverty and destitution were removed, people will work for the public good. She described how in a socialist society,

'the factories, works and the agricultural enterprises must be reorganized according to a new way of looking at things'. She says that 'in a socialist society, where everyone works together for their own wellbeing, the health of the workforce and its enthusiasm for work must be given the greatest consideration at work. Short working hours that do not exceed the normal capability, healthy workrooms, all methods of recuperation and a variety of work must be introduced in order that everyone enjoys doing their part'. She says that work should also be organized in ways that enable individuals to learn and grow as part of their job and use their initiative to complete tasks. Some degree of technical managers would still be required, but these would be subordinated to the democratic demand for equal participation in important decision making. As part of this change in how work would be organized, workers required a new sense of self-organization and discipline to replace the compulsion of work under capitalism. For Luxemburg this called for 'inner self-discipline, intellectual maturity, moral devotion, a sense of dignity and responsibility, a complete inner rebirth of the proletariat'. Finally, Luxemburg was attentive to the broader cultural transformations that would be required to institute new forms of life beyond a change in economic institutional structures. She considered that a socialist society would require a shift in the egoism and competition which predominated in capitalist culture towards an ethos of solidarity and public spiritedness. For her, socialism in life demanded a complete spiritual transformation in the masses which is degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. In her later writings, Luxemburg emphasized the need for a widespread change in people's established patterns of behavior to ensure that economic changes were supported by new social norms. Revolutionary transformation involved a new set of moral principles that could accompany the institutional changes to the mode of production. She believed that the emancipation of the working-class would require their mental and spiritual development. She insisted that the revolutionary transformation of society must proceed in a manner that aligned with the future goals of socialism. The workers would need to embody the principles

of socialism in their actions, as they went about transforming society, so that a socialist society could emerge through the conscious support of a majority of workers, and be constructed through their common efforts. She thought that 'socialism will not and cannot be created by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Only that is socialism, and only thus can socialism be created'.

Luxemburg considered the institution of democracy as a product of historical processes, though not as the great fundamental law of all historical development' like Bernstein did. In fact, she dismissed democracy as superficial, a mechanical generalization of the features of one small stage in developments since 1870. She did not find any intrinsic relationship between capitalism and democracy. She regarded, contrary to the reformists, that parliamentarianism was on the decline and that it was a 'historical form of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and would remain alive only as long as the bourgeoisie was in Conflict with the feudal elements. She considered parliamentarism as a powerful tool for encouraging socialist propaganda and for increasing the influence of socialist ideas among the masses but insisted that it need not be restricted merely to agitation. It ought to devote itself to the task of positive legislative work. Social democracy, in order to remain an opposition force, would have to derive its strength from the proletarian masses and abandon the illusion of empowering the capitalist state by majoritarianism in parliament. Luxemburg summed up her criticisms of revisionism by pointing out that its philosophical basis was similar to that of bourgeois economics. Its theory and tactics would not lead to a triumph of socialism because Bernstein was not choosing 'a more tranquil, calmer and slower role to the same goal but a different goal, not the realization of socialism but reform of capitalism'. This crucial distinction between reform and revolution was the most important point in Luxemburg's critique of evolutionary socialism because it was this important difference that distinguished social democratic movement from both bourgeois democratic ideas and bourgeois radicalism. This ultimate revolutionary goal had to be harmonized and embodied in the social democratic activity. Similarly, ideals were inseparable from trade union struggle and the struggle for social reforms and democratic rights. This was of utmost necessity for Luxemburg because otherwise the socialist dream would never materialize. She refused to concede that reforms were valuable in themselves and she mistrusted any spectacular success that the workers had achieved in their economic struggles. As a result, her assessment was negative and pessimistic. She regarded English working class as being

corrupted by temporary gains. In 1899, she declared that the English workers abandoned their class perspective and compromised with capitalism. Luxemburg, like Marx, did not clarify which would come first, that capitalism could not be reformed and the working class would inevitably destroy it through a revolution. In her polemics with the revisionists, she relied on the first statement and her theory of accumulation supported her contention. However, she did not clarify as to how it would that lead to a proletarian revolution. In fact, she believed that the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat would increase without observing social reality which was why she hoped for a spontaneous rather than an organized action by the party. She remained committed throughout her life, to a conscious majoritarian revolution which did not need the help of either an elite or a Party.

#### **4.3.5.6 The Institutions of a Socialist Democracy**

Luxemburg's remarks on socialist political institutions are not well developed, but we can take out from her writings and speeches her support for a robust institutional framework of a pluralist political system with the rule of law, multi-party elections and protections of civil liberties such as freedom of speech, assembly and association. In a socialist democracy, common ownership and control over economic institutions would be accompanied by a parliament elected via universal suffrage, civil and political rights, a free press and a coercive apparatus that could enforce collective decisions. This interpretation is in contrast to those who have claimed either that no coherent institutional politics could be developed from her writings, or that her ideal political system is some form of council republic.

