
UNIT 9 EDMUND BURKE

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) is considered as the most important **conservative** political thinker that England has produced, Conservatism as an important political ideology began with him in the same way as **liberalism** began with John Locke (1632-1704). Though there is near unanimity about his brilliance there is no consensus about him in **terms** of political categorisation. Berlin (1969) described him as an ultra conservative while O' Brien (1968) viewed him as a liberal and pluralist opponent of the French Revolution. Laski (1920) called him a liberal because of his **sympathetic** attitude to the American Revolution and the Irish Question and his criticisms of the British colonial rule in India. Some saw him as a progressive conservative, for "he supported political and economic progress within the framework of England's established institutions" (Miller 1997: 562). Kramnick (1977) described him as "the gravedigger of the Enlightenment" for his **virulent** anti-clericalism and **disembodied** rationalism.

Burke's **thought** is difficult to **categorise**. First, he showed no clear preference for he had both liberal as well as conservative tendencies **which became** evident in his support to the American Revolution and his opposition to the French Revolution. Second, Burke was a prolific writer in his long career as a parliamentarian and therefore most of his writings were situational and could not be considered as well **formulated** political theory texts. His most important political tract **emerged** as a reaction to the French Revolution of 1789 proving that there exists a clear relationship between crisis and significant developments in **political** theorising. Though his fame rests **mostly** for his critique of the French Revolution there were other concerns in him as well.

9.1.1 Restraining Royal Authority

In the tradition of Whiggism, Burke was a vocal opponent of arbitrary monarchical **power** and

patronage. However, he was also conscious of the importance of the institution of monarchy as a natural attraction for obedience and reverence and that it also strengthened the principle of continuity. But these positive aspects were minor, compared to its important role in developing a mixed and balanced government, for which it had to be streamlined. In developing this theme the influence of Richard Hooker (1554-1600), Locke and Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu (1689-1755) were apparent. Burke was an admirer and defender of the British constitution, as he believed that it adequately ensured good government, order and liberty of its people.

9.1.2 Ireland

Burke stood with the Irish cause, though expediency and the interests of a successful political career compelled him to sacrifice theoretical consistency. Furthermore, his open and public stand was cautious, compared to his private correspondence. But in spite of this limitation, which was understandable because of the prevailing mood and consideration for his political survival, he always emphasised the desirability of the emancipation of the Roman Catholics of Ireland. He also spoke of the inevitability of the Irish emancipation.

9.1.3 East India Company

For about a decade, Burke spoke extensively against the oppression, exploitation and misrule in India by the East India Company. "There is nothing more noble in Burke's career than his long attempt to mitigate the evils of company rule in India" (Laski 1920: 35). He criticised British rule in India. Being an old civilisation, much older than Britain, its traditions and customs were to be respected. Interestingly, Henry Sumner Maine (1822-88) used these arguments to challenge John Austin's (1790-1859) theory of sovereignty. Burke's interest in Indian affairs continued with his primary initiative in launching impeachment proceedings against Warren Hastings in 1787. He challenged Hastings' assertion that it was impossible to apply Western criteria of authority and legality to oriental societies. The proceedings continued for eight long years, though in the end, Hastings was acquitted.

9.1.4 American Colonies

Burke championed the cause of American colonies. In the midst of emotional and angry debates like the right of Parliament to tax colonies and the right of resistance to American settlers, he lifted the entire controversy to a different and a higher level altogether. He refused to analyse the problem from the point of view of abstract rights, and raised some very serious and fundamental questions, which were reiterated in the course of his critique of the French Revolution. Furthermore, he charged that the British policy was inconsistent, and emphasised the need for legislative reason.

9.2 CRITICISM OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution, at least in the initial period had lot of support in England. One popular defense was from Richard Price (1723-91). Burke's masterpiece emerged as a critique of Price. His scathing criticism surprised many, destroying many of his close friendships. Equally shocking for many was the clear difference between the young and the old Burke. Burke's earlier criticism of the king's control over the parliament, his efforts of more than a decade to expose oppression, exploitation and misrule in India by the East India Company, and

his championing the cause of the American colonies was at variance with his total denunciation of the French Revolution. Unlike many other contemporaries, he refused to draw any parallels between the French events and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Burke's *Reflections* was written during the revolutionary years. Macpherson (1980) pointed out that one should not overlook the second part of the title of the book, because it was very significant, i.e. his immediate concern was the perceived danger of the French revolution's impact on England and in other parts of Europe.

