

Unit 8

The Conceptual and Theoretical Issues of Power

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Learning Objectives

After going through this Unit, you will be able to

- understand the meaning and concept of power
- explain the articulation of power among the elite and in local communities
- critically discuss the works of major thinkers on power

8.1 Introduction

In simple terms power refers to the ability of a person to influence the behaviour of another person or a group of persons in accordance with his / her own wish. In the words of Tawney (1931: 229), "Power may be defined as the capacity of an individual, or group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in a manner in which he desires, and to prevent his conduct being modified in the manner in which he does not". Power heralds a relationship of subordination and superordination between people. Many social scientists, particularly sociologists, are chiefly interested in the consequences of the play of power in social relationships. In this Unit, we begin with the meaning and concept of power and go on to the major theoretical approaches to the understanding of power in sociological writings. Here, we briefly review the viewpoints of six sociologists who explain the different dimensions of power. Later in the Unit, we discuss the articulation of power in two mutually opposed contexts: the elite on the one hand and the local communities on the other.

8.2 Concept of Power

Power always entails a social relationship between at least two actors. It cannot be an attribute of one person. To say that an individual has power is meaningless unless it is stated over whom this power is exercised. An individual or group of individuals who hold power is / are able to get others to do what they want them to do. If those on whom the power is exercised resist or refuse to obey those who are powerful, they are punished in one way or the other. Power always gives rise to asymmetry in relationships. Those who have greater access to limited resources e.g., control over finances, ownership or control over means of production and / or means of distribution are more powerful than those who do not have the means or

the opportunity to control such resources. The use of sanction in imposing one's will is an important constituent of power and it is on this count that power differs from influence.

Coser (1982), delineated two major traditions in the conceptualisation of power that can be distinguished in sociological writings. The first one focuses on power as the imposition of the will of actor A (who may be an individual or a collectivity) upon actor B despite B's resistance. Here, actor B is dominated by actor A. This approach may be traced in Max Weber. The second tradition focuses on power as a resource at the disposal of collectivities and used for their benefits allowing them to make use of it to attain their objectives. Here power is conceptualised as a collective facility. This approach may be traced to Talcott Parsons.

Two questions assume relevance at this stage, why do some people wield power while others do not? Why do some people command and others obey? At the outset one tends to think in terms of physical might and strength. The stronger person wields power and commands while the weak person does not wield power and obeys. This, however, does not hold true always. It may be said that inequality of resources leads to inequality of power, so if the resources within a specific sphere were equally balanced, there would be no power relation between two parties.

The answer to the twin questions is far more complex. It is important to know the basis on which the one who holds power claims obedience and the obedient one feels obliged to obey. Gerth and Mills (1953) explain that in itself power is simply the probability that one person will act as another person wishes. The obedience may rest upon fear, rational calculations of advantage, lack of energy to do otherwise, loyalty, or any other reason.

Dennis Wrong (1968: 679) comprehensively explains, "*If* an actor is believed to be powerful, *if* he knows that others hold such a belief, and *if* he encourages it and resolves to make use of it by intervening in or punishing actions by others who do not comply with his wishes, *then* he truly has power and this power has indeed been conferred upon him by the attributions, perhaps initially without foundation, of others". A group, which is unorganised, lacks common goals or common interests, and is not ready to exercise power, is not treated as powerful. Often people who are in power are able to avoid the surfacing of issues that are of significance to the powerless. They are able to keep at bay the complain of the powerless people that they are not cared for.

At this stage it is important to distinguish power from related concepts:

a) Power and Authority

When power acquires legitimacy or justification it is understood as authority. It may be noted that authority receives voluntary obedience. A person who has authority may exercise command or control over other persons. Take the example of a senior bureaucrat who assigns tasks to his/her subordinates and may even transfer some of them to another city. This is because, the bureaucrat has the authority to do it by virtue of his/her position and status in the government machinery. In formal organisations authority is clearly specified, and dispensed through rules and laws, of the organisations. It may be understood at this stage that the exercise of authority does not necessarily imply the superiority of the person who commands. A teacher may be a

better scholar than the Principal of the school who dismisses him/her. It is simply because of the authority, which vests with the Principal that he/she may suspend a teacher. Power may, therefore, be executed in formal organisations as institutionalised authority and as institutionalised power in informal organisations.