Luxemburg's conception of a vibrant public sphere with institutionalized spaces for disagreement and difference separate her from many writers in the socialist tradition. Luxemburg called for the 'replacement of all political organs and authorities of the former regime by delegates of the workers' and soldiers' councils'. This signifies that she held a preference for workers' councils over Universalist democratic representative institutions. However, her critical remarks of the German National Assembly should be viewed in the context of the concrete political struggle that was occurring at the time. What Luxemburg opposed was what she saw as a strategy by the German Social Democrats to create 'a counter-revolutionary stronghold erected against the revolutionary proletariat'. She denounced the tactics of 'bourgeois parliamentarism' as a form of government in which 'class antagonisms and class domination are not done away with, but are, on the contrary, displayed in the open'. Her issue was that the SPD were actively seeking to suppress socialization and forestall the democratization of society. Luxemburg believed that in

Germany at that particular moment the revolution had to be driven forward in order to secure its advances and to prevent it from descending into a counter-revolutionary movement. Her criticisms of bourgeois democracy were not targeted at political institutions such as a parliament, multi-party elections and civic liberties, but at the class domination that these institutions both enabled and concealed from view under a coating of abstract rights. Her conception of socialist democracy should not be thought of as in substantial disagreement with these structures even though she attacks aspects of how they function within capitalist regimes.

In the case of the Russian Revolution, her criticisms of the Bolshevik dissolution of the Constituent Assembly reveal the importance she placed on universal suffrage and representative government. The Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly under the pretext that it no longer reflected the will of the people, which they claimed had shifted significantly since the election. Luxemburg argued that this denied 'any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate; any permanent interaction between one and the other'. The response should not have been to dissolve the Constituent Assembly in favor of party-controlled institutions, but rather to pressure representatives to reflect the current public mood. The Bolshevik's solution was worse than the problem because the abolition of democratic institutions led to less participation and an even tighter control by the party elite. The replacement of the Constituent Assembly with the purportedly higher working-class institutions of Bolshevik-dominated councils in fact restricted the progress of democratic transformation because it reduced citizen participation and control over political institutions. For Luxemburg, the solution to the oligarchic tendencies of democratic institutions was not to abandon them, but to seek to hold them accountable through an empowered and mobilized citizenry capable of placing pressure on representatives.

She suggested that the strength and vitality of a democratic institution can be measured by the degree to which citizens can influence and direct them through political pressure. In this sense, organized citizens provide a crucial counter-balance to the domination of institutions by elites and bureaucrats. According to her, in a vibrant democracy, 'the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them'. She raised the question of representation not to criticize any form of political representation but to put forward evaluative criteria, as how the representative nature of institutions could be judged. As she says that 'the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and

complete is their influence'. Luxemburg's preferred political system comes from her draft of the programme of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. In this programme, Luxemburg calls for the immediate goal of the establishment of a Constituent Assembly elected via universal suffrage with equality before the law and the freedoms of assembly, press and speech. Luxemburg also planned for minority groups to receive proportional representation in the Assembly and for each country to have its own Assembly with freedom to use their own language and promote their own culture and education system. A socialist democracy, then, provides a strong institutional framework within which democratic politics can take place as well as instituting common ownership over productive assets and common forms of economic governance. Luxemburg held that formal democracy would be realized as an actual democracy through the democratization and socialization of major social and economic institutions. This democratization and socialization must be organized and instituted within newly formed democratic organizations, not subject to party domination, but it cannot be understated, how radically transformed society would be through these processes. The socialist component of socialist democracy, to be properly implemented, would amount to a fundamental rupture with current capitalist social relations amounting to a complete social revolution. Although certain institutions of liberal democracy might remain in the transformed society, their context and function would be transformed by the socialization of society's material basis.

We can sum up that Luxemburg was pre-eminently a Marxist who enjoyed a position as an autonomous political thinker outside the context of the Marxist tradition. She espoused and defended a moral doctrine that viewed social revolution not only as the fulfillment of the laws of dialectical materialism but the liberation and progress of humanity. The key political idea in her theorizing and activism was participation. As Nettle says 'Her controlling doctrine was not democracy, individual freedom, or spontaneity, but participation-friction leading to revolutionary energy, leading in turn to the maturity of class-consciousness and revolution. Luxemburg's political ideas and personality made her a champion of spontaneous revolution. She regarded socialism as the inevitable goal of human society. Socialism could not be manufactured or decreed for it embodied the aspirations and hopes of the proletarian masses. The political experience of the working class was the arena in which it would originate. She frequently reiterated two cherished Marxist themes; that the emancipation of the working class had to be won by the working class itself and that the proletarian revolution would belong drawn, arduous, tortuous and difficult. Arendt analyze that 'Her fear of a deformed rather than an unsuccessful revolution set her apart from the Bolsheviks and Lenin'. The events in the Soviet Union indicated Luxemburg when she spoke about



the moral collapse without foreseeing the open brutality and terror that would eventually undermine the revolutionary cause. She was proved right when she castigated Lenin for the means that he advocated, and when she insisted that the only salvation was the 'school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion'. She remained a friendly critic of Bolshevism. Luxemburg's major theoretical weakness arose from the fact that she could not comprehend, as Bernstein did, the important changes that capitalism was undergoing and the enormous potential of democracy as a weapon with the working class for advancing its cause, even though she spoke of spontaneity and cherished basic civil and political liberties. She could never work out an institutional arrangement to secure them. It was the fast moving and un-expected worker's militancy in Tsarist Russia between 1905 and 1916 that gave credence to her theory of spontaneity. This was reflected by the fact that Lenin who had a pessimistic view of the Workers revolutionary consciousness in 1902 accepted more or less the position of Luxemburg and Bukharin in 1916 for he mentioned the role of the Communist Party only thrice in 'The State and Revolution'. However, with the rise of Stalin and his proclamation of socialism in one country, the internationalist and libertarian aspect of Marxism got buried, of which Luxemburg was the finest exponent.

