

HANNAH ARENDT (1906-1975)

Hannah Arendt was famous philosopher and political thinker of Germany in 21th century. She was forced to leave Germany in 1933 and lived in Paris for next eight years. In 1941 she went to USA and became citizen of USA. Some of the important works are “Origin of Totalitarianism”, “The Human condition” and “On Revolution”.

Experience of Inner Sider:

She never wrote systematically like Hobbes or Locke. She faced persecution in his real life. Her writings are reflection of her own experience. Hannah Arendt was unique political thinker. We can't put her under any school of thought. She was staunch supporter of liberty, democracy, pluralism and human rights. She strongly opposed Fascism and Nazism and totalitarian ideology. After disintegration of USSR her thinking became more relevant.

Human Action

She explained importance of political participation through her work ‘Theory of Action’. She gave this theory in her famous work “On Human Condition”. According to Hannah Arendt there are three practical dimensions of human actions (a) **Labour** (b) **Work** (c) **Action**.

- (a) **Labour:** -Labour is primary activity through individuals fulfill his physical needs. At the level of labour, animals and humans being are same.
- (b) **Work:-** The second dimension of human activity is work through which individuals create **permanent object** and permanent institutions. Animals never engage in **work**.
- (c) **Action:-** It is most important attribute of human activity. Human beings are **unique in nature** because they have capacity to exercise **freedom**.

By ‘action’, she means **political participation**. It is **moral act**. Working for the well-being of community, is action. It is political action which differentiates man from other species. Her ideas are closer to **Aristotle** who believes that human being is superior being despite of being part of nature. She believes that **political participation** for welfare of community is most precious and valuable part of human life. Activities like protest, civil disobedience, etc. can be included into ‘action’ action are the most important dimension of human activity. Economic activity is the private dimension of human life. Political activity comes in public sphere. Political activity is Supreme in human life.

Liberty

She was influence by the **existentialist** who believes that each and every human being is unique. Individual cannot be understood through **scientific or positivistic** method. Individual is not reflection of any **idea only**. The meaning of human being can be realized only through the **living experiences**. And experience of each and everyone is unique. This can be realize only through liberty. She said that liberty is more important for human life than material need. Liberty denotes the sign of **imperfectness** of human being. She said that action of human being is comparable to a person who wants to break **his own record** in running.

Although Hannah was most influential thinker of 20th Century. She never indulged herself into **systematic writing** like **Hobbes**. She redefined politics. In her work “On Human

Condition” she wrote that in modern times politics is becoming secondary to **economics**. Politics should not be used as tool to fulfill economic necessities. She believes primacy of **economics** can head to the emergence of totalitarian, government.

Purpose of Politics

Politics is not for obtaining economic prosperity. According to Hannah Arendt, the ultimate objective of political life should be welfare of community and not **self-interest**. She was influenced by existentialist thinkers **Karl Jaspers** who modified the relationship between individual and state. Force and coercion is not the basic element of obedience of state. State is based on the consent of the people state is an extension of the will of people. Power lies in the people not in state.

According to Hannah Arendt ‘political action’ is collective participation of people and state’s role should be confined to endorsing the decision taken **by people**, Government should use ‘**persuasion**’ and ‘**Consensus building**’ as a tool to convince people and **not punishment**.

Existentialist like Karl Jaspers said that human being is unique. There is no objective definition of human being. Individuals is multi layered personality reflects through freedom. Participation in political activity means enjoying freedom. Source of political powers lies in the people, or in community. **Government** is secondary to the **community**. Elections and political parties are essential component of democracy. But **power of citizen** is the sufficient condition of democracy.

Criticism of modernity

She criticizes modernity which creates of **mass society**. She believes that human being is unique. An almost every individual is new and they always make **new identity**. Identity of human being is **plural. Multi-dimensional** nature of human being is suppressed by modern civilization. It highlights the economic need of individual and individual becomes merely consumer. She also pointed out the Marx society behind emergence of **totalitarianism**. Marx society refers atomistic society where individual becomes isolated from **community and collective action**. For Hannah Arendt morality is the Crux of modern thinking. Materialism is Degrading Liberty and uniqueness of individual. Because modern world treat human being a machine.

Civic Republicanism

She believes that active citizenry is the fundamental of democracy. She said that there are two types of citizenship-(a) **Space of appearance**, which includes the active participation of the person in political activities, (b) **Common World**, denotes the presence of political institutions. Space of appearance is more important than common world.

Active citizenry is the foundation of democracy. Human beings are moral and virtuous. Democracy does not stand for rule of majority. Hannah Arendt propounded the term ‘consensual democracy’ which involves active participation of citizens. She redefined relationship between citizen and state by making them interdependent. Law made by people is product of **collective consensus** of people which seeks to secure collective interest. State becomes meaningless without people’s involvement. Holding elections once in 5 years is not the complete meaning of democracy. **Active and everyday participation** of citizen is essence of democracy.

Revival of Aristotle

She was influenced by Greek philosopher, **Aristotle**, who said that participating in political life means '**Virtue in Action**'. She believes that there was **real democracy** in ancient Greek Age, citizens were entitled to participation in political activities. She rejected slavery practiced during Greek age.

She admired democracy practiced in ancient city states. She was critical of practice of slavery, accordance of inferior status to woman and artisans. She was also **critical of communist** ideology and establishment of **totalitarian state** in the name of establishing dictatorship of proletariat. She was not happy, with the modern politics, where economy becomes primary.

Human Arendt was one of the first Political Thinker who emphasized importance of political life. Politics is a means to fulfill morals virtuous ends. She was influenced by existentialists like **Karl Jasper** and **Martin Heidegger**.

