



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF BRITAIN:II

MODULE I-AGE OF TRANSITIONS

JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704)

IV SEMESTER

BA ENGLISH COMPLEMENTARY PAPER

DR.SR.VALSA MA

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

LITTLE FLOWER COLLEGE, GURUVAYOOR



- One of the greatest philosophers in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century.
- Regarded as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers and commonly known as the “*Father of Liberalism*”.
- He is known for his social contract theory.
- He lived during the one of the most extra ordinary centuries of the English political and intellectual history.

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- It was a century in which England witnessed conflicts between Crown and Parliament and the overlapping conflicts between Protestant , Anglicans and Catholics.
- Consequently the country plunged into civil war and finally Glorious Revolution.
- John Locke was the advocate of natural rights theory.
- He wrote his Two Treatise on Government.
- The English Revolution was the inspiration behind this work.



- The introduction of the work was written after the Glorious Revolution and gave the impression that this work was written to justify the glorious revolution.
- The First Treatise of Government – aimed at refuting the theological basis of the divine right of kingship.
- Early in the First Treatise, Locke denies that either scripture or reason supports the Absolute Monarchy.
- Ardent supporter of constitutional monarchy.



- The Second Treatise of Government gives his positive theory of government.
- Here he provides an alternative account of origin of government.
- Locke's account involves several device which were common in 17th and 18th century political philosophy – natural rights theory and social contract.
- Natural Rights : those rights which we are supposed to have as human beings before ever government comes into being.



- We might suppose that like other animals, we have a natural right to struggle for our survival.
- When Locke comes to explain how government comes into being, he uses the idea that people agree that their condition in the state of nature is unsatisfactory, and so agreed to transfer some of their rights to a central government.
- This theory is known as Social Contract.
- Under such contracts, people and government had mutual obligations



- Government should protect the rights of the people and people would act reasonably towards the government.
- If the ruler violates the contract, the people had right to rebel.
- Thus the government was the product of contract and its basis was the consent of the people.