#### **4.3.5.7 Conclusion**

Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg's critique of liberal democracy and advocacy for the expansion of democracy beyond the political sphere, we can construct a concept of socialist democracy that accommodates and reconciles pluralism, civil liberties and parliaments with an economic order built on common ownership, social equality and citizen control over decision making. Through a close reading of Luxemburg's writings and speeches, one can draw an important distinction between her critique of bourgeois parliamentarism and a complete opposition to representative democracy. This was achieved through a contextualization of her advocacy for transferring power to workers' and soldiers' councils based on the specific historical factors of the German Revolution and the counter-revolutionary intentions of the German Social Democrats. This distinction allowed for the reinterpretation of the democratic themes within Luxemburg's revolutionary socialism in a novel direction, placed greater emphasis on her advocacy for institutions that would empower the entire citizenry. It sought out the ways in which socialization of the economy and democratization of its institutions would disempower the capitalist elites that dominate liberal democracies and prevent the realization of its ideals. It was shown that social ownership of the means of production would allow for inclusion, collective will formation and collective decision making to develop within the economic and

social spheres, while also freeing the democratic state from the structural constraints placed upon its decision making by capital, massively expanding the range of possible decisions to be taken by citizens.

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**M.A. Political Science, Semester I**  
Course Title: **Western Political Thought**  
Unit – IV: **Socialist Thinkers**

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## **4.4 MAO: PEASANTRY, THEORY OF CONTRADICTIONS, REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGIES AND THEORY OF STATE**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 4.4.0 Objectives
- 4.4.1 Introduction
- 4.4.2 Mao's Theory of Contradictions
- 4.4.3 Revolutionary Strategies and People's Front
- 4.4.4 Mao's Theory of State
- 4.4.5 Summing Up

### **4.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to know:**

- Mao's views on peasantry;
- Mao's theory of Contradictions;
- Mao's revolutionary strategies;
- Mao's tactics and his theory of state.

### **4.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Mao Tse Tung, who held complete control over the political scene of China from 1949 to 1975, was often hailed as 'father of the nation, foremost Marxist, theorist and beacon-light for the oppressed people of the world.' In China, the nationalist movement was directed both against the Mancho rulers and the western imperialism. It was on this pre-existent base of Chinese nationalism, that Mao attempted to establish a super-structure of Marxism and Leninism. Re-affirming his faith in Marxism and Leninism from time to time,

Mao introduced changes in operationalising the tenets of Marxism. He analysed Chinese problems and guided the people of China in their struggle to victory. He used the Marxist and Leninist principles to explain the Chinese history and the practical problems of China. He was the first to have succeeded in doing so. According to Wayper, “He brought to China the universal orthodoxy of Marxism to replace that of Confucianism, and so interpreted it as to seek to make China again, even at the expense of conflict with the U.S.S.R., what she had always claimed to be, the middle kingdom, the sole source of civilization and light.”

Mao Tse-Tung, the most powerful Chinese personality and statesman, who held the office of the Chairman of the Central Committee of a Chinese Communist Party and of the Chinese Peoples Republic, was born on 26th December, 1893 at Shao Shan in the province of Human, China. His father was a small trader who owned a small tract of land. He was extremely harsh and dominating type father. At the age of eight, Mao was sent to the village teacher to learn to read and write, although at the same time he continued to do farm work. He received his primary and middle school education of Changsha. He served in Sun Yat Sen’s revolutionary army from 1911 to 1912. He resumed studies at the age of twenty at Normal School, Human where he studied philosophy and obtained degree from this school in 1918. That very year Mao went to Peking, where he worked as Assistant in the Library of Peking University. It was there he first studied the Communist Manifesto. By 1920 he was a staunch Marxist and thought of himself as a Marxist. In 1921, he took part in the Assembly which founded the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. In 1927 he organized the Human Autumn Revolt. In 1934 he led the trek of 3,000 miles from Kiangsi to Shensi, during which he lost his first wife. By 1935, he gained complete control of the Communist Party. For some years Mao advocated a common front with the Kuomintang against Japan and reorganized the Red Army in 1937 so that it could fight as a part of the Chinese national army. In 1945 he cooperated with the U.S. Ambassador to China in an unsuccessful attempt to reach agreement with the Kuomintang leader, Chiang Kai-shek. After the Allies’ victory over Japan in 1945, the Maoist forces resumed their fight against the nationalists for control of China. By 1949 the Chinese Communist party under the leadership of Mao, became successful in driving the nationalists from the Chinese mainland to Formosa. The Communists established their capital at Peking and on October 1, 1949 Mao became Chairman of the Central People’s Government of the Peoples Republic of

China. In 1949, he once left China for the first time to visit Moscow where he signed a treaty of mutual alliance with the U.S.S.R. From 1949 to 1959, he was the Chairman of the People's Republic. He remained the un-disputed leader of China till his death in 1975.

Mao wrote voluminously. His important works are

1. Red China (1934)
2. China and the Second Imperialist World War (1939)
3. China's New Democracy (1944)
4. On Coalition government (1945)
5. On Practice
6. On contradiction
7. The Present Position and Task Ahead
8. The People's Democratic Dictatorship (1949)
9. Mao's view on Peasantry

Mao's significance as an original political thinker is a matter of dispute and debate, but there can be hardly any doubt about the historic-political significance of his doctrines, if one sees them simply as logical extensions of thought begun by Marx and Lenin. G.H. Sabine writes, "While Lenin had recognized the significance of the peasantry in societies not heavily industrialized, it was Mao who moved them to a central place in revolutionary strategy. Mao seems to have suggested that the proletariat shall be replaced by the peasantry as the vanguard of the revolution, a position heretical in the eyes of some Marxists." As early as March, 1927 in an article entitled "Report of an investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan", he developed the view that it was to result in a new strain of communism. The significant extract from this article reads as follows: "This enormous mass of poor peasants, altogether comprising 70 percent of the rural population, are the backbone of the peasant association, the vanguard in overthrowing the feudal forces, and the foremost heroes, who have accomplished the great revolutionary undertaking left unaccomplished for many years... Being the most revolutionary, the poor peasants have won the leadership in the peasant association... This leadership of the poor peasants is absolutely necessary.

