UNIT 3: SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY: LOCKE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this chapter you will be able to:

- Know what is Locke's view on human nature is pre-political state.
- Know how Locke's view is different from Hobbes regarding the origin of society.
- Know the social contract theory of Locke.
- Know some inconveniences of the state of nature.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we have discussed about what is the state of nature, how the individuals enter into a society and what is social contract according to Hobbes and what is the relation between individual and society. In this chapter we shall discuss about what is Locke's view on human nature and social contract. Locke also believes in Social Contract with a slightly different view from that of Hobbes. Unlike Hobbes, Locke believes in a free state of man in the state of nature who lives peacefully and rationally. There is no chaos in the state of nature. Unlike Hobbes, Locke believes that the reason of entering into a society is not due to war but due to certain inconveniences which lead them to enter into a social agreement or contract.

We shall discuss these views in this chapter.

3.3 LOCKE'S VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE

As we have already discussed in the previous chapter about Hobbe's view on human nature, we now have some ideas about what is the state of nature before the formation of the society. Locke also put forwarded his views regarding the human nature in the pre-political state. But his idea is slightly different from that of Hobbes. According to Locke, before the existence of the society, man is free and there is no oppressive restrictions imposed on them. In that state, everyone follow natural laws and live peacefully. It is a state of peace, reason and good will. Locke holds that there is no government before the society come into being. Unlike Hobbes, he considers this state to be pre-political rather than pre-social where the people follow only the law of nature. According to Locke, law of nature means laws created by God which deals with every aspect of human mind. It is a state of perfect freedom for individuals to act according to their own will. An individual does not depend upon the will of other individuals in such a state. It is not a state of war but is a state of perfect happiness, equality, liberty, where they enjoy equal rights. But the question arises what drives the individuals to enter into an agreement of forming a society? Locke states that such a state of nature is not without disadvantages. The drawbacks of the state of nature drawn by Locke are different from the drawbacks drawn by Hobbes. Unlike Hobbes, Locke does not the state of nature as state of war and out of the chaotic situation individuals enters into an agreement to form a society. According to Locke, there are certain inconveniences faced by the individuals in their state of nature which bound them to form a society. With the increase of individuals there would be inequalities regarding the distribution of properties. Such disputes would not be solved as there would be no any trustworthy and defined mechanisms. Due to certain inconveniences, it is felt that the rights of the individual not always protected in that state of nature. Most of the individuals do not respect others' rights. Different individuals interpret the law of nature differently about one thing in their own ways which will create conflicts of the various interpretations

regarding the meaning of law. Moreover there is a lack of proper organization in such state which is a threat to their security from the aliens. Again, the judges would punish the individuals severely who would violate the laws. Due to such inconveniences, people would come together with a contract and unite together to defend one another's rights. There would be a social contract among them.

3.4 LOCKE'S IDEA OF SOCIAL CONTARCT

In order to get rid of the inconveniences of the state of nature, the better solution is to come to an agreement or contract. According to Locke, there are two contracts:

1. Firstly, the individuals come to a contract to form an individual society.
2. Secondly, the individuals come to an another agreement to form a government or a political society.

It is to be noted that the distinctions between these two agreements are important as it shows that the authority is titled by the individuals in society on government so that the government fulfills the necessity of the individuals. If the necessities are not adequately represented then the citizens of the state can distribute both with their deputies and with the existing form of government. Locke's Views in this regard can be maintained as follows;

The people do not surrender all their rights to the state by the formation of the society. It should be noted here that the people came to contract to form a society is due to the inconvenience faced by them in the state of nature. But this does not mean that the individuals would surrender all their rights to their state that they enjoy in the state of nature. The main intention of formation of the society is the making and execution of laws. The political authority is to see whether each man's right is correctly represented. But the individuals do not surrender their rights to the political authority as the authority might misuse them. Thus, the powers of the government are in the hands of the individuals. The government is powerful if and only if it guarantees to preserve the life, liberty and estate. Thus, the ultimate sovereignty rests in the hands of the people. Locke rejects the

idea of absolute sovereignty and believes in the distribution of powers because the persons who make laws would also execute them and they may themselves not follow those laws. They may make and execute laws In their own favor and their interests may differ from rest of the individuals. Thus, the power of the government is routed in the hands of the people. The political society is created in order to secure individual freedom of satisfying their necessities. The individuals can exercise power, have duties towards the society, can enjoy their rights, have responsibilities, can enjoy liberties and also have some constrains. According to Locke, the state looks after the rights and interest of the individuals and ensures the maximum possible the freedom of every citizen.