b) Power and Prestige

E.A. Ross (1916) drew attention to prestige as the immediate cause of the location of power. It was said that the class which has more prestige will have most power. Prestige, therefore, is an important source of power. It is not appropriate to associate prestige with power because prestige is usually not accompanied with power. In itself power becomes the basis of prestige i.e., when a person has power, he / she has prestige but when a person has prestige he / she may not have power.

c) Power and Influence

There is a close connection between power and influence. Power commands obedience and submission; influence is persuasive rather than coercive. Power calls for intended control, which is usually executed through sanctions while influence does not involve the use of sanctions or punishment. Influence, is not essentially accompanied with power. Newton, for example was a man of influence but not power. A policeman may have power but not influence. In the same vein, the Prime Minister of the country is a person with both power and influence.

d) Power and Dominance

Power exists and expresses itself in inter-group relations. It is associated with status that people occupy in formal organisations while dominance is associated with one's personality and may be treated as a psychological concept. Power, on the other hand, is associated with the structure of society itself and may be treated as a sociological concept (Bierstedt, 1982).

8.3 Theoretical Considerations

The major theoretical considerations in the context of power focus on (i) its potential to achieve goals, (here power is treated as equivalent to domination enfolding the strategy of exercising power over someone) and (ii) its potential to generate solidarity and collective autonomy (here power is understood in the larger framework of pursuing collective action as enfolded in the strategy of exercising power to achieve common goals). Against this backdrop, the major currents in the sociological conception of power are discussed here.

a) Max Weber: Power and Domination

According to Weber (1914, 1920) 'power' (*macht*) as a general concept is distinct from 'domination' (*herrschaft*) as a specific phenomenon. Power is defined as an actor's chance to impose his/her will on another (even against the resistance of the latter) in social relationship. What is interesting to note is the proposition that the degree of power is dependent on the nature of submission over the one on whom it is being exercised. Stated simply, power is more if the probability of submission to the will of the one who holds it is higher. It may be safely said that the power of an individual(s) is measured in terms of the chance(s) of imposing the will. Here, the basis of power or the basis on which imposition of will is called for is not important.

Scott (1996:22) explains that power is a potential that is realised through the actions in which an actor engages. This potential is determined by accidental or fortuitous circumstances (eg. individual has power over others because of better physique or because he/she has information that is not available to others) as much as by structurally defined opportunities and capacities (e.g. when social distribution of resources improves or worsens the chances of realising his or her will) at the disposal of an individual. Domination or *herrschaft*, on the other hand, presumes the presence of a *herr* or master. The chief difference between power and domination is that the former does not imply the right to command and the duty to obey while the latter implies the probability of gaining willing obedience.

There are two contrasting types of domination. The first kind of domination is one that involves a rational and calculative maneuvering of interests in one's favour. Often the individual who exercises domination of this kind is able to convince the subordinate actors that it is their interest which is being served by allowing him/her do what he/she is doing. This often happens when small companies sell their goods to a monopoly retail outlet. In doing so they subject themselves to the power of the retailer since their livelihood depends on his/her goodwill. The second type of domination is the one which is exercised by virtue of authority. Here, domination is exercised by an individual or group because it is legitimised as authority. Those on whom domination is exercised accept the commands and demands of those who dominate as basis of their own behaviour.

Box 8.1: Power and Domination

'Weber gave particular attention to those forms of power that involve stable and enduring relationships, and when power is structured in this way he learned it 'domination'. Power is structured in this way he termed it 'domination'. Power is structured into distinctive forms of domination through processes of rationalisation: Power relations that were formerly matters of unreflective custom and habit become more conscious and deliberate social practices. The rationalisation of action involves replacing the unreflective patterns of customary and habitual action by actions that are oriented towards calculations of self-interest and commitment to ultimate values. Weber seems to imply two forms of rationalisation, which may be called, respectively, 'instrumental rationalisation, and 'value rationalisation'. Customary or habitual forms of social order evolve through instrumental rationalisation into forms of social order that are sustained by calculations of expediency. Through value rationalisation they become forms of social order that are sustained by the conception of legitimacy (Weber, 30, cited here from Scott 1996: 22-23).

