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Utilitarian Ideology through the eyes of Rammohun Roy

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Abstract:

The term utilitarian denote one meaning necessity or utility. The term coined by Jeremy Bentham thus it is known as Benthamite policy. According to him everything has to be judged according to utility. Other political thinker also visualizes the principality of Utilitarianism. Indian social reformer like Rammohun also applied the policy of utility in his social reform movement as an ardent follower of utilitarianism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Key Words : Bentham, Jean, Hampton, Eric, Helvetius, Hume, Metcalf, Mill.

In India during the Colonial rule the mighty British rulers applied several ideological principality . The Utilitarian ideological approach is not an exception to that . Such an ideology gained a momentum in the 18th century in Indian perspective . Let us now explain the backbone of such an ideological approach and its characteristics which existed in social – political and cultural atmosphere throughout the period .

Before going to discuss various aspects of Utilitarianism at first need to mention the term ‘Utopian Utilitarianism’ . Such a term may be defined as a stage of early experimentation into which the basic mode of human functioning and the motivation and pattern of human behaviour was made .¹ This deals with the human psychology and efforts were made to analyse the basic instinct and interest of the people .

Several western political philosopher took up this lead in the study of human psychological from this point of view . They were Claudius Helvetius , Joseph Priestley , William Paley , David Hume and Francis Hutcheson. Among them Claudius Helvetia’s played the most important part in explaining the fundamental motives of human beings which he describe as “ Pleasure and Pain ” .² In this connection it is to be noted that mankind want to get pleasure and advocate pain .

This “ Pleasure - Pain ” theory was developed by Bentham as the theory of Utility , necessity , welfare of mankind . On the basis develop the doctrine of Utilitarianism on a scientific basis . In this distinction with the Utopian stage of Claudius Helvetius and his group . Therefore, the doctrine of Benthamite Utilitarianism may be called “Scientific Utilitarianism” .³

Bentham copied Utilitarianism from material welfare of the people which is the major background behind this . It can be studied under the following heads :

- (i) Utopian Utilitarianism ;
- (ii) Scientific Utilitarianism ;
- (iii) Views of different scholars on Utilitarianism .

As stated earlier the motivation of Utopian Utilitarianism, now its need to mention the practical and theoretical approach of Scientific Utilitarianism .

Bentham analysed the practical situation of the society . He emphasised upon the developmental work of the Indian society . He targeted administrative reforms. He wrote ‘Fragments of Government’ and ‘Constitutional Code’ .

The condition of Indian society focused by Bentham ---- The character of Indian society as focused by Bentham was as follows :⁴

It was primitive , uncultivated , uncivilized marked by ignorance illiteracy , lack of enlightenment , prejudice, superstition, irrationality , corruption , debauchery , un- cleanliness , poverty and a spirit of blind obedience and servitude . Taking advantage of the defects there was established , the despotism of the priest craft who for their vested interests forced the people to accept their ascendancy .

Therefore , Bentham was convinced that some urgent reforms were necessary for the improvement of the condition of the society and the people in the spheres of administration , legislation and economy . The main motives of Bentham behind these reforms was the maximum possible benefits of the Indian people and for this purpose he prescribed a formula ----- “ greatest good always for the greatest number .”⁵

The structure and contain of this reform programme of Bentham may be joined in his writings mentioned above and these reforms recommended by him were as follows :⁶

(a)strong centralised government , (b) good government , (c) benevolent government , (d) effective administration of justice , (e) recognised judiciary , (f) standardisation of administration , legal , judicial , political and social norms of functioning of the government , (g) light taxation , (h) sovereign legislature , (i) human legislation , (j) scientific code of law .

Thus Bentham in his plan of programme of reform combined the two opposite sides --- authority (government) with the people (governed). He also combined in this reform programme the three dimensions of the functioning of the government namely administrative , legislative and judiciary .