In *Reflections*, Burke made a detailed criticism of both the theoretical and practical aspects of the Revolution. He pointed out the dangers of abstract theorising, but was realistic enough to provide for an alternative mode of social progression. Unlike Josepli de Maistre (1753-1821) and Louis Gabriel de Bonald (1754-1840), who outrightly defended orthodoxy and absolutism, Burke provided a framework for change with continuity. "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve" (Burke cited in Curtis 1961: 49). As Burke pointed out, these two principles of conservation and correction operated in England during the critical periods of the Restoration and the Revolution, when England did not have a king. But in both these critical times, a totally new one did not replace the entire edifice of the old order. Instead, a corrective mechanism was achieved to rectify the deficiencies within the existing constitutional framework. As such, it balanced the old and the new.

Burke criticised Jacobinism for its wholesale attack on established religion, traditional constitutional arrangements and the institution of property, which he saw as the source of political wisdom in a country. He often used the term "prejudice", by which he meant attachment to established practices and institutions. These provided a bulwark against sweeping changes, particularly those that followed from a rational critique. He did not support everything that was ancient, only those that held society together by providing order and stability. His main audience in the *Reflections* was the aristocracy and the upper middle class of English society, which he perceived to be the upholders of stability and order. He challenged the English ruling class to respond appropriately to the plight of the French Queen, otherwise it would reflect the lack of chivalry and demonstrate that the British political order was not superior to that of the Continent.

Burke further argued that the period of the *Magna Carta* to the *Bill of Rights* was one of slow but steady consolidation, reflecting continuity and change. This enabled the British constitution to preserve and provide unity within the context of diversity. Inheritance was cherished as a political necessity, for without it both conservation and transmission were not possible. While there was a process of gradual change in Britain the French made an attempt to achieve a complete break with the past and create afresh with emphasis on equality and participation. With this inherent belief in natural aristocracy, he debunked the very attempt to create a society of equals. Burke emphasised the necessity of well-ordered state, to be ruled by a combination of ability and property. Such an order would be inherently based on inequality. He linked the perpetuation of family property with stability of a society. There was no place for either proportionate equality or democratic equality in his preference for aristocratic rule. Like Adam Smith (1723-90), he stressed the importance of preserving and protecting property. He favoured accumulation of wealth, rights of inheritance and the need to enfranchise property owners. While Burke was socially conservative, he was a liberal in economics, the two being fused together uneasily.

9.3 CRITIQUE OF NATURAL RIGHTS AND SOCIAL CONTRACT

Burke pointed out the intricacies of human nature and the complexities of society, and because of such considerations no simple analysis of human nature or power was possible. Rejecting any claim of either economic or political equality, he provided a theory of rights within this large framework of his political philosophy. He emphasised partnership, but denied any corresponding equal rights in the enjoyment of economic and political privileges. In understanding and perpetuating this philosophy, the British constitution had stood the test of time. Emphasising the utmost need for continuity, Burke pointed out that in the areas of morality, principles of government and ideas of liberty, there was no need to make a fresh beginning every time. Giving the example of the English achievement, he pointed out the inevitability of a continuous process of adaptability and change within the larger structure. Rejecting atheism and pointing out the enormous importance of religion for a proper functioning of civil society, he characterised the individual as a religious animal. He saw no conflict between the existence of an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy and an established limited democracy. The point that Burke made was that in the modern age the coexistence of institutions was of utmost importance for effective functioning and efficiency. He stressed the fact that all authority was to be exercised as a trust, and in this his philosophy was akin to that of Locke, but he emphasised that the continuity of society had to be preserved at any cost. The overall structure of society could not be just reduced to a mere contract between two or more parties. It was not a trade agreement involving paper, coffee, calico or tobacco. Such agreements reflected only transient interests, which could be dissolved by the parties involved. The intricacies of social relationships had to be understood on a very different plane.

...It is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born. Each contract of a particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place (Burke cited in Curtis: 59).