Locke holds that every citizen has the right to disobey and revolve against the government that violates the natural rights of the individuals. It is the duty of the state to protect the rights of the individuals. If the government fails to protect the rights and liberties of the individuals then the individuals can use force against the government and can take back the power of the government. They can take back to the authority and power from the government. In that case, by revolving against the government, then sovereignty would go back to the society which would led them to recreate government again. Locke says that the small issues should not be taken into account to remove the government until and unless the issues hamper a large number of people. Locke is aware of the fact that if people take away the power of the government or throw away the government from the throne then it would let to nihilism. Thus, he establishes a balanced version of political obligation. From the Locke's view of social contract theory, it is clear that the individuals enter into two contracts. The first contract arises out of the inconveniences faced by the individuals in the state of nature due to which they unite together and form, a society. The second contract informed between the society and the government in which the liberties of the individuals are sacrificed in order to form the stability in the society which is only possible in the political community. In the second contract, the government must protect the rights of the citizen only then the state

obeys its authority. If the government fails to do it then people can rebel against the government. But it would not lead to dissolution of the social contract but it would lead to the removal of the government.

Thus, we can come to know that according to Locke it is the duty of the state to protect the natural rights of the citizen. It is the obligation of the state towards the citizens rather than the obligation of the citizens towards the state. If the state fails to protect and secure the individuals rights, the individuals can dethrone the power of the government.

3.5 CRITICISM

Locke's theory is not free from error. There are some limitations of Locke's theory. They are as follows;

Firstly, the society is not a simple institution that can be easily created or destroyed. There can be many other reasons behind the formation of the society than what Locke suggests.

Again, Locke suggests that the ultimate power rests in hands of the majority of the individuals of the state. In this regard, he fails to understand that a single citizen may be deprived of his natural rights by a single individual or a majority of individuals. He fails to realize that even the majority of individuals can be autocratic. Moreover, Locke's idea of state lacks the concept of moral authority. He just talks about natural rights and necessities supported by majority. His idea of state lacks education, morality and development of the individuals.

By giving power to the state of removing government if the necessities of the majority of the citizens are not fulfilled or if the government misuses the power, it shows that Locke assign negative functions to the state. It leads to the control of the strong over the weak.

Locke is also criticized on the ground that there is a lack of social justice among the individuals. He stresses more on the majority without taking into consideration the needs of the minorities.



CHECK YOUR PROGRES

Q No. 1: What is the state of human nature according to Locke?

Q No. 2: What are the two contracts that individuals enter?

Q No. 3: Why do the individuals enter into a society?

Q No. 4: Do the individuals surrender all their rights to the state that they enjoy in the state of nature?

Q No. 5: What is the function of the political authority?

Q No. 6: What is social contract theory according to Locke?

Q No. 7: Does Locke believe in the idea of absolute sovereignty?

Q No. 8: What is the law of nature according to Locke?



3.6 LET US SUM UP

- According to Locke, man in his state of nature is free and there is no oppressive restrictions imposed on them.
- Locke holds that there is no government before the society come into being.
- Locke considers state to be pre-political.
- There are certain inconveniences faced by the individuals in their state of nature which bound them to form a society.
- The individuals enter into two contracts to form an individual society and to form a political society.
- The people would not surrender all their rights to the state that they enjoyed in the state of nature.
- The government is powerful if and only if it guarantees to preserve the life, liberty and estate.
- The ultimate sovereignty rests in the hands of the individuals.
- According to Locke, every individual has the right to disobey and revolt against the government that violates the natural rights of the individuals.

- Locke holds that small issues should not be taken into account to remove the government until and unless the issues hamper a large number of people.



3.7 FURTHER READING

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

2) Paul Sanatan, Das Dhrubajyoti (2016), Western Political Thinkers: Ashok Book Stall.

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

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1: According to Locke, man in his state of nature is free and there is no oppressive restrictions imposed on them.

Ans to Q No. 2: The two contracts that individuals enter into are: (1) The first contract is between individual and society. It is an agreement to form an individual society.2) The second contract is between individuals and the government. It is an agreement to form a political society.

Ans to Q No. 3: In the state of nature there are certain inconveniences according to Locke due to which the individuals enter into a society.

Ans to Q No. 4: No.

Ans to Q No. 5: The function of the political authority is to see whether each man's right is correctly represented.

Ans to Q No. 6: According to Locke, the individuals enter into agreement to come out of certain inconveniences that they face in the state of nature. This agreement or contract is called social contract. According to Locke, the individuals enter into two contracts: One is to form an individual society and the other is to form a political society.

Ans to Q No. 7: No.

Ans to Q No. 8: According to Locke, Law of nature means the laws created by God which deals with every aspects of human mind.



3.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q No. 1: What is the state of human nature according to Locke?

Q No. 2: What is Locke's view regarding social contract?

Q No. 3: What are the two social contracts according to Locke?

Q No. 4: What is a natural law?

Q No. 5: What is the function of the political authority?

Q No. 6: Why do the individuals enter into social contract?

B. Short Questions (Answer in about 150 words)

Q No. 1: Write a note on Locke's idea of human nature.

Q No. 2: Write a note on Locke's view of social contract.

Q No. 3: Explain the two contracts put forwarded by Locke.

Q No. 4: Explain briefly the reasons behind the individuals entering into a society.

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

Q No. 1: What is social contract theory according to Locke? Is it satisfactory? Discuss.

Q No. 2: What is Locke's view on human nature?

Q No. 3: How does Locke differ from Hobbes regarding his view about social contract? Explain briefly.

Q No. 4: How does Locke's concept of human nature different from that of Hobbes'? Explain briefly.

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