

MACPHERSON'S THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

Macpherson is one of the most important political thinkers to write on democracy in recent time. His aim was not only to construct the conception of democracy but to provide a moral foundation to it. He has presented his democratic theory after examining the condition of contemporary world. He has examined the liberal concept of democracy, and finding out its inadequacies he has propounded his own theory of democracy, by which he has tried to resolve the problem of liberal democracy. Many philosophers treat him as a Marxist, but this is only half truth. Though he was too much impressed by Marxian concept of equality, yet he cannot be called a blind follower of Marx and a mere translator of Marx' view into his own framework. He has sought out the relevant views of Marx for contemporary world, and mentioned them also in his concept of democracy. Macpherson has acknowledged that no political theory can remain relevant to all types of society. "Every political theory is a product of its age and has a timebound quality. Since its basic premises and assumptions are 'drawn from' and 'opt for' a particular kind of society, its value is relative to that kind of society. When men and society change, its premises no longer apply to them and it turns out to be no longer as accurate as it was."¹ Macpherson has given a systematic mechanism for analyzing any theory. He argued that "any clear inconsistency is to be treated as a clue to inadequately stated assumption."²

He has observed that today, democracy does not mean the same thing as it was meant previously. The meaning of democracy is quite changed as "until about a hundred years ago democracy was a bad thing, that in the next fifty years it has become a good thing and that in the last fifty years it has become an ambiguous thing."³ It has become an ambiguous thing today because : now it does not mean a mechanism for choosing a government. It is not necessary for

democracy that there would be periodical elections and various political leaders, whom people choose as their representatives, and people would have voting power. Macpherson argued that this is also a type of democracy, but not essential nature of democracy. He made a distinction between strict and broader concepts of democracy.

According to strict concept, 'Democracy is merely a mechanism for choosing and authorizing governments, or in some other way getting laws and political decisions made in which majority is supreme; it not only controls the rulers but the actually ruling power is itself majority decision and broader aspect of democracy has generally been taken to mean something more than a system of government. Democracy in this broader sense has always contained an ideal of human equality, not just equality, as could only be fully realized in a society where no class was able to dominate or live at the expense of others."⁴ and this type of equality requires "not only one man one vote but also one man one equal effective right to live as fully humanly as he may wish."⁵ This right requires man to make best use of himself. So to Macpherson political theory of democracy is a social theory that is itself desirable.

He emphasized that in a democratic system government should be 'by and for the people' and by 'people' he means 'common people' 'a large number of oppressed people.' Though many previous liberal thinkers (as Mill) realized that real majority is of the oppressed class people. So they should have a political voice, yet they were afraid of achieving majority voice for this oppressed class people. Macpherson was bold enough to admit that "democracy originally meant rule by the common people, the plebeians. It was very much a class affair, it meant the way of the lowest and largest class."⁶

The essence of democracy is that all the members of society have right to develop their essential human capacities fully and freely. It is necessary to promote, the moral and intellectual worth of all individuals. But now the problem is, what are the essential human capacities of which full and free development is needed for democracy. Macpherson says that the most important capacity of man is 'self direction' to choose one's goals and try to realize them.

Man is not a passive consumer of utilities. He is active exorter and developer of his capacities and uniquely human attributes are "seen as ends in themselves, not simply a means to consumer satisfaction."⁷

But man does not have only good qualities, he has some bad also, but Macpherson argues that bad qualities are not essential to human nature, these are developed by the situation of society, but there certain qualities as poetry and painting are also developed by society. He gives another criteria for deciding what are essential human capacities. He says "which can be harmoniously developed by all - this implies that in order to be fully human a man needs only those capacities that are destructively contentions and concersity that essentially human capacities are fundamentally harmonious."⁸