Along with the rejection of the contract, Burke rejected the other Lockean fundamentals—natural law, the rights of the individual and the separation of Church and the state. The only laws that he recognised were the laws of God and the laws of a civilised society. Burke did not reject the argument of human rights, except that he sought to rescue the real rights from the imagined ones. He shared with Locke the view that political philosophy was based on theological foundations but rejected the derivative of political and juridical equality from the argument that God created all human beings as equal. He also rejected the idea of creating order with the help of human reason. He charged the doctrine of natural rights with 'metaphysical abstraction'. It failed to take into account the differences that existed between societies. Following Montesquieu, he insisted that different countries merited different legal and political systems, keeping in view the differences pertaining to climate, geography and history. The universality of natural rights doctrine overlooked national, geographical and cultural distinctions.

Though his criticism of natural rights seemed similar to that of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), there were significant differences. Burke's conception of human well being was not hedonistic as in the case of Bentham. In fact, it was more like Aristotle's (384-22 BC) idea of '*eudaimonia*',

linking moral virtue and duty with that of political morality and duty. Furthermore, Burke suggested maximisation, but by stressing the moral to the mathematical he was closer to Aristotle's 'phi-onesis'. He also rejected the utilitarian idea of trade-offs. Unlike Bentham, Burke was also cautious about endless new schemes. Besides emphasising political virtue, Burke also stressed the need for an elite, which enjoyed a privileged position because of its contribution to the common good. He placed aristocracy under this category. In parliament, this elite could be distinguished from others with reference to ownership of property, for inheritance was a sure reason for conservation. In this context, the French National Assembly did not consist of property owners. Instead they were lawyers who were "artful men, talented, aggressive, ideologically inclined, impractical and dangerous, if not alienated". The basic problem was that the talent that made a good lawyer was not enough to make a good ruler and be a part of the natural aristocracy. The basic shortcoming of a lawyer was that his experience had a very narrow base, which meant that both the diversity of humankind and complexities of public affairs were beyond his grasp.

9.4 LIMITS OF REASON

Burke questioned the very basic argument that a stable political structure could be established only on the basis of reason. He pointed to the limits of reason and its role in understanding society. In fact, Burke questioned the whole style of rationalistic thought, an argument reiterated by Michael Oakeshott (1901-90). Quoting Aristotle, he cautioned against *à priori* deductive reasoning in moral arguments. The philosophy of the French Revolutionaries was a 'false philosophy', because of its insistence that all authority derived its sustenance from reason. As opposed to reason, Burke emphasised wisdom as something more than prejudice. The philosophy of natural rights based on the new principles of liberty and equality was not conducive to the establishment of order. Veneration of authority developed over a period of time, and the denunciation of one authority by a different group led to its denunciation as well. The abstract revolutionary ideology inevitably led from subversion to anarchy, because it brought a consciousness of rights but not of duties of order, discipline and obedience to authority. Burke repeatedly stressed that societies needed awe, superstition, ritual and honour for their stability, and to be able to secure the loyalty and support of those on whom it depended. He warned that a state, which dismissed this entire edifice aside in the name of rational enlightenment, would ultimately be a state based merely on a lust for power.

Burke emphasised that the dignity of the human being came through socialisation. One rendered obedience to society not because it benefitted us, or because we had promised to obey it, but because we saw ourselves as an integral part of it. Though he rejected the divine right of kings, he affirmed, like Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC), that nothing was more pleasing to God than the existence of human 'civitates'. He accused the natural rights theorists of not merely "imprudence and intellectual arrogance but of blasphemy and impiety as well" (Waldron 1987: 95).

9.5 CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

Burke was also perturbed by the democratic aspirations of the French revolution, in particular by the doctrines of popular sovereignty and general will. He regarded democracy as the "most shameless thing in the world" (Burke 1969: 190). He was skeptical of the political ability of the ordinary people. He was an elitist, totally unconcerned about the plight of the masses. For him, the best form of political practice was one that was played by a few of the enlightened and aristocratic elite. Burke believed that elections gave an opportunity for the enfranchised

citizens to choose a wise elite to govern them. In a modified form, Schumpeter provided a similar model of elitist theory of democracy in the 1940s. Like Aristotle, Burke favoured citizenship limited to a segment of adults who had the leisure for discussion and information, and were not mentally dependent. The Whigs in England and America favoured ownership of property as a necessary condition for citizenship. In view of the fact that average individuals were guided by their baser instincts, government had to keep them apathetic so as to prevent their selfishness from undermining communal life.