Power

Power is different from violence. And power is not force or coercion. Power is based on consent. People or source of power. Collective action of people is a necessity for retaining the power. In case where individual lives singular life the probability of emergence of violence is more.

Hannah Arendt was opposed to idea of human beings defined objectivity. According to her, politics isn't a medium to attain power and influence but to ensure justice and dignity. According to Bhiku Pareek, political activity of Hannah is close to Gandhi, Lenin and Mao. Although, she believed in importance of **community**. But she also believes in individual **freedom within community**. Without consent of people power of state or govt. has no legitimacy.

She believes that govt. role should be that of initiator and every activities of government should have people's approval. Thus she believed in consensual democracy. Instead of political parties she emphasized upon individuals. In **communitarian** life there should be active participation of people in all affairs of community life. Whereas in modern democratic era, people's **role has been confined to vote only**. She believes that thinkers should influence people by performing following role:-

- Imparting knowledge to citizen.
- Persuading people to encourage criticism and disagreement.
- Encouraging people to involve in constructive activities.
- Promoting dialogues among citizen on various issues.

Criticism of Capitalism and Marxism

She criticized capitalism which focuses over **work**. Capitalism promotes modern civilization and they want to make modern institution too. But modern institutions are not preserving liberty. On the other hand she was critical toward Marxism. Marxist only emphasized over **labour**. Since Marxist are looking for fulfillment of physical need of the people. She is of the view that liberty democracy is danger both in capitalism as well as Marxism. This shows that her ideas are full of humanism and it is not divided on the ideological lines. It also proves relevance of Hannah Arendt in the present age of post modernism.

Totalitarianism

The Plato though is a philosophical cause behind emergence of totalitarianism. Apart from that **modern industrial society** is equally responsible for emergence of totalitarianism. In modern society labour and work becomes primary action is considered secondary. For receiving wealth and material prosperity individual is ready to sacrifices their liberty.

Arendt said that totalitarianism is based on **terror** and myth or false ideology. Where, one party usurps unlimited power. She has classified **Hitler, Mussolini** and **Stalin** as totalitarian. Totalitarianism is completely based on terror which controls every aspect of human activity. Totalitarian state not only seeks to control individual body. It also tries to control one's conscience and soul. It kills one's **individuality** and **freedom**.

Philosophically, Plato was responsible for emergence of Facism, said by Arendt. Plato tried to make an ideal and romantic republic. Plato believes in an objective analysis of human being, which is suitable for an ideal republic. Plato is in search of a prefect polity and individual. Same thing is repeated by Fascist. Hitler was looking for an ideal state, liberty, right of human being were suppressed for making an ideal state.

Arendt is of the view that objective definition of individual is incorrect. Human being is different from any material object. Totalitarianism also emerged due to rise of industrial-urban mass society. Individual want to fulfill their material need at any cost. They undermined liberty and rights for sake of materials need. Thus, action is undermined labour and work became primary. Mass society is also known as atomistic society. Propaganda becomes effective in such mass society.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND TOTALITARIANISM

Hannah Arendt made important distinction between **authoritarianism** and **totalitarianism**. But under totalitarianism, tyranny reaches to its climax when opposition is completely wiped out and freedom of speech is taken away through mixture of ideology and terror. In her book 'The Origins of Totalitarianism' she analyzed nature of totalitarianism of 20th Century and particularly 'Nazism' and 'Stalinism'. After the end of World War, people blindly entrusted their faith to totalitarian ruler to escape from immediate economic hardship and unemployment. Thus, people have confined their role to '**labour**' and ignored '**action**' i.e. **political participation**. She believes that foundation of totalitarianism was laid down by Plato who defined human beings more objectivity.

Totalitarianism is specific form of non-democratic government which is based on **violence**. In totalitarianism government is violence is supported by **masses**. Government destroys **individual thinking**. Special mechanism of violence is invented in totalitarianism government. For Hannah Arendt, people must exercise their collective power to ensure their freedom by indulging in **active participation in politics**. Which will prevent the emergence of totalitarianism?

Revolution

Hannah Arendt was ardent supporter of **republican form of government** and **human liberty**. She analyzed American Revolution 1776 and French Revolution 1789 and praised **American Revolution** which paved way for **limited constitutional government** in America.

She believes that limited constitutional government was necessary to ensure liberty. American Revolution was based on 'Action' which ultimately succeeded in attaining its goal.

French Revolution couldn't succeed because it was inspired by 'necessity' and 'want'. The main objective of French revolution was to bring about social and economic transformation. She compared **communist revolution** with **French Revolution**. According to Marx, economy is primary need of individuals and rests are secondary. Thus, she believed that Marxist and communist revolution are not real revolution. It was driven by necessity. French revolution failed as despotic rule was established in France after revolution. Failed to deliver its goal of social and economic transformation.

Communitarian and Republicanism

Hannah Arendt was neither a liberal nor a socialist. She was strong critique of fascism. Although she supported individual liberty. She also believes one should act for community. She doesn't believe in **atomistic** and **individualistic society**. She wanted to make modern democracy more democratic. Power is centralized in political party in modern democracy. She believes in securing **active participating** of people by giving power to them. The state should govern its citizens through **persuasion** and not through **terror** and fear of **punishment**.

Liberty is essence of human being. She never accepted that human nature is egoist and self-centric. Community is having greater importance. Same time community cannot suppress the liberty of citizens. She was very much inspired by **direct democracy of Greek age**. She never rejected represented democracy, but she always tried to reform the representative democracy.

Criticism:

She committed the same mistakes, which is done by Plato. She also divides human activities in three parts labour, work and action.