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THOMAS HOBBS (1581-1679)

INTRODUCTION:

- ✘ Hobbes was regarded as the greatest political philosopher from England.
- ✘ Hobbes witnessed the Civil War in England between the monarch and the Parliament in which Charles I was beheaded and monarchy was abolished.
- ✘ Hobbes wrote in favour of Stuarts who tried to wield absolute power.
- ✘ The most celebrated work of Hobbes was the LEVIATHAN (1651) through which he expounded his Social Contract Theory.
- ✘ His political writings were done during the civil wars to promote Absolute Monarchy.



INTRODUCTION.....

- ✘ He had full belief in monarchy as the most stable and orderly form of government.
- ✘ His political philosophy is a part of his general philosophy based on scientific materialism.
- ✘ He is regarded as a contractualist who contributed the theory of Social Contract regarding the origin of the State.

MEANING OF SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY:

- ✘ This theory states that the state arose as a result of deliberate and voluntary agreement among the primitive men in a pre-social & pre-political stage.
- ✘ This theory considers that there was “a state of nature” prior to the creation of the state.
- ✘ The State was created as a result of a Social contract.
- ✘ Thus the theory assumes that before the contract was made, there was no state & law.
- ✘ In his explanation of this theory Hobbes gives his ideas on Human Nature, Social contract and the concept of State.

HOBBS ON HUMAN NATURE:

- ✘ Hobbes views on Human Nature form the basis of his political philosophy.
- ✘ Unlike the earlier philosophers Hobbes makes the individual the spring board of his thought.
- ✘ He treats the individual not as a rational creature but an embodiment of passions, emotions & desires.
- ✘ According to Hobbs, what a man desires he calls good and what he dislikes (aversion) he calls evil.

HUMAN NATURE

- ✘ He asserts that the conception of good or bad is not fixed or objective but subjective, ever under going change.
- ✘ According to him, there is no final end or goal of life.
- ✘ Therefore every man tries to obtain those things which he desires.
- ✘ In other words, the man according to Hobbes is highly self –centered.
- ✘ Again, Hobbes believes that men by birth are equal. Some may have better mental faculties while others may be physically superior. But reckoned as a whole, they are considerably equal.

HUMAN NATURE

- ✘ However, the desire to have the same things brings them clash with each other.
- ✘ He says that competition, glory and differences make people brute and quarrelsome.
- ✘ Every individual has a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ends only in death.
- ✘ In order to live well he has to acquire more and more power and he cannot be satisfied with the acquisition of moderate power.

HUMAN NATURE

- ✘ As all men are roughly equal and desire more or less the same things there is bound to be “War of every man against every man”
- ✘ In short, Hobbes says that man is essentially selfish, contentious, quarrelsome mean wicked, non- altruistic, non- rational, impulsive and self –centered.
- ✘ The second principle of the human nature according to Hobbes is reason and the first one is desire.
- ✘ The reason is regulative power by which he can ensure security for himself.

CRITICISMS:

1. Man is as **neither so reasonable nor so unreasonable Hobbes displays him**. He depicts that man as highly irrational in the state of nature, but suddenly assigns him the faculty of reason which compels him to create a state.
2. Secondly, he depicts human beings as anti- social, self-centered and egoistic. **It is really difficult to understand how such people become social and take initiative** in the evolution of the state.
3. Thirdly, his assertion that all men are equal in respect of their physical and mental powers does not appeal to our reason and **it is contrary to our actual experience**.
4. There is **absolutely no evidence in history** to show that the Human nature is so gloomy and dark.

2. HIS IDEAS ON STATE OF NATURE:

- ✘ The state of nature was a period in human history preceding the establishment of the state.
- ✘ The state of nature according to Hobbes, was pre-social & pre-political. It was a state of anarchy & a state of continuous strife.
- ✘ The life of man was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish & short.
- ✘ Men was devoid of the sense of right and wrong.
- ✘ There was no law, no justice and no rights.
- ✘ Everything depended on physical power which alone could limit the rights of men.
- ✘ Two factors which dominated over men in the state of nature were fear and self-interest.

MAN'S POSITION IN THE STATE OF NATURE:

1. Man was not social.
2. Man wanted to grab more and more.
3. Selfishness and fear made him to wage an endless war with his neighbors.
4. Man's condition was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.
5. There was no peace and the weak had no chances of survival.
6. There was no morality & consciousness of obligation.
7. Man loved power and took pleasure in exercising it.
8. All his energy was bent on satisfying his appetites and desires.
9. Though he had thinking power, man was overruled by his passions.