Burke accepted inequalities as natural and unavoidable in any society, and that some would enjoy an enhanced status. In the well-ordered society, this ruling elite was a genuine one, a 'natural aristocracy', for the mass of people were incapable of governing themselves. They could not think or act without guidance and direction. For Burke, government was not based on general will, but wisdom. For Burke, political representation "is the representation of interests and interest has an objective, impersonal and unattached reality" (Pitkin 1967: 10). For Burke, aristocracy of virtue and wisdom should govern for the good of a nation. As in other areas, even in representation, there was no clear and well laid out theory of representation. But out of Burke's speeches and writings emerged some key ideas. He regarded the members of parliament as an elite group, a group of natural aristocracy. The mass of ordinary people needed the guidance and direction from this elite since they could not govern by themselves. Representatives were genuinely superior to the electorate. The representatives had to possess the capacity for rational decision making. They were to be men of practical wisdom. This was a negation of Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1712-78) theory of direct democracy. The representatives need not consult or be bound by the views of the voters. Furthermore, obligation and ethical considerations, and questions of right and wrong guided governmental action. Burke championed rational parliamentary discussion, which provided the right answers to political questions. And as a participant, the representative need not consult the voters. They would enjoy complete freedom, for they have no interest other than the national interest. With contempt for the average voter, Burke advocated restricted suffrage so that the selection process of the natural aristocratic group of parliament would become fool proof. He also distinguished between *actual representation* and *virtual representation*. Since an area would have one dominant interest, he saw the merit of virtual representation against actual representation. Virtual representation was based on common interest. By this logic, even people who did not vote were represented. The localities, which did not have actual representation by this criterion, would have virtual representation. Burke was careful in noting that this logic of virtual representation did not hold for the disenfranchised Catholics of Ireland and the people of the American colonies. Pitkin (1967: 169-70) rightly pointed out that Burke's position was highly inconsistent. His view of representation endorsed the 17th Century notion of representation, and had very little relevance in contemporary times. However, it helps us to understand the anti-democratic bias prevalent during Burke's period. The Burkean theory centred on the parliament. Conniff (1977: 331-332) tried to refute Pitkin's analysis by questioning the theory of objective interest and a commonly held agreement of the parliamentary elite on what constituted the common good. However, Burke's insistence that every recognisable constituency had one dominant interest and that a consensus could always emerge out of parliamentary discussion vindicated Pitkin.

9.6 RELIGION AND TOLERATION

Burke's views on religion exhibited both liberal and conservative perceptions. He defended traditional practices of the established church, unless there was an 'intolerable abuse'. He equated attack on the established Church of England as tantamount to an attack on England's constitutional order. He was convinced that the established church would foster peace and

dissuade civil discord. His liberal temperament made him advocate and defend toleration for most religious sects, including non-Christians. He was perturbed that the Protestants did not support toleration for the Catholics. He did not believe in the truth of any particular religion but was concerned about the effect of changes in traditional religious practice on political stability. Toleration and religious freedom could be refused if it threatened civil peace and considered atheism as complementary to political radicalism. He was condescending towards Rational Dissenters as being better than atheists, for at least they believed in God, though not in the divinity of Christ. However, he castigated all those who corrupted and attacked religion as being destructive of all authority, thereby undermining equity, justice, and order—the foundations of human society.

Burke did not quarrel with the atheists as long as they did nothing to publicly attack or subvert religion. While he began to dislike Hume for his open contempt of religion, he remained friendly with the irreligious Smith, even though the latter blamed Roman Catholicism for impeding economic and political progress, but there was no denunciation or revolt against religion. Burke's critique of the French Revolution was also due to the latter's anti-clericalism. The famous cry "hang the bishops from the lampposts" during the early days of the Revolution was an indication of the "insolent irreligious in opinions and practices". The nationalisation of the Church's property by the National Assembly in 1790 was a move against traditional religion, and represented the larger goal of subverting establishing authority and civil society. The revolutionary fervour only fostered hatred, animosity and suspicion, rather than affection and trust. It undermined the traditional civilising ties of the French citizens. Burke placed a great deal of emphasis on manners and etiquette that controlled passions and will.