The human capacities are fully "developed under his own conscious control for his own human purposes."⁹ and he agrees with Mill in believing that each should follow his own way of life, because one can know better what is good for oneself. So a man should design and direct his own plan of life. Macpherson agrees that this essential nature is an ethical nature. Man does not behave in this way, but through this behaviour his essence can be fully realized. Several capacities, that a man has can be developed by exercise. So it is his moral duty to develop all his essential human capacities, and any society that gives the freedom to develop all essential human capacities can be called democratic and (but to realize these capacities man needs power) "powers are his potential for realizing the essential human attributes said to have been implanted in him by Nature or God (as with Hobbes) his present means however, acquired to ensure further gratification of his appetites."¹⁰ So power here means 'ability to exercise one's capacities and to use 'capacities' for what is there to be exercised. "¹¹

Macpherson distinguished the two concepts of power, the developmental power and extractive power. These are not the two categories of power, rather these are the two different ways in which the same power can be exercised - the ability to develop his own capacities and ability to extract others' capacities for his own purpose. For democratic theory the exercise of developmental

power is essential and this is defined as his "ability to use and develop his essential human capacities." ¹² It is called an ethical capacity because it decides what the human essence is. It requires a concept of man as doer and exorter than merely receiver and consumer. Macpherson does not point out what man does but what is needed for the development of human essence, and extractive power means - 'ability to use other's power capacities.' It is a capacity to power over others, the ability to extract benefits from others. It is illegitimate because it hinders the development of 'developmental power' and a society is democratic can be decided only on the basis whether people are free to develop their essential human capacities but in the way of exercising 'developmental power' there are some impediments. Macpherson has categorised these impediments in two categories :

1. Physical impediments - this is the natural impediment, so political theory does not pay any attention to it.
2. Social variable impediment. Political theory tries to remove This type of impediment. These are of the three types :
 - i) Lack of adequate means of life - Every man has the energy to exercise his capacities. So inspite of energy he requires maintainence of material for taking part in the life of community.
 - ii) Lack of access to the means of labour - Every exercise of human labour requires materials to work on, with it requires access of materials.
 - iii) Lack of protection against invasion of labour While exercising his capacities man should be free from the invasion of others.

Macpherson says that the third impediment can be removed by giving civil liberties to citizen and by providing protection for person, but the two former impediments cannot be checked in a capitalist market society. A few people accumulate all the capital and most of the people have to depend on them for their livelihood. This is not due to scarcity of the means of life, but it is because of the class division of the capitalist and labour. Increase in productivity cannot check this scarcity because this society sees man as infinite consumer of utilities though he is not a bundle of appetites seeking satisfaction but a bundle of conscious energies seeking to be exerted. If he would see himself as doer, enjoyer and

appetites seeking satisfaction but a bundle of conscious energies seeking to be exerted. If he would see himself as doer, enjoyer and exorter of human capacities, this scarcity would be ended. This is not a natural scarcity but a human constructed scarcity.

Liberal democrats believe in the maximization of aggregate utilities, but the measurements of utilities are subjective and each person's idea of satisfaction is different from others and "it involves estimating whether change in the distribution of different goods between persons would add more satisfaction for some person than it would subtract from them and from others." ¹³

Macpherson says that this is not true for maximization of powers. So the goal of any democratic society should be maximization of powers, and in this process we would count not the satisfaction which can be got by the exercise of any capacities but the ability to exercise these capacities and if one increases his power, this does not diminish other power, but the power should be taken as developmental power. Extractive power is inconsistent with it, because if one increases ones extractive power, it decreases the developmental power of others. So the increase in extractive power does not increase the aggregate amount of power but "increase in the ability of any persons to use and develop their capacities would not be accompanied for any others." ¹⁴ And extractive power is not essential capacity of human being. Only some have this power, so it encourages great inequality in power also, as if 'A' has both extractive power and developmental power and 'B' has only developmental power, then 'A' s exercise of extractive power extracts benefits from B and uses 'B's abilities for his own purpose and it minimizes B's developmental power, but Minogue in his essay 'Humanist Democracy' argued that in every act man exercises his extractive power over others because in purchasing a thing from producer, we have benefitted from others capacities for example, in buying a bar of chocolate, one exerts extractive power over the workers of the chocolate factory but this is a wrong interpretation of the concept of extractive power, because in purchasing a thing one benefitted from the capacities of others yet not compelling others to work for one self. This is just a simple exchange, we purchase a thing from producer and pay him wages.