Without the poor peasants, there can be no revolutions. To reject them is to reject the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution.”

As such Mao depended more on the political mobilization of the peasantry than on the proletariat in the context of his communist revolution in China. The communists had regarded the peasantry as an important revolutionary force, but it was Mao Tse Tung who recognized and proved that the peasants could become the vanguard of communist revolution. Marx himself had taken the peasantry as a property-oriented and comparatively reactionary class. He and Engels had visualized socialist revolution only in an advanced capitalist society after the forces of production there had attained the maximum possible quantitative growth allowed by the system. But opposed to this, Mao believed in the role of the peasantry in effecting the revolution. The only thing was that the peasantry was to be politically mobilized. Therefore, it can be said that Mao was the first important socialist leader to recognize that the peasants were capable of independent revolutionary actions. As early as 1926, Mao was impressed immensely by the bitter feelings of the peasants in Kiangsu and Chekiang and by their movements of resistance. Mao believed in the peasant base and essentially agrarian character of the revolution and used the term “New Democratic Revolution,” before 1949 and ‘people’s Democratic Dictatorship,’ after he came to power. Writing about Mao’s emphasis on the peasantry, Sabine observes: “Whether Mao’s stress on the peasantry was heresy or the enlightened applications of Marxist-Leninist thought, it certainly had its roots in the Chinese situation. Much of Mao’s inspiration grew from Chinese history.” In Mao’s Selected Works, it is recorded : “The gigantic struggle of the peasants-the peasant uprisings and wars alone formed the real motive force of historical development in China’s feudal society.” China’s history is full of examples of peasant wars. Particularly notable were the revolt of Huang Ch’ao and Li-Tzu-Cheeng in the ninth century. In general these revolts had failed because the peasants attacked and retreated, as relatively poorly armed guerrillas should do, but they lacked strong bases to fall back on. This lesson was dictated by Mao Tse-Tung, who surprised urban-oriented Communist colleagues by asserting that the proper strategy was to surround the cities from a countryside containing well established revolutionary bases.

Mao believed in strengthening the organizational nuclei of his revolutionary struggle in the base-areas in the countryside. After the rural base-areas had been consolidated, those bases were to be used for encircling and capturing the cities. In the words of S.P. Verma,

“The technique which Mao followed in the early period of his consolidation of power, first in Kiangsi, then in Hunan, was (a) to bring a certain area under the political, military and administrative control of the Communist Party, (b) introduce preliminary land-reforms there, (c) help the people in their daily lives with welfare activities and win their full support, (d) indoctrinate them in the principles of communism, (e) give military training to as large a section of the people and the party and its fighting forces. This technique, known as the ‘Mao Tse-Tung line’ was followed with equal success later in Yen-an, northern Shensi and the north-west ‘border area’ and paid its inventor great dividends.’

There was a reason for selecting villages by Mao in preference to cities as the questions then arises as to why the cities were not selected by Mao for launching revolution. In other words, why did he give preference to the villages, as instruments of revolution. The reason is to be found in Sabine’s observation, when he writes: “According to Mao, because the forces of imperialism and reaction were firmly entrenched in the cities, continuing the struggle involved a considerable period of avoiding decisive battle with the generally stronger enemy. While the revolutionary forces were still weak, it was necessary to ‘build the backward villages into advanced consolidated base areas, into great military, political, economic and cultural revolutionary bastions, so that they can fight the fierce enemy, who utilizes the cities to attack the rural districts.” Given the immensity of Chinese territory and the almost total separation between the simple agricultural villages and the modernized urban areas, Mao believed that eventually condition would be right for total victory by the revolutionary forces operation from their rural bases.

#### **4.4.2 MAO’S THEORY OF CONTRADICTIONS**

Mao Tse Tung has been one of the greatest political thinkers of Marxist political thought. He moulded Marxian philosophy to fit the same in the Chinese situation. Stuart R. observes, “By any reckoning, Mao-Tse-Tung must be regarded as one of the greatest and most remarkable statesmen of modern times. As a poet of distinction, as a political philosopher, and as a strategist, whose 6000 miles trek across China has become a legend, Mao devoted his life to China and Chinese peasants.” One of the notable contributions of Mao has been his theory of contradictions. In the words of Sabine, “Mao is perhaps the first Marxist theorist to do much writing about the development of politics after Mao Tse Tung revolution. Engels talked of the withering away of the state in general terms, while Lenin in State and Revolution-quoted Engels in support of his contention that under communism

the government of persons would be replaced by the government of things. The notion of dialectical reasoning that serves as the principal analytical tool-in all Marxist theorizing tends to suggest a closing off of conflict and argument at the end of the dialectical process when all contradictions are resolved. The idea that class conflict pushes history to a proletarian revolution that ends in the classless society is the paradigm case of this ‘closing off’ process in Marxist thought.”