9.7 CRITICISMS OF BURKE

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) criticised Burke's position in his *Rights of Man* (1791). In his reply, he defended Enlightenment liberalism and tried to correct "the flagrant misrepresentations which Mr. Burke's pamphlet contains" (Paine 1973: 270). Both agreed that in contemporary European society there existed a very large proportion of illiterate and unenlightened people. Burke, following Aristotle, argued that individuals differed in their capacities, which is why any attempt to level would never succeed. Paine, on the contrary, attributed the very large numbers of illiterate people in the 'old' world to bad governments. In total contrast to Burke, he championed the cause of universal suffrage, representative government, the rule of law, and a sympathetic attitude to the poor. He denounced the hereditary system, whether in the name of monarchy or aristocracy, for a "hereditary governor is as ridiculous as an hereditary author" (cited in Jackson 1969: 111). Unlike Burke, Paine, following Locke, justified government as an outcome of a social contract between the people themselves. He was critical of the British constitution for being unwritten, making it unhelpful as a reference point. Its precedents were all arbitrary contrary to reason and common sense.

Burke and Paine were representative symbols of the conservative and radical responses to the French Revolution. It was noteworthy that both of them championed the American cause, but were on opposite sides with regard to the French experiment. Their basic disagreements could be understood in light of their support to the American cause. For Burke, "Taxation without representation" violated traditional English rights and liberties and that the English were on the wrong side of history, because they violated their own well-established practices. For demanding redressal, the Americans did not base their arguments, like the French did, on a notion of natural rights. Paine, on the other hand, found that the British action in America was a violation of universal reason and natural rights. He rejected hierarchical authority, and asserted that "setting up and putting down kings and governments is the natural right of citizens" (Paine

1973: 42). He regarded aristocrats as a class of unproductive idlers and parasites, who lived off the surplus and the exploitation of the industrious classes. As such, in a rational, reconstructed society they would not be missed at all. The striking similarity between a radical Paine, a liberal John Stuart Mill (1806-73) and a socialist Claude Henri Comte de Rouvroy Saint Simon (1760-1825) is too clear to be missed.

Early Liberal Feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) and Catherine Macaulay Sawbridge Graham (1731-91) criticised Burke and regarded the French Revolution as something new and unique, spreading the message of an enlightened spirit. Wollstonecraft echoing many contemporaries of her time, in her reply to Burke, pointed out the apparent contradictions of a liberal Burke supporting the American cause, and the conservative Burke opposing Jacobinism. His praise of hereditary rights and tradition and his emphatic stress on the conservation of existing political relations indicated a lack of reason and a predominance of sentiment, leading to social stagnation, hindering the progressive and dynamic nature of socio-political life. She accused him of championing the maintenance of unequal property, and if necessary, of despotism and tyranny, for property not only restricted liberty by creating inequalities, but also undermined sociability. Among unequals according to Wollstonecraft there could be no friendship and mutual respect.

Wollstonecraft, unlike Burke saw the Church as fundamentally corrupt, having secured vast property from the poor and the ignorant. With the help of David Hume's (1711-76) *History of England* (1754-62), she tried to show that English laws were product of contingencies rather than the wisdom of the ages. She insisted that only those institutions, which could withstand the scrutiny of reason and were in accordance with natural rights and God's justice, deserved respect and obedience. Furthermore, she assailed Burke for defending a 'gothic affability' more appropriate for a feudal age, than the burgeoning commercial age marked for its 'liberal civility'. Rejecting Burke's theory of prescriptive rights, Wollstonecraft contended that human beings by birth were rational creatures with certain inherited rights, especially equal rights to liberty compatible with that of others. She criticised Burke's views on women as a "symbol of man's need for a feminine ideal, not woman for herself". Wollstonecraft, like Paine, portrayed Burke as a brilliant but misguided voice of the past. Though Paine's criticism of Burke was more effective and well-known, as evident from his famous phrase that Burke "pitted the plumage but forgot the dying bird", it was Wollstonecraft who advocated a more radical stance than Paine for ameliorating the plight of the poor. Paine did not have any plan for social levelling other than taxing the rich and insisting that the appalling conditions of the poor must be improved, but he failed to offer any economic solution to the problem (Dickinson 1977: 267). On the other hand, Wollstonecraft suggested the adoption of economic means for improving the condition of the poor by dividing estates into small farms and endorsed plans for the working class, which could lead to their betterment. Wollstonecraft was the first to lay stress on the equal rights and status for women by pointing to the incompleteness of the natural rights doctrine, which understood the individual to be a male and left out the female.