In this theoretical framework Bentham used the fundamental principles of Helvetius ---- the pleasure pain instinct of the basic human psychology and develop it as a full fledged substantive , comprehensive reform programmes for the utility of government functioning and benefits of the people . Thus Helvetius’s “Pleasure Pain theory” and concept of ‘Utopian Utilitarianism’ culminated in a doctrine of ‘Scientific Utilitarianism’ under Bentham .⁷

Bentham’s theory and reforms were supported by James Mill, the author of the book “ History of India ” . He agreed with Bentham’s analysis of the Indian situation and his recommendations for its improvement . Basically Mill’s outlook --- liberal , secular , racial , practical and scientific was similar to that of Bentham .

Views of different scholars on Utilitarianism :

(a) **Jean E Hampton** : Jean E Hampton in his book ‘**Specifications of Political Philosophy : Dimensions of Philosophy**’ , made the following observations :⁸

(i) ‘Utilitarianism’ indicates a morally sound legislation by the government on the basis of assessment of moral behaviour of the individuals ;

(ii) Utilitarianism was a scientific theory of a parliamentary legislation based on Utility , not on rights , even natural rights were denounced by Bentham as insignificant ;

(iii) ‘Utility’ denotes a responsibility on the part of the state to maximise the ‘Utility’ of the ‘Community’ .

(iv) According to Hampton , the principal of ‘Utility’ as enunciated by Bentham was a justified individual normal behaviour . As a complement to it , it implied a norm of functioning of the state to maximise the happiness of the State . Hampton explains Utilitarian principle of Bentham , identified this two modes happiness of the people and happiness of the State as interdependent .

(b) Observation of **Thomas R Metcalf** : Metcalf in his book ‘**Ideology of the Raj**’ , explains Utilitarianism as an instrument of social progress and security .⁹ The community protected and secure will be happy and this will create improvement of the society and moral progress . Here he emphasises two factors which are ensure by ‘Utilitarian’ and one progress and security .

(c) **Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams** : ‘**Utilitarianism and Beyond**’ in this edited book , the authors have interpreted Utilitarianism as a moral standard or moral doctrine and its main criteria should be ethical application of the norms of Utility for moral improvement of the State .¹⁰

(d) **Eric Stokes** : ‘ **The English Utilitarians and India**’, (1989), Oxford University Press, endorsed the Bentham formula of administrative judicial and legal standardisation for political , social, economic norms for the happiness , protection and security of the individuals .¹¹ According to Eric Stocks material welfare of the people includes not only social comfort and pleasure but also it covers economic benefit like industrial progress , protection and security of the tenant . Thus we find that partly he recognised the importance of social economy .

Finally we should point out here the opinions of Smart and Hare, whose views have been quoted in Amartya Sen's book (as mentioned above).

Thus according to Smart morality was the criteria of Utility and it was the duty of the State to enforce morally right actions. According to Hare, the main significance of the doctrine of 'Utilitarianism' should be to give 'equal rights' to 'equal interests' of the people impartially, the sum total of which will be 'Utilitarianism'.¹²

Application of the Utilitarian doctrine by Raja Rammohun Roy :

Raja Rammohun Roy was a towering figure of Modern India. He played a dominant role in the modernisation of the Bengal society. He applied the utilitarian doctrine in Indian social structure on the following way :

(i) Approach of Utilitarian doctrine through education policy : Rammohun's education policy was guided by the principles of Utilitarianism in the sense of fulfilment of general welfare of the people. His basic idea was twofold ;¹³

1stly ; To create awareness and enlightenment among the people to remove their ignorance, superstitions, prejudice and blind servitude. He wanted to create a spirit of independent enquiry and a quest for knowledge in place of their applicable and submissive attitude to faith. This would help them to create interest for getting education through which this change will come.

2ndly; Rammohun emphasised particularly on the need of female education since the women were subjected to oppressive imposition of unjust and out dated customs. He believe that without improvement in the condition of women social progress was not possible. The primary step was necessary for the purpose was to create awareness and fearlessness among women to enable them to assert and protest against the injustice meted out against them.