Mao, however, adopted a different line. He believed in ever continuing dialectical process. He was quite explicit about an open-ended, ever-continuing dialectical process. In Mao’s own words, “The development of the objective process is full of contradictions and conflicts, and so is the development of the process of man’s cognition. All the dialectical movements of the external world can sooner or later find their reflection in man’s knowledge. The process of coming into being, development and elimination in social practice as well as in human knowledge is infinite.” Mao further observed that “for a long time after the proletariat takes power” class struggle continues as an objective law independent of man’s will, differing only in form what it was before the taking of power.” The reason which Mao gave for this is that he considered the socialist revolution on the economic front as insufficient in itself and also incapable of being consolidated. He, therefore, wanted that there must be a thorough socialist revolution on the political as well as ideological fronts for which a pretty long time is required. To quote Mao “Our people’s government is a government that truly represents the people and serves the people, yet certain contradictions exist between the government and the masses. These include contradictions between the interests of the state, collective interest and individual interest, between democracy and centralism, between those in positions of leadership and the led, contradictions arising from the bureaucratic practices of certain state functionaries in their relations with the masses. In fact, Mao believed that the contradiction even in the communist society do not come to an end. Keeping in view the peculiarities of the Chinese situation, the Communists have always talked of ‘contradictions in social process and situations’. But Mao found it useful to draw a very clear distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. ““An antagonistic contradiction is one between the revolutionaries (who represent the people) and the enemies of the people, while a non- antagonistic contradiction may exist even among the people”. Stalin in 1930 said rather the same thing when he differentiated between contradictions within the bond, that is, between the mass of the people and the proletariat,



and contradictions outside the bond, that is, between capitalist elements and the dictatorship of the proletariat. But Mao insisted that the contradiction between the working class and national bourgeoisie was non-antagonistic, that is, it existed within the people. Moreover, Mao differed from Stalin by suggesting that while the Communist Government truly represented the people, there could still be contradictions between the two. Mao further believed that for resolving these non-antagonistic contradictions, the existence of the state was necessary for an indefinite period. Therefore, the state was not to wither away. We can say that such a view made the idea of 'withering away of the state itself withered away.'

From the above discussion it can be concluded that, to Mao, the struggle and conflict do not end with the setting-up of a communist society. It simply takes a new shape. Contradictions, according to Mao, continue even after socialism gets established in a country. "Contradictions between progress and conservatism, between the advanced and the backward, between the positive and the negative, and even contradictions between the productive forces and conditions of production, continue to characterise post-revolution society." In 1956 Mao wrote, "Humanity is still in its youth. The road it has yet to traverse will be, no one knows, how many times longer than the road it has already travelled. One contradiction will lead to another, and when old contradictions are resolved, new ones will take place. In resolving and dealing with these contradictions the state will have to assume more and more powers."

Explaining Mao's concept of contradictions, C.L. Wayper writes, "Under Maoism, that even under communism, tensions always exist." Mao admitted that even under communism, tensions, the 'non antagonistic contradictions', would exist. He acknowledged that the state would be needed to deal with them so it would not wither away. He nevertheless believed it possible to perfect men by perfecting their environment. The Commune, he thought, could "create an entirely new kind of man in an entirely new kind of society", and when that failed he looked to the Cultural Revolution to achieve the same end to the idea of permanent revolution, a perpetual bath, as it were, that would constantly wash away the grit of imperfection. While struggling to attain the un-attainable, in the process he destroyed much of the costly achievement of his regime. And if that sacrifice rids communism of its absurd belief in human perfectibility the world may yet have cause to thank him.

Besides its practical application, Maoist dialectics appears to consider this disequilibrium as a universal law. Mao Tse Tung looked at all social process in terms of conflict and combat. The law of contradiction, the dialectical struggle, is one to which he gave special emphasis. For him, as Ashok Mehta writes, "Progress stops when struggle ends, hence conditions of combat-stimulated, if necessary, are required to change social consciousness and create a new type of man. To him, therefore, contradictions were not as for Hegel-merely the mentor of change, these were the very stuff of life, because contradictions continue, they are left, as it were philosophically unresolved.

#### **4.4.3 REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGIES AND PEOPLES' FRONT: CONCEPT OF NEW DEMOCRACY**

Mao floated a new concept of democracy and called it 'new democracy'. It was in 1940 that he wrote a book on New Democracy-a small document running into 80 pages. It is said that it is the first useful document on communism written by a writer from outside the Soviet Union, at a time when China was struggling for national unity, and integrity. Mao's ideas contained in 'New Democracy', published in 1940, were further supplemented by his writings on Coalition Government (1945), The Present Position and the Task Ahead (1947) and the People's Democratic dictatorship (1949). This idea was based on the social and economic difficulties being faced by the peasants of China. In this work Mao considered Chinese revolution as a part of the world revolution.