Another refutation came from James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae* in 1791. In it he insisted that Burke had trampled upon the ideals of Whiggism and aligned himself instead with Tory superstition and chivalry. In opposition to Paine, Mackintosh invoked the ideals of 1688 in explaining the events in France. He supported the Revolution, for it attempted to make France a commercial society.

9.8 CONCLUSION

Burke used the historical perspective to understand politics. His conservatism rested on a philosophically backed skepticism about the possibilities of discerning the historical processes

by which societies developed. It was not concerned, as in other forms of conservatism, to discover an ideal in the past to which one must go back. His reputation was that of a reformer, for he held that one must reform in order to preserve, and that a society without the means of reformation could not have the means of preservation. However, he emphasised on limiting the ambit of reforms to eradicate the present evil, and not aim at realising a blueprint that would conform to rational standards. For Burke, revolutionary change was undesirable not only for the uncontrollable violence it unleashed, but also because it invariably led to seizure of power by those who were unable to use it harmoniously. Reforms, on the other hand, could also be dangerous if taken to extremes, making them obtuse and unacceptable to their participants. Change could be enduring and feasible only if it attempted to conserve. Burke impressed upon the importance of acting prudently, improve by preserving and reform by changing, and not by embarking upon a complete break with the past and traditions. He respected institutions that had worked reasonably well over a period of time, but did not favour the status quo. His respect for prescription was applied to tested schemes and not to untried ones. Hannah Arendt (1906-75), endorsing Burke demonstrated that for a revolution to succeed in protecting liberty and avoiding terror had to be limited in its ambit and political in nature like the American one and not social like the French and Russian revolutions (1973). Burke also favoured penal reforms, abolition of slavery, and reduction in the number of governmental sinecures.

Burke did not, like Locke, believe that conveniences were created when human beings mixed their labour with the earth and its raw materials. He did not see any contradiction in the expansion of commerce and the importance of prescription, though he admitted that it was not easy to strike a balance between the roles of the market and the state. The state was necessary to ensure political stability. He defended a society not based on coercion and thus was a precursor to the liberal J.S. Mill and not the conservative, de Maistre (Bromwich 1998: 4). Burke made politics dignified and efficient. He deliberated judiciously on important issues, and "has endured as the permanent manual of political wisdom without which statesmen are as sailors on an uncharted sea" (Laski cited in Kirk 1960: 23). However he was not free from the prejudices of his time and tried to create a natural aristocracy in politics, which is a negation of equal opportunity on which the mass democracies of our time are based. Today we believe in just the opposite that Burke believed in, namely that politics is too serious a business to be left to politicians alone.

9.9 SUMMARY

It was with Edmund Burke that Conservatism as a political ideology came into being. He is known best for his critique of the French Revolution which was in complete contrast to his earlier criticisms of the misrule by the East India Company and his support for the cause of the American colonies. He criticised Jacobinism for its wholesale attack on established religion, traditional constitutional arrangements and the institution of property, which he saw as the source of political wisdom in a country. He favoured accumulation of wealth, rights of inheritance and the need to enfranchise property owners. While Burke was socially conservative, he was a liberal in economics. He criticised the theory of Natural Rights and Social Contract. He emphasised partnership, but denied any corresponding equal rights in the enjoyment of economic and political privileges. He questioned whether a political structure could be established only with rationalistic thought and cautioned against deductive reasoning in moral arguments. He was elitist and regarded democracy as the "most shameless thing in the world". The best form of political practice was one that was played by a few of the enlightened and aristocratic elite and accepted inequalities as natural. He advocated restricted suffrage. On religious grounds, Burke supported the established Church. He was not against atheists, as they did nothing to publicly attack or subvert religion.

9.10 EXERCISES

- 1) Explain Burke's criticisms of natural rights and social contract.
- 2) Write a short note on Burke's views on citizenship and democracy.
- 3) How are Burke's ideals different from our beliefs of today?