UNIT 2: SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY: HOBBES

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Know what is Hobbe's view on Human nature in pre – social state
- Know how society has come into being
- Know Hobbe's view of social contract theory
- Know the relation between the individual and the society

2.2 INTRODUCTION

A group of individuals sharing common views, likeness or goals form a society. There can be no society without an individual. There is an inter-relation between individual and society. But can there be an individual without a society? What is the nature of individuals in the pre social state? How does society come into existence? We shall discuss these questions in this chapter. We shall find out how individuals come into an agreement in the form of a social contract. There are different views regarding the origin of the society, the social contract between the individuals and the state of

nature. In this chapter we shall study what Hobbes has put forward his views regarding the individuals and society.

2.3 HOBBE'S VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE

Thomas Hobbes describes his views on human nature as: In pre social state, before the existence of society, all men are equal and practice equal rights whatever is necessary for their survival. They have equal rights of hurting or killing each other for their own protection. Every individual has equal freedom to do what he wishes to do to acquire whatever he desire. According to Hobbes, as everyone is created equally, therefore everyone is equally capable of killing each other. Differences in strength can be overcome and the weak can destroy the strong.

Hobbes believes that people have the desire to seek more and more power and are not satisfied with their existing powers, when people desire for the same thing, conflicts arise between them. It results in war and they try to destroy one another. Thus, we can say that there are competitions, distrust and glory. In pre social state men are selfish who think only of themselves and want to protect their interests at any cost. There is no unity between them.

Hobbes, after analysis, has find out that every individual has two motives to achieve, namely appetite and aversion. Men can go to any extent for their survival. At the same, time they hate whatever comes on their way as a threat to them. According to Hobbes men are fundamentally egoistic as they only think on their own survival and can do anything only to fulfill their desires. Thus we can say in pre social state there are a lot of conflicts and chaos between the individuals. In that state there is no morality, goodness, rightness or wrongness.

But in spite of it, in pre social state there is natural law define by Hobbes which is the general law that concerns with what to do and what not to. Men know and follow this natural law for their own safety. They think of peace necessary for their survival. Thus, they come together for an agreement in the form of a contract which is known as social contract

theory. We therefore can conclude that Hobbes view on human nature leads him to develop social contract theory.

2.4 ORIGIN OF SOCIETY

An individual is referred to a particular human being who is incomplete without a society. Every individual is referred to as social being as they share a social relationship to each other. They live together for some common purpose and are interconnected to each other. Thus, they form a society. It is the social nature of man that helps them to create a society. The existence of a man cannot be imagined without a society. But how does society form? Individuals living together with common likeness and purpose form a group which is called society. Thus it is the individual who creates society. There are different views regarding the origin of society. One of such views is social contract. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J.J Rousseau represent the social contract theory regarding the origin of society.

2.5 SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

In the pre social state of individuals, as we have already discussed the individuals are independent and are not bound up by anything. In that state the society is not formed and therefore there is no question of unity among the individuals. But later when individuals through a contract among themselves come close to each other, the society is formed. It is the theory which is originated during the Age of Enlightenment. It is the agreement among the individuals to come together for the protection of themselves, for their common interest, for a common goal and for the welfare of themselves. In the pre-social state the individuals are in a state of nature where there where there is no government and therefore, no law for the individuals. They live independently. In such a state men are guided by natural laws. But after sometime, they decide to leave their independency and come together to form a state. Thus, state is the creation of individuals. Natural laws are now replaced by man-made laws.

2.6 HOBBE's VIEWS ON SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Man, according to Hobbes is selfish, and is in conflict to one another. They don't act rationally but are driven by their appetites, passions and desires. In such a state of nature, man's life is "solitary brutish, nasty and short". There are no law and justice. There are only natural rights. This state of nature is intolerable and as such men enter into voluntary agreement of establishing an authority to which they surrender all their rights. Thus, they establish a society in search of peace.

The outcomes of the social contract are:

- A society and a ruler is established out of this contract.
- The ruler of the society is not bound by the terms of this contract.
- The people cannot go against the ruler, otherwise it would lead to violation of the terms of contract and thus, they will get back to the state of nature. If the government dissolves, it will lead to the dissolution of the state.

2.7 CRITICISMS

Hobbe's idea of social contract theory has been criticized on the following grounds. The pre-social state has no historical existence. Society exists as soon as the individuals are born. There is inter-dependency between the individuals and the society. His view on the state of human nature that man is absolutely selfish cannot be accepted. Human nature is a mixture of both selfish and altruistic. Again, Hobbe's view that man surrenders all his natural rights is an insult to common sense. Men have their own rights which are practiced under certain compulsions. Moreover, the self-conscious of every individual living in the society cannot results out of a selfish nature of man which is claimed to be in the pre-social state. We can also say that the social-contract between individuals would have been impossible if people would not have developed mentally, socially, rationally and emotionally which is only possible in a society. Again, the ruler is said to be not bounded by the rules of contract and the individuals surrender their natural rights to the ruler. If this is so then the whole powers of the

individuals would have to be surrendered to the ruler. Such a situation would have been worse than the pre-social state. Thus, Social Contract theory as supported by Hobbes is not free from error.

2.8 RELATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE SOCIETY

The term individual refers to a particular human being who has three aspects: body, mind and soul. The individuality of a man can be viewed out of the co-ordination of these three aspects.

Man being a rational social animal cannot be viewed without a society. Their personality, selfhood cannot be developed without a society. A child's nature is revealed in his interaction with the society.

Every individual has a relationship with society. The term 'Individual' is a continuous process. Every individual differs in terms of their social relationship to society.