The main principle of Mao's new democracy was that China was to remain under the kind of state called New Democracy for a space of years, before it could be Sovietised. His new democracy was not the same as Western Democracy; which stood for the capitalist rule. His idea of new democracy also differed from the Soviet democracy where there was the workers' rule only. Mao's democracy presented the 'third model' in which the revolutionaries as a whole were to rule. The modern democracy, in fact, has been a minority role. But the new democracy of Mao was really to be the democracy where big banks, trade and all industries were to be owned by people and controlled by the State. The New Democracy, based on a compromise between capitalist and communist societies, tied the period of the revolutionary transformation of one into the other. This corresponded also to a political transition in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force i.e. exclusion from democracy, of all the exploiters and oppressors of the people. This is

the change democracy undergoes during transition from capitalism to communism. Mao's aim was to reconstruct democracy and freedom and place the people of China under the Communist Party's leadership. New Democracy, according to Mao Tse Tung, implied two things: first, democracy for the people, and, second, dictatorship for the reactionaries. These two things when combined constitute the people's democratic dictatorship. Mao Tse Tung writes, "Our recent task is to strengthen the people's state apparatus which means at the utmost people's army, the people police and the people's courts-therby safeguarding national defence and protecting the people's interest. Given these conditions, China, under the leadership of the working class and the Communist Party, can develop steadily from an agricultural into an industrial country and from a New Democratic society into a Socialist and, eventually, Communist Society, eliminating classes and realizing universal harmony." (People's Democratic Dictatorship).

Mao's definition of 'New Democracy' was based on the Leninist idea of practical democracy. He laid down three stages by-which the Marxist aim was to be achieved in China:

- Firstly by placing the country under the political leadership of the Communist Party and working through the party regime;
- Secondly by carrying through a Socialistic Revolution by means of policies operated by the state and
- Thirdly by producing the Soviet pattern in Chinese life and society through the practice of Socialism.

To Mao, 'People's Democracy' was democracy with regard to those classes of society only, which it recognized healthy for its own life and progress. The classes, which it considered reactionary and unhealthy, were to be suppressed. Mao Tse Tung in his People's Democratic Dictatorship, further wrote, 'We definitely have no benevolent policies towards the reactionary or the counter-revolutionary activities of the reactionary classes. Our benevolent policy does not apply to such deeds or such persons who are outside the ranks of the people; it applies only to the people'. The people's state is for the protection of the people. Once they have a people's state, the people then have the possibility of applying democratic methods on a nation-wide and comprehensive scale to educate and reform themselves. Then they may get rid of the influences of domestic and foreign

reactionaries. Thus, the people' can reform their bad habits, and thoughts derived from the old society, so that they will not take the wrong road pointed out to them by the reactionaries, but will continue to advance and develop towards a socialist and then communist society.'

Regarding reactionary class or group, Mao said that if they do not want to work, the people's state will force them to do so. Further, he held that the propaganda and educational work directed towards them will be carried out with the same care and thoroughness as the work already conducted among captured army officers. This may also be spoken of as a 'benevolent policy', but it will be compulsorily imposed upon those originally from enemy classes. This can in no way be compared to our work along self-educational lines among the ranks of the revolutionary people.

The foundation of the people's democratic dictatorship is, according to Mao, the alliance of the working class, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie. It is essentially the alliance of the workers and peasants because these two classes comprise the major part of China's population. Mao Tse Tung observed that the democratic system must be built up from the ranks of the people, giving them freedom of speech, of assembly and of convocation. The right to vote is given to the people only and not to the reactionaries. These two aspects - democracy for the people and dictatorship of the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries - combine to form the Democratic Dictatorship of the People. The task is to strengthen the apparatus of the popular state. This applies principally to the army, the police, and the judiciary. The army, the police, and the judiciary are the instruments by which class oppresses class. Towards hostile classes, the state apparatus is the instrument of oppression; it is violent and not benevolent. The people's democratic dictatorship, Mao held, must have the leadership of working class. 'The entire history of revolutions proves that without the leadership of the working class, a revolution will fail, but with the leadership of the working class, a revolution will be victorious.' About China, Mao said, 'our State is a people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the worker-peasant alliance'. Its first function is to suppress the reactionary classes and elements and those exploiters who range themselves against the socialist revolution. To maintain public order and safeguard the interest of the people, it is likewise necessary to exercise dictatorship over embezzler swindlers, arsonists, murderers, criminal gangs and other scoundrels, which seriously disrupt public order. Dictatorship does not apply within the ranks of the people. Law breaking elements among the people will be punished according

to law, but this is different in principle from the exercise of dictatorship to suppress the enemies of the people.

If we consider the Cultural side of Mao's New Democracy, he believed in the philosophy which adopted scientific method of Marx and Engels. Mao is of the opinion that New Democracy cannot be maintained without this new culture. He held: "The popular scientific culture of the broad masses of the people anti-feudal-is the culture of New Democracy-it is the new national culture of the Chinese people. 'The economy of New Democracy wedded to the New Culture with which it shall work in unison will provide the groundwork for the establishment of the New Democratic Republic which not only shall exist in name, but also in fact, and this shall be the New China that we are creating.'" Mao called it as the 'national culture'. But what was to be this national culture. Mao described it as the culture of and for the Chinese people, which although possessing characteristics and peculiarities of its own, yet seeks also to interlink and fuse itself with the national socialist culture and the New Democratic culture of other lands, so that they mutually become the component parts of the new world culture. It is, therefore, essential to bring about radical changes in China's old culture, which Mao feels, cannot fit in the New Democracy and new socialist culture. He elaborated that without the overthrow of these reactionary cultures, new culture can never be established, nor extended, if the other is not stopped or crushed. The struggle between the two is a struggle of life and death. He stated on various revolutionary strategies in the following manner.

***Mao on Communes:*** Mao was against the system of communes. He held that communes weaken the family. P.C. Gupta remarks that, according to Mao, in the communes members are fed in mess halls, children are taken from their parents and are placed in communes, nurseries, and husbands and wives are separated during the day for work in labour brigades. Older people, the focus of influence and respect under the traditional system are sent off to homes for the aged, where they are required to do as much work as their strength permits. Peasants have been ordered to tear down family shrines and allow the communes to plough up grave plots. It is an attitude contrary to the tradition of China; it can conduce only to disruption, tension between the old generation and the new, and unhappiness in family life on a large scale.