We are not ruling over others capacities. Macpherson says "when he pays a man to fix his television and he is an independent repairman then there is no extraction. He has simply exchanged his skilled labour and working capital for his payment, but if he is an employee then his employer exercises extractive power over him, not customer. The very few people have the capacity of extractive power and the increase in extractive power decreases developmental power but "increase in the ability of any person to use and develop their capacities would not be accompanied by a decrease for any others."¹⁵

Equality and freedom both are central to Macpherson's democratic theory, but his main emphasis is on equality. He believes that all human beings are equal, so they must have an equal right to live as fully humanly as they wish but Macpherson has argued that this equality should be real equality, not as liberalists argue for equality, because if men do not have equal resources of living or self development then what is meant by saying that all have equal right to live as fully as they wish. Liberalist's equality is illusionary equality, because in this concept of society, capitalist would accumulate all of the capital and most of the people live without any capital, they do not have sufficient resources to develop their capacities, they have to pay for the access of the capital, then what is meant by saying that both property owner and non owners have equal right to develop their capacities. To a non property owner it is impossible, so the right to do an impossible thing is useless. Minogue in his essay "Humanistic Democracy" criticises Macpherson for his essential equality by arguing that he has confused equal right with equal right of things but Macpherson believed, that without equal resources of living notion of equality is only conceptual, because if one has not sufficient materials to maintain one's life, is it meaningful to say that he has an equal right to live as fully humanly as he may wish. He can wish, he can wish everything but cannot live according to his wish. Equality is means and end in itself. Equality in democracy is not only "one man vote, but also one man one equal effective right to live as fully humanly as he may wish."¹⁶ and to effect this type of equality in a capitalist society, only redistribution of material wealth services is not sufficient because division of class is embodied in this very concept

of capitalistic society, which diminishes equality. Equality must be seen in this way that each and every individual shares in the products as well as the power directing society's productive forces. Everyone then only has right to enter into the true realm of freedom. Though one can argue that it would create sameness and dullness in the society where there are differences that are culturally rich but Macpherson says that it would not create sameness because same result is neither necessary nor needed for it.

Freedom or self direction is the main human quality which distinguishes him from animal being. "Man is unique in the world in having both the capacity for choice and ability his activity is human only so far as it is directed by his own design and not undertaken "at the dictate of another." ¹⁷ But the freedom should be equal, Macpherson criticised capitalist system, because in this system though all are but some are freer than others, because here some accumulate most of the capital and some live without any capital, they pay for the access of capital. Though freedom is necessary for human beings yet freedom cannot be maintained at the cost of equality, and where there is conflict between freedom and equality freedom should be sacrificed for the sake of equality and for the future freedom. "Equality within a community were traditionally rated more highly than individual freedom." ¹⁸ Macpherson has given priority to equality than freedom because he argued that democratic society would be classless and for so a single party system also can be said to be democratic where people have general will for national unity and economic development. This system can be seen emerged in underdeveloping countries where the goal of people is not only to attain independence but there after to modernize their society and to rapidly raise the material productivity. Human beings can attain full freedom and humanity by the expression of general will. Communist society is also democratic in the sense that its goal is the fullest self realization of its members, though it cannot be said to be democratic in strict sense. It requires the revolution by working class people, so this would be a class society at first because working class liberate themselves by taking political power. It was "needed to transform the capitalist economy to a socialist economy. When the transformation was completed and abundance for all was attained

there would be no more need for class rule. "19 Macpherson argues that though communist societies are democratic, because their aim is "humanization of the whole society " yet the communist states are not democratic. Communist state would be democratic if and only if it would fulfil the three conditions : (i) there should a full intra party democracy and (ii) openness that party membership should be open for all (iii) the price of the participation should not be above from the realm of average men's participation. These requirements are necessary for any communist states to be democratic.