Regarding the relationship of individual to society, various theories can be discussed, which are as follows:

(a) Individualism: there are various individuals in a society who are independent of each other. An individual is free and is not bound by society. He is free to be separated from a society when it hinders his personal interests. But a society, in no way, can exist without individuals. It is the group of individuals that forms a society. Before the formation of society, each individual is an independent unit. Later, they are tied up by a contract among themselves and form a society. But this theory is criticized in certain grounds. This theory has some loopholes. If individuals actually exist without a society then there is no possibility of social feeling among them. If there is no social feeling then the formation of society would have been impossible. Moreover, a human being cannot totally think of themselves and also cannot totally think of the good of others. He is the combination of both egoistic and altruistic. Such a state of human being cannot be imagined without a society. Again, without a society, the individualistic state

could not have developed mentally and socially and in such a state the contract between the individuals is beyond imagination.

Thus, individualistic theory of the relation between Individual and Society is unacceptable.

(b) Collectivism or Socialism:

According to this theory, the individuals after losing their independence, unite together and form a society. In this theory, a society can exist without an individual but an individual cannot exist without a society. The development of an individual is based on the society. Thus, the society has a full control over individual. This theory opposes individualism. Plato and Aristotle are the supporters of this theory. But this theory is criticized in certain grounds. The collectivistic theory is not acceptable. This theory neglects the existence of individualistic independence of the individuals without a society. But it is not possible. Society is formed by the group of individuals with some common likeness. Thus, individuals have full control over the society which is rejected in collectivism.

(c) Organic theory:

According to this theory, the relation between society and individual is organic and not mechanical. The society has been compared to a human body. Just as human body is composed of innumerable cells, so as the society is composed of innumerable individuals. This theory holds that both society and individuals are interdependent on each other. Leslie, Stephen and Herbert Spencer are the supporters of this theory. The criticism of this theory is as follows: The Organic theory is also not free from defects. Although a society is not a mechanical but cannot also be regarded it as a living organism. There is no similarity between a society and a living organism. A living organism dies but a society does not.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is an individual?
2. What is individualism?
3. What is collectivism or socialism?
4. What is an organic theory?
5. What is a social contract theory?
6. What is a society?
7. What is the relation between an individual and a society?
8. What is the state of human nature according to Hobbes?
9. What are the two motives to be achieved by every individual?
10. What is a natural law?



2.9 LET US SUM UP

- An individual is referred to a particular human being who is incomplete without a society.
- A group of individuals sharing common views, likeness or goals form a society.
- According to Hobbes, the human nature in pre-social state is essentially selfish who think only of themselves and want to protect their interests at any cost.
- Individuals come together with an agreement in the form of a contract which is said to be social contract theory through which they form a society.
- Society is the creation of individuals.
- After the formation of society, the natural laws are replaced by man-made laws.
- Hobbes believes in the sovereignty of the ruler.
- The relation between the individual and society is that of inter-dependence.

- According to individualistic theory, an individual is free and not bound by society.
- According to the theory of collectivism, a society can exist without an individual but an individual cannot exist without a society.
- The organic theory states that the relation between individual and society is organic and not mechanical.



2.10 FURTHER READING:

1) Chakravarty, Sibnath, (1962), An Introduction to Politics: Modern Book Agency Pvt Ltd.

2) Chaturvedi, Archana (2006), Political Theory: Commonwealth Publishers

3) Sanyal, Jagadiswar (1994): Guide to Social Philosophy: Sribhumi Publishing House

4) Stumpf, Samuel E, (1987), Elements of Philosophy, An Introduction: McGrew Hill Book Company



2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No.1: An individual is referred to a particular human being who has three aspects- body, mind and soul.

Ans to Q No.2: Individualism is one of the theories of the relation between individual and society. According to this theory, an individual is free and can exist without a society.

Ans to Q No. 3: Collectivism or socialism is a theory which states that the individuals after losing their independence unite together and form a society.

Ans to Q No.4: An Organic theory is a theory according to which the relation between society and individual is organic and not mechanical.

Ans to Q No.5: A Social Contract theory is a theory according to which the individuals come close together and enter into an agreement or a contract and form a society.

Ans to Q No.6: A group of individuals sharing common views, likeness, or goals form a society.

Ans to Q No.7: The relation between an individual and a society is that of interdependence.

Ans to Q No.8: According to Hobbes, men in the state of nature are equal and have equal freedom. They are selfish, egoistic and cand do anything whatever comes on their way as a threat to fulfill their desires.

Ans to Q No. 9: The two motives to be achieved by every individuals are- appetite and aversion.

Ans to Q No. 10: A natural law, as defined by Hobbes is a general law in pre-social state that concerns with what to do and what not to.



2.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q No. 1: What is a society?

Q No. 2: Is society natural to man?

Q No. 3: What is a social contract theory according to Hobbes?

Q No. 4: What are the theories of the relation between individual and society?

Q No. 5: What is the nature of man in pre-social state?

Q No. 6: What are the two motives to be achieved by every individual?

Q No. 7: What is the theory of Individualism?

Q No. 8: What is an Organic theory?

Q No. 9: What is Collectivism or Socialism?

B. Short Questions (Answer in about 150 words)

Q NO. 1: Write a note on origin of society.

Q NO. 2: Write a note on the social contract theory.

Q NO. 3: What is the relation between an individual and a society? Explain briefly.

Q NO. 4: Write a short note on the state of human nature.

C. LONG QUESTIONS (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q NO. 1: What is meant by Individualism? Is it a satisfactory theory about the relation between society and individual? Discuss.

Q No. 2: What do you mean by collectivism or socialism? Is it a satisfactory theory? Explain.

Q No. 3: What is social contract theory regarding the origin of society?

Q No. 4: What is the relation between individual and society? Discuss.

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