***Role of Religion in New Democracy:*** Like other communists, Mao was also against religion. According to Mao, religion is the opiate of the people. Mao Tse-Tung declared in

his New Democracy : “Chinese communists may form an anti-imperialist united front politically with certain idealists and disciples of religions but can never approve their idealism or religious teachings.” Mao advocated that the religious leaders should be required to serve communist ends. Mao was of the view that Christianity had served the ends of capitalistic social order. Confucianism also had served for the ruling classes for the last twenty five hundred years in China. As such, in China as per Mao’s order, religious books were to be burnt and historical monuments destroyed. Graves of ancient Chinese thinkers like Confucius were to be dug up. Temples; pagodas and mosques were to be annihilated.

***Role of Party Members in New Democracy:*** Mao assigned a special type of role to the party members in his ‘New Democracy’. He believed in admission of members on the basis of rigorous tests before the public session of their particular party organisation. Mao was of the firm view that the party members should come out with their self-criticism i.e. that they should review their own shortcomings and deviations from party principles’ and socialist line. Then the senior members were to expose further, the shortcomings and past deviations of those members from the Marxist traits. With the help of these, the members were to put through rigorous examinations, rectification campaigns; a sort of ‘brain-washing’. This was also meant to make the members strictly disciplined and loyal to Mao. Thus under his democracy Mao’s leadership was entrenched further through these tactics. Mao also taught the country, that political war to be fought against all those, who resisted or were liable to resist re-moulding, by making promises from a quieter and easier life with threats of forced labour, prison or execution by allowing a state of high tension to alternate irregularly with reassuring relaxation. The Chinese people were kept off a constant state of near hysteria. This was the strategy of no rest at all or in Mao’s terminology, the strategy of uninterrupted revolution.”

***The methods to be used for realising these were also explained as follows:*** “The movements, campaigns, drives, sudden announcement of crimes committed by counter-revolutionaries, campaigns of hate, rectification campaigns, economic plans, voluntary movement to give up your farm, your factory etc. the ever changing new eras, a hundred flowers blooming, poisonous weeds being annihilated; kill the flies, the sparrows, the rats, the dogs; kill the people’s enemies, the constant redefinition of the people, etc.....” Mao was opposed to colonialism and imperialism. He was of the view that Western democracies were imperialistic in nature. He considered them as imperialist Class-dictatorship. He

opined that the colonies should be liberated through violence and war. He was intent on changing the whole world into giant struggle meetings, similar to those which he had started in China. Mao called for co-operation with Kuomintang to fight the Japanese imperialism on the Chinese soil. He also supported and organised the spread of the communist influence and power by guerrilla tactics. After coming into power Mao maintained that, while Russian Revolution was the model for revolution in imperialist countries, the Chinese revolution constituted the model for revolution in colonial and semi- colonial societies.

As far as comparison with soviet Russia is concerned, Mao differed with Stalin but his differences with Khrushchev were greater. He differed with Khrushchev on matters of policy with regard to imperialistic powers, nuclear war and co-existence. Khrushchev believed in meetings, summit diplomacy and working through the U.N. He held that non-violence could be useful in colonial liberation. This was objected to by Mao Tse-Tung . He considered this type of Khrushchev line as revisionism of Leninism. In 1960, when Khrushchev was working for a summit meeting and conducting an all out campaign for the concept of peaceful co-existence, Mao launched an international campaign which was officially termed as “New storm of struggle’ . Its main target was U.S. Imperialism. He battled against Khrushchev’s “soft and unprincipled” policies. Mao even went to the extent of calling him a foe of revolution. Therefore, every disorder, violent clash or uprising was interpreted as a proof of Khrushchev’s mistaken policies and approach. Khrushchev cautioned against local wars an the plea that they-could develop a general nuclear war. On the basis of these arguments he stood for the policy of peaceful co-existence between the communist and capitalist nations, so as to show the superiority of the former. Mao did not accept this approach. He denounced Khrushchev as an enemy of communism and revolutions. Khrushchev was dubbed by Mao as a “paper tiger” . On the other hand, Peking was made a sort of Rome of the ‘non-white world: with the most extremist and non-white political leaders. Various political leaders and deputations from Latin America and Africa were accorded warm receptions by Mao. He even entertained them lavishly, promised all political support and they were given advice as to the technique of mobilising and manipulating the masses by well-organised minorities during times of turmoil, in the spirit of Mao’s slogan; “A single spark can start any big fire.”

Mao was not at all scared of the nuclear war. He was not convinced that Red China could be the main target. He went on to explain that even if China was made a target, only the

principal cities and two to three hundred millions of China's people could be put to destruction. Even then three to five hundred million Chinese could survive. This number was quite enough to enable China, according to Mao, to ensure its status as the most powerful nation of the post-nuclear war period. On the other hand, countries like the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and Britain, according to Mao's estimate, would be crippled for decades to come. This would mean that these countries would lose their dominating positions. The poorest and the least industrialised regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America would suffer least from the fall-out. This would be the non-white world that Mao intended to lead with the help of his hundred of millions of Chinese. "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun"-in a speech not published at that time, he said this to the Central Committee plenary session held on 6th Nov, 1938.