MENS POSITION IN THE STATE...

10. The spirit of competition prevailed among men.
11. Men realized that peace and cooperation was necessary for their self- preservation.
12. There was no political authority to enforce law and establish peace.
13. The only law that prevailed was the natural law which made men to use force and fraud.
14. Men had the freedom to do whatever they liked, but this freedom was unsafe, a curse and resulted in anarchy.
Thus, the state of nature was very gloomy and too terrible to continue it perpetually, where every man was the enemy of every other man. It was a state of total anarchy.

3. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT:

- ✘ The conditions that prevailed in the state of nature were really intolerable where people lived in constant fear and insecurity.
- ✘ All men came together and entered into a contract in order to escape from horror and anarchy and to form a state so as to achieve progress.
- ✘ So they made up their minds to give up their natural freedom and form a civil society to protect the life and property and to punish the wicked.
- ✘ So they surrendered their natural rights into the hands of a common superior and to obey his commands.

SOCIAL CONTRACT.....

- ✘ The contract was of each with all and of all with each.
- ✘ Each man said to every man “I **authorise 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 authorise all his actions in like manner...**”
- ✘ Thus, the state was created through the help of a social contract.

FEATURES OF SOCIAL CONTRACT:

1. There is **only one social contract** and no room for any second or governmental contract.
2. The authority of the **Sovereign is absolute** and unlimited.
3. The **sovereign is above the contract** and is not a party to the contract and therefore has unlimited power.
4. The social **contract is perpetually binding** on the whole community.

FEATURES.....

5. He **denied the people the right to revolt** against monarch even if he is a wicked one as it may lead to going back to state of nature.
6. Men **surrendered all their rights permanently**, including the right to revolt against the sovereign.
7. **Law is the command of the sovereign.**
8. **Liberty of the people is the gift of the sovereign.**
9. **Hobbes located sovereignty in the hands of one person i.e. the monarch.**

HOBBS' CONCEPTION OF STATE:

- ✘ His conception of state is evident in the “Leviathan” in which he not only enunciated the theory of sovereignty of the state but also the origin of the state.
- ✘ Some of the important highlights of his conception of state are as follows-
 1. To him the **state is originated through the social contract among primitive men** in a pre-social and pre-political stage. Thus the state was created as a result of deliberate human effort.

HIS CONCEPTION OF STATE.....

2. The state was called as a **commonwealth** to protect life and property and punish the wrong doers and the wicked.
3. The **state enjoyed absolute** powers through the sovereign or king who enjoyed unlimited and superior powers.
4. Hobbes was the first thinker to give a statement of **complete sovereignty of the state which is absolute and unlimited**, he said.

HIS CONCEPTION OF STATE....

5. To him, **state is nothing more than a machine** which is based on mutual agreement between men.
6. Hobbes considered **the state as existing to serve men's needs.**
7. The moral authority of the state was derived from **the consent of the governed.**
8. Hobbes supported **absolute monarchy as the form of government** suitable to a state.

CONCEPTION OF STATE.....

9. His idea of state supported the monistic theory of sovereignty.
10. To him, state was absolutely necessary for every individual to escape from anarchy. He explain as to why men obey the state which is a logical explanation.

MERITS OF HOBBS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY:

1. His political philosophy **was highly logical and rational one.**
2. His theory on social contract **located the concept of sovereignty in the hands of the king very clearly.**
3. His criticism of the Roman Catholic church **weakened the claims of the Pope** and reduced the authority of the Church over the state.

DEMERITS:

1. No evidence for the existence of dismal state of nature in the entire human history.
2. The explanation of Hobbes on human nature is nothing but exaggeration and beyond reality. Nature of man is essentially social which he denies.
3. His social contract is a one sided contract as there is only one party to the contract. It is an invalid contract as the sovereign is not a party to the contract.

DEMERITS.....

4. **Contradictory statement**- as man in the state of nature enjoyed Natural Rights without corresponding obligation that too in the absence of a state and society.
5. Complete surrender all Rights except the right of self preservation appears to be an inconsistent statement. **It is against common sense to believe that men would ever surrender all their rights and place themselves fully at the mercy of a sovereign** who is a tyrant.
6. Contract cannot bind on all future generations. But according to Hobbes social contract was binding on all future generations is against any common sense . Because any contract has a binding effect only on those who accept it voluntarily.