Macpherson analyses the liberal concept of democracy too. In the first sense he equates liberalism with individualism as liberalism insists upon each individual's right to choose his own purposes, beliefs, religion, marriage partner, way of life, occupation form of government and so on. In its second sense it is related with possessive individualism which means man's essential nature is constituted by the freedom from the dependence on others. Man is proprietor of his own person. He is necessarily linked with ownership of property. Human society is series of market relations. Each individual's freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules necessary to secure the same freedom for others and human society is a place for exchange between individuals and in the third sense liberalism treats human beings as consumer of utilities and a bundle of appetites.

But these three senses are not interrelated with each other. One can be maintained without accepting the others. For if one accepts the principle of freedom of choice it is not necessary that he would trace human being as possessive individual and passive consumer.

Macpherson argues that in liberal democratic state, democracy was liberalised. Democracy was introduced in these states for the maintenance of liberal state. By the addition of democracy, liberal state has provided its ideals democratic base, and its aim was to promote liberal society which was not essentially democratic or an equal society. The job of competitive party system was to uphold the competitive market society by keeping

based on freedom of choice and they justified themselves on the equality of individuals. So it was unfair for them to exclude any one from market competition but the non property owner is generally excluded from market competition because he has no political power and who has no political power has no purchasing power and has no voice in market competition. So the demand for franchise was raised for equal political weight, but equality here does not mean the social and economic equality but equal right to compete with others. Liberalists take democracy as a mechanism for ensuring fair competition in market system. "By admitting the mass of the people into the competitive party system the liberal state didn't abandon its fundamental nature, it simply opened the competitive political system to all individuals that has been created by the competitive market society." ²⁰

Macpherson criticises capitalism because it depresses self development of most of the persons and it creates great inequality because unlimited right over property and capital leaves many people with no capital for the means of their labour and capitalism encourages the continuous net transfer of powers. "What is transferred from non owner to the owner of the means of labour (i.e., of the land and capital) is the non-owner's ability to labour i.e., his ability to use his own capacities productivity during the time contracted for. The owner purchases that ability for a certain time and puts it to work. The ability, the labour power is transferred. The actual work is performed by the non owner. But in a very real sense the actual work is owned by the owner of the capital. He, having purchased the ability to labour, has the right of ownership in the labour that is actually performed." ²¹

Capitalist controls both the performance and production. So both the ability to work and the ownership of the work itself and consequently the value added by the work is transferred to capitalist. He decides how much and who will enjoy the access to the means of labour. So it is a power relation between owner and nonowner. The nonowners have to pay for the excess to the means of labour. The unlimited right over property is for owner a right to accumulate, what he has gained by his own labour but to work, it is an exploitative right of owner on the non - owner. Capitalist compels

non - owners to work under his supervision, not according to their own designed plan of life.

Macpherson distinguished between productive and extra productive power. "Man's productive power is his ability to use his energies and capacities in the production of material good. His extra production power is his ability to use his energies and capacities for all other purposes, that is his ability to engage in activities which are simply a direct source of enjoyment and not a means of material productive and capitalism diminishes both the productive and extra productive power. Though the labour transfers all his productive capacities to the capitalist yet he cannot transfer all the values. Only his labour capacities on materials are transferred and rest is lost, because if labour works for his own purposes its value would be the satisfaction value plus value which its application added to the materials on which it was applied."²² But in selling his labour the satisfaction value is lost. A man whose productive power is out of his control cannot exercise his developmental power, his labour can be said as a mindless work. The distinction between developmental power and extractive power is simply spontaneous work and compelled labour. Macpherson says that developmental power is absent from the working hours of the man who has to sell his labour to that extent which differs from the way he might have chosen to do. Man exercises his developmental power only when he is working under his own control, according to his own design and for his own purpose and men are fully human if left to leisure and non-compulsive labour, but in a capitalistic system labour have to engage in compulsive labour.

Capitalism's distribution of wealth is not just because it rewards not only to labour but to ownership also. Some argue that ownership also should be rewarded because the owner of the capital trained the workers in new techniques, purchases good machines. He gives wages to the workers for their labour, he works hard to decide what type of production is needed in market and how much, he makes plan for it, advertises for it and so after that what benefit is gained must belong to owner also. He does not compel labours to work for him. Workers are free to work or not to work for owner, but this explains only half truth, because labour's freedom

to work or not to work for bourgeois is not a real freedom, the capital is accumulated by capitalist and if labours want to survive, they must have to work for capitalist. So the capitalist compels labours to work for him, though indirectly.