The Power in this kind of domination emerges from the probability that the command will be obeyed. In addition, Weber distinguished between three kinds of authority, rational-legal authority which is based on norms, ordinances and legality of the offices of those who exercise authority e.g. the authority exercised by the tax collectors, policemen, bosses in the office; traditional authority which is based on a belief in the sacred quality of long-standing traditions and in the legitimacy of those who exercise authority e.g. the domination of the eldest person the family; and charismatic authority which is based on devotion to the sacred quality, heroic strength or exemplary character of a person, e.g. authority of god-men (see Aron 1967).

b) Karl Marx: Class and Power

Marx (1954, 1955) is known for his conception of class and class struggle. More specifically, he identifies two classes: the *bourgeoisie* (or the ruling class) and the *proletariat* (or the working class) in the capitalist society. He says that the proletariat rules and commands obedience from the *bourgeoisie*. The basis of the power of the *bourgeoisie* is control over the capital on the one hand and its hold over the military force and production of ideas. In the words of Bottomore (1964: 24-25), "The lines of conflict are most sharply drawn in the modern capitalist societies, because in such societies the divergence of economic interests appears most clearly unobscured by any personal bonds such as those of feudal society, and because development of capitalism brings about a more radical polarisation of classes than has existed in any other type of society by its unrivalled concentration of wealth at one extreme of society and of poverty at the other, and by its gradual elimination of the intermediate and transitional social strata". The *proletariat*, on the other hand seek to increase the capital for the ruling class. The relationship between the two classes is one of exploitation in which the ruling class gains at the expense of the wage labourers constituting the *proletariat*.

Workers produce commodities for the *bourgeoisie* for which they receive wages. The wages are just enough for their subsistence. Surely, there is a vast difference between the value of the commodity the workers produce and the wages that they get this difference appropriated by the ruling class. The *proletariat* class is perpetually engaged in struggle over its wages and conditions of work. Earlier the struggle was disorganized and ineffective. Modern industry and factory system of production ushered an era of political organisation of class struggle. The class conscious political organisation emerged. Marx opines that some day, the *proletariat* will overthrow the *bourgeoisie* and get liberation from the long standing domination and exploitation.

c) Robert Michels: The Iron Law of Oligarchy

Michels believed that the craving for power is inherent in the nature of human beings. Those who acquire power, seek to perpetuate it. Against this backdrop, he propounds that democracy calls for organisation, which leads to oligarchy. The trend towards oligarchic rule in party organisations is better known as the Iron Law of oligarchy. He agreed that the "democratic currents of history" often "break ever on the same shoal". They are, however, "ever renewed". One of the reasons for the renewal of democracy is that oligarchies were felt to be oppressive and were overthrown. Michel insists that democratic currents will always break the Iron Law (Michels 1959).

It may be understood that the large collectivity of people in an organisation cannot govern or administer their common affairs. Over the period of time, specialisation develops and division of labour evolves. Organisations become increasingly complex. Some people are chosen to represent the masses and execute their will. According to Michels (1927) every organisation however democratic in the beginning develops an oligarchic character. He was convinced that masses await leaders to govern them and take care of their concerns. The leaders derive power from the incompetence of the masses in the domain of political life. The incompetent masses submit to the leaders of whose expertise they are convinced. Oligarchies preserve the stability and longevity of leadership. More importantly, the oppressive conditions in themselves, do not lead to unrest. It is the awareness of those conditions that generates class struggle. The struggles and revolts are often suppressed.