Thus Rammohun's education policy was humanist in character and taking into account its foundation on reason, it was also rational in character. It was also secular in character since religion did not play any role in his education policy. It was also modern in character since the basic objective of education policy was to modernise the society through modern education on the basis of synthesis of western knowledge and learning, western science, technology and English education on the one hand the preservation of oriental knowledge and learning on the other hand. In all these, his basic motivation was utility of the society and people. Therefore, his education policy was a Utilitarian policy.

(ii) Approach of Utilitarian doctrine through social policy : With his equal sincerity Rammohun applied 'Utilitarian' method in his social policy for rationalization, secularization and modernisation of the Indian society free from the tremulous of prejudice, superstition, conservatism, irrationalism and medievalism.¹⁴ Thus he particularly in his social reform programme followed consistent policy of welfare and improvement of the women folk to paid the way of their emancipation. Thus he played a very important role in the abolition of *Satidaha* side by side his protest movement against the evils of polygamy, child marriage, deprivation of women's right to property, promotion of female education etc, because of this Utilitarian approach, his social policy for which he was called 'A Social Benthamite'.¹⁵

(iii) Approach of Utilitarian doctrine through religious policy : In his religious policy Rammohun was thoroughly dissatisfied as he wrote to Jhon Digby with the present condition of religious affairs since the religious state of affairs was dominated and controlled by Brahmin Pandits to use religion for their vested interest or self interest. He pointed out the too much ritual, too much religious creed. So, he wanted improvement for which he established the Brahma Samaj to remove excessive religious affairs. He wanted to restrain the autocratic authority of the priest class, in their vested interest, self-appointed guidance. Rammohun was a pragmatic outlook that is he wanted removal of some provision of Hinduism as applied by Rammohun's.¹⁶ The hindu pandit first distorted and converted and Sanskrit conjunctions for their own convince. From this point of view Rammohun as a social – political reformer wanted an electric form of religion, where different religion co – exists. It was something like *Din – I – Ilahi* of Akbar. In Rammohun the basic principles of different religions and wanted to establish an synthetic religion order.¹⁷ He wanted to present the true religious condition in the Sanskrit Rammohun's purpose was vernacular agreement of Vedanta was translated in Bengali '*Vedanta Sastra*', '*Bhattacharyas Sahit Bichar*'.

(iv) Approach of Utilitarian doctrine through political policy : In the political sphere some objective was there. Rammohun was convinced that the Indian people were not yet eligible for self – government. Because of their inexperience and immaturity. Therefore, he felt that pending the eligibility for their sake and for India confrontation with the British should be avoided and a policy of adjustment with them should be adopted. This was no appeasement but only a wise strategy to utilize British help for India's cause during this period.¹⁸

Rammohun in this light for the first time adopted a policy of state society interaction and wanted British help for the solution of India's problems in state of the British policy of intervention. Rammohun was a strong champion of the freedom of the press and he submitted memorandums for their cause to the Supreme Court and to the king in council. So, that the British took up the matters. Rammohun wanted judicial organisation and reforms and for their purpose recommended the following measures :¹⁹

- (a) Separation of the judiciary from the executive .
- (b) Gradual Indianization of the Indian judiciary .
- (c) Publication of the records of the judicial session in English to be translated into Bengali vernaculars .
- (d) Recognition of the importance of the media in judicial transaction .

Rammohun initiated a policy of constitutional agitation for the fulfilment of the legitimate demands of the Indian people . This Constitutional agitation later on , followed by the Indian National Congress .

From this point of view , we find Rammohun used education , religious , social and political policy ---- all for the benefit of the people . This benefit means Utility , necessity , welfare of the people . Hence we find Rammohun applied the principle of 'Utility' in his different programmes .²⁰

In conclusion , it can be noted that British Ideological approach of Utilitarianism was on the whole a distinct landmark in the history of psychological avenue of Colonial India . No doubt it was the brainchild of Jeremy Bentham , but the more important thing is that when it was applied by the Colonial rulers , it worked successfully , and more precisely can say that it caught the thought process of the Indian intellectuals viz , Rammohun . Thus it was marked as a restless process in keeping the hold of a smart rulers .

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