

Q) What is the meaning of political obligation? Discuss its characteristics.

Ans: Political obligation refers to a moral requirement of the state to obey natural laws. It relates to the set of legal duties to be performed by the citizens, their non-compliance is usually followed by punishment or prescribed by the prevailing rules/laws. But it is not the same as legal obligation. Political obligation goes beyond the sphere of legal obligation. The problem of political obligation is how to establish a legitimized political as well as social order. Its domain lies between ethics and law.

Its origins are unclear, however it traces to the Ancient Greeks. The idea of political obligation is philosophical, focusing on the morality of laws, rather than justice. Discussions of political obligation started during the era of social contract theory by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. The idea of political obligation was renewed by Thomas Hill Green around the late 1800s, who termed it as "obedience to the law." A more detailed account can be traced in the ideas of Socrates and Plato.

The term 'obligation' originates from a Latin word 'obligate' implying something that binds men to an engagement or performing what is enjoined. It has various connotations in different realms:

- (i) **In the realm of ethics**: In ethics obligation informs a man to fulfill or discharge a duty enjoined on him and acceptable to him by his rational understanding.
- (ii) **In the field of jurisprudence**: It requires a man to obey law by which he is tied to some 'performance'. Since law regulates the social life of men, the principle of legal obligation takes the form of a bond between private person tied to one another for the performance of some act desired by the enforcement of law.
- (iii) **In the world of politics**: It takes the form of a bond between man as citizen and the authority which he lives.

Definitions:

According to Thomas Hill Green, "It is intended to include the obligation of the subject towards the sovereign, the obligation of the citizen towards the State, and the obligation of the individual to each other as enforced by a political superior."

John D. Rockefeller says, "Every right implies a responsibility; Every opportunity an obligation, Every possession, a duty."

Richard Bach opined," Your only obligation in any lifetime is to be true to yourself."

Essential characteristics of political obligation

- (i) **Honest public service**: As government is a difficult art, it is the duty of every conscientious person to be seriously interested in the management of public affairs. Those placed in high offices should direct their thought and action to the general good. Political obligation are not merely of an intellectual character, but it involves obligations of an honest public service.
- (ii) **Political legitimacy and effectiveness**: The concept of political obligation automatically involves the case of political legitimacy and effectiveness. Political effectiveness implies actual performance in the light of the extent which the political system provides for the performance of the basic functions of government as the people and powerful groups in society perceive them. Political legitimacy refers to the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing social, economic and political institutions are most appropriate for society.
- (iii) **Critical attitude**: The idea of political obligation not only informs people to obey the authority of those in power, it also desires them to be critical about the way authority is exercised. The people should scrutinize the actions of their rulers. They should resent any invasion on their liberties. Thus, political obligation involves resistance to authority.