Coming to the question of war, Mao wrote, "As a national war of resistance is going on, we must further contend for military power for the nation Every communist must grasp the truth: 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.' Our principle is that the party commands the gun, and the gun will never be allowed to command the party. But it is also true that with guns at our disposal, we can really build up the party organisation in North China. We can also rear cadres and create schools, culture and mass movements. He said that the class- struggle of the era of imperialism teaches us that the working class and the toiling masses cannot defeat the armed bourgeois and landlords except by the power of the gun; in this sense we can even say that the whole world can be remoulded only with the gun." The slogan coined by Mao i.e. political power grows out of the barrel of a gun had a very deep impact on the working of the communist parties all over the world, particularly in the under-developed and developing societies. The differences of opinion arose, and the communist parties were split into factions, some to sing the Mao line, others opposing it. The growth of Naxalite movement in India and the militant elements in the communist countries of Africa could be very much attributed to the influence of Mao's teachings and slogans. This concept was the basis of Mao's thought against Kuomintang and Japanese.

On the revolutionary and guerrilla tactics, Mao taught his followers the actual use of such like weapons and tactics, as:

"The enemy advances, we retreat

The enemy halts, we harass



The enemy tires, we attack

The enemy retreats, we pursue.”

Mao believed in the game of hide and seek and the principle of surprise, while dealing with the enemy i.e. the imperialistic class. Mao had full faith in the old Chinese saying, “A plan prepared in an army tent beforehand decides the victory to be won thousands of miles away.”

#### **4.4.4 MAO’S THEORY OF STATE**

One significant aspect related to Mao’s theory of State is that unlike many earlier Marxists, particularly Lenin, Mao adopted a nationalistic, not a class, approach to the determination of the nature of a political system and, like his bourgeois-nationalist predecessors, accentuated the specific features of the Chinese revolution. Since the exigencies of national struggle demanded the expansion of the communist appeal to include classes other than workers and peasants, establishment of a straitjacketed working class state would not be possible. The logic of the situation demanded some accommodation with the Nationalists; hence the second united front was born in 1937. However, Mao was not intended to permanently accommodate the bourgeoisie, nor did he see liberal democracy as an ultimate end. His people’s democratic republic is a temporary stage till full-fledged socialism was established.

For Mao, a people’s democratic republic means a republic based on the revolutionary Three People’s Principles. It will be different both from the semi-colonial and semi-feudal state of the present and from the socialist state of the future. Thus, his intention was to build the basis for a multi-class state, and not a dictatorship of the proletariat – at least in the next stage, i.e. early revolutionary period. Mao envisaged a transitional state-form different from either the bourgeois or proletariat dictatorship. Since revolution was taking place in a feudal society, it is necessary to have a democratic state which consists of several classes. In Mao’s theory the question of ‘state system’ reduced to the question of the ‘status of various social classes within the state’. Mao envisaged State in post-revolutionary China as a co-operative state which is in position to defend society against imperialists. For this purpose, he even prepared to postpone domestic class struggle.

Government was an important element in Mao's theory of the state. For Mao, Government is the one where political power is located and organized, "the form in which one social class or another chooses to arrange its apparatus of political power to oppose its enemies and protect itself". A system of people's congress will take responsibility for legislation; it provides representation to each revolutionary class, it functions on the principle of democratic centralism. In other words, the joint dictatorship of the new democracy was to consist of a hierarchical order of classes, with the proletariat at the top and the bourgeoisie at the bottom.

After revolutionary victory in June 1949, Mao clearly stated his ideas on the type of state to be established. It was to be a dictatorship but a democratic one under the Chinese people – comprised all classes except agents of imperialism and reactionaries. Democracy is reserved for the people, not for their enemies: "The combination of these two aspects, democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries, is the people's democratic dictatorship". Mao intended to build a strong state apparatus – the army and other security services – to counter imperialism and domestic reactionaries.

For Mao the state is necessary to move China from agricultural society to an industrial one and from a new-democratic into a socialist and communist society. The state is not benevolent but erected as an instrument for the oppression of reactionary classes.

#### **4.4.5 SUMMING UP**

Mao Tse-Tung, a peasant, a poet, philosopher, guerrilla leader, visionary and statesman, was a leader of great sagacity and wisdom. He succeeded in his struggle and became ruler of a nation of seven hundred million Chinese in October, 1949. Having united China at the age of forty five, he challenged Khrushchev's orthodoxy and claimed leadership of the Communist World. His personality may fairly be compared with that of Lenin. He was a man of great thoughts and actions. He may rightly be regarded as the master and maker of modern China. From a nation of opium-eaters, he turned China, into a country of patriots and revolutionaries. Sometimes he is charged for his ruthlessness. But if he had not been ruthless in the pursuit of his objective, he would never have won through; one has only to study what went on in China from about 1923 onwards to understand that. Mao Tse Tung cannot be placed among the category of political philosophers, and nor did he develop any political philosophy. His ideals on class-struggle are in no way different from those of

Marx and Lenin. His ideas on basic democracy and its requirements are those which suited most to the Chinese society which he had visualized. His philosophy of indoctrination and culture revolution aimed at transforming and rejuvenating both the Chinese people and the entire nation. His ideas on war are highly significant. Leaders of all categories may derive immense benefit out of his view on the methods of leadership. His views on the theory of contradictions, role of the Chinese Communist Party in the national war, youth movement, danger of capitulation, party's style of work, organizations, education, production, social and moral responsibilities of the people and coalition government, are still admired and appreciated both by his supporters and critics.

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