Macpherson argued that capitalism confused between ownership of the means of life and ownership of the means of producing means of life. Ownership of the means of life is justified because it is necessary for developing capacities but ownership of the means of producing the means of life is neither necessary nor justified because it leaves out most of the men underdeveloped. They have no sufficient material resources to develop their essential human capacities.

In a capitalistic system though labour sells his labour and gets wages yet this should not be confused with the simple exchange. In a simple exchange every one has land or capital to exert his energies and he is independent producer and has the control over his energies and skill and is free to make best advantageous exchange but in this he sells the product of his labour not his labour itself. In capitalist economy, some people accumulate most of the capital and others have to sell their labour to survive. In a capitalist system labour can be bought and sold and there is distinction between labour and capital. Property is taken as right to exclude others but it should be an obligation not to exclude others. "There is amongst the pressure diminishing the extent of private property, the markedly increasingly public awareness of the menaces of air and water and earth pollution which are seen as denial of a human right to a decent environment, a denial directly attributable to the hitherto accepted idea of the sanctity of private (including corporate) property. Air and water which are scarcely regarded as property at all are now being thought of as common property - a right to clean air and water is now coming to be regarded as a property from which nobody should be excluded."²³ Though previously these things are not regarded as property because people are being aware to the value of these things and trying to exclude it from pollutants all are free to utilise it.

Macpherson says that now the concept of property is changing and property is no longer to be considered to consist solely of private

property. The demand for public property is now increasing "in the most capitalist countries the market is no longer expected to do the whole work of allocation. We have moved from market society to quasi market society." ²⁴

Macpherson takes this change as a forwarding step towards the achievement of his participatory democracy because he says that the pre-requisite of participatory democracy is the reduction of social inequalities and man's image as exeter and developer of his capacities. People are now realising that their political apathy encourages the concentration of corporate power to dominate them, and capitalist system is increasing the great inequality in the society and people's demand for public property is a step to end the capitalistic market system.

For Macpherson the simplest model for participatory democracy is of pyramidal system in which direct democracy would be at the base level and delegate democracy at every above level. Democracy should be started on industrial basis where people can choose their delegates by direct discussions and consensus of the majority and after that those delegates can choose some above level delegates by direct discussion and consensus and they can choose some another above level delegates and at the end there would be only one the top-most representative, the supreme controller, though he was not chosen by the people themselves yet also he is their representative, because he is chosen by their chosen representatives. Delegates should be subject to recall. "The delegates would have to be sufficiently instructed by, and accountable to those who elected them to make decisions at the council level reasonably democrat." ²⁵

Macpherson appreciates the existence of different political parties in any system of government and he says that in a non class divided society also the competitive political party system is desirable. But he was worried that these parties would have monopoly of political power. So he tried to combine the competitive political party system with pyramidal, direct/indirect democratic system. Macpherson realised that the participatory democracy can be sustained only when people are active and when social and

economic inequalities are reduced. Both the conditions are related with each other, for the fulfilment of former latter is necessary and for the fulfilment of the latter former is necessary. Macpherson says that people are now being active, and criticising the capitalistic market system.

Sometimes it is said that Macpherson has confused the political theory of democracy with social theory. He is quite right in emphasising that political theory has to work on society. So for its success it is required that it should be consistent with the structure of the society but at all these two are different. Macpherson has treated social and political theory as the same thing.

He has collapsed the distinction between politics and economics by treating wealth as merely political and he believes that in a real democracy every one has "right to live as fully humanly as one may wish". This principle allows one to have an unlimited right over property. But he has criticised the concept of private property. He believes that a demand for public property is an optimistic sign for the change in the concept of property but this is not a change in the concept of property, but only a new type of ownership.

The another confusion of his democratic theory is his belief that complete harmony would be achieved only when the exercise of the extractive power would be restricted but it is not true, because disharmony is not only due to exercise of extractive power but there are some other factors also responsible for it.

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