Michels maintains that it is appropriate to ascertain the limits imposed by oligarchies over individuals. He says that decentralisation does not necessarily give way to enhanced liberty in the hands of individuals; neither does it enhance the power of the rank and file. Usually, it serves as a mechanism by which weak leaders seek to get away from the dominion of the stronger ones. The weaker leaders, however, may establish a centralised authority within their own domains. One oligarchy gives way to many smaller oligarchies each powerful in its own sphere. He laid thrust on developing the spirit of free inquiry, criticism and control of the leaders among the masses. It may be noted that these are imperative in the process of strengthening democracy (Zeitlin 1987).

d) Steven Lukes: Power and Human Agency

Lukes affirms that all power is attributed to individual or collective human agents. Often human agents have several options or alternatives before them from which they choose their course of action. "Human agents exercise their characteristic powers when they act voluntarily on the basis of wants and beliefs which provide them with reasons for so acting. Such an exercise of the power of human agency implies that the agent at the point of action has the power to act otherwise, that is, at the least the ability and the opportunity both to act or not to act, it is in his power to do either; there is 'an openness between performing or failing to perform the action', and there is no set of external circumstances such that in those circumstances the agent will necessarily so act' (Lukes 1977, rpt. 1982: 159). Two conclusions emerge from this perspective: the one who exercises the power had the option or the alternative to act differently; and those on whom the power had the option or the alternative to act differently, if power was not exercised over them.

Lukes's proposition of power accepts that despite the fact that actors operate within "structurally determined limits", they have a certain degree of autonomy and could act in a degree of autonomy and in a different way. In other words, there would be no place for power in a condition of total structural determinism and imposed constraints that determine the options of human agents. He cites the example of an employer who declares some of his workers redundant because he wants to cut costs. In another case, an official government liquidator declares an insolvent company bankrupt which throws the workers out of work. While the first case is a case of simple exercise of power, the second is not because we assume that the liquidator had no alternatives before him. Lukes conclusively says that social life may be properly understood as a dialectic of power and structure, a web of possibilities for agents to make choices and pursue strategies within given limits.

e) Anthony Giddens: Power as Dependency and Domination

Anthony Giddens's concept of power in the context of interaction is rooted in terms of domination. He distinguishes between power in the broad sense and power in the narrow sense. In the broad sense, power is explained as the transformative capacity of human agency. Here, the term capacity refers to the capability of an individual to bring about a change in the course of a series of events through intervention. On the other hand, power in the narrow sense is largely relational. It is the capability to effect results when these outcomes depend upon the agency of others. The basic difference between the two lies in the agency. While use of power in the broad sense

is grounded in the capability of an individual to effect outcomes directly, the use of power in the narrow sense is grounded in the capability to effect outcomes in situations when they depend upon others (Stewart 2001).

More specifically, in the narrow sense, power implies dependency upon the agency of others and the capability of an individual to prevail upon them. The thrust is on domination on the part of the individual who may be said to hold power and compliance on the part of others over whom the individual exercises control. This relationship then, may be understood as one of domination. Thus Giddens (1976: 111) writes, 'It is in this sense that men have power over others; this is power as domination'.

Giddens's basic conception of power has to do with acquisition and use of resources or capabilities expressed in struggles and subordination. In Giddens's own words (1976:111), 'Power in either the broad or restricted sense, refers to *capabilities*. Unlike the communication of meaning, power does not come into being only when being 'exercised', even if ultimately there is no other criterion whereby one can demonstrate what power actors possess. This is important because we can talk of power being 'stored up' for future occasions of use'. Later Giddens (1984) suggests that reproduction of structures of domination leads to generation of power. Power, therefore, depends upon the distribution of resources and the capability of individuals to make the most of them effectively. He upholds that in actual situations everyone does have possibilities of exercising power. An individual in a subordinate position is never completely dependent and is often able to convert the available resources 'into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system' (Giddens 1982: 32). Giddens opines that power is not always oppressive. In fact, power may best be understood as the capacity to achieve outcomes. In fact, power flows smoothly in processes of social reproduction in the larger matrix of structures of domination. More importantly, despite the fact that constraints of power cannot be ignored, power is often a medium for attaining freedom or emancipation.

f) Michael Foucault: Power as Domination

Michael Foucault identifies power with domination in conceptual, methodological and political terms. He distinguishes between the character of modern and classical power within the framework of domination. Disciplinary power as modern form of domination stands out in sharp contrast with sovereign power as pre-modern domination. Firstly, while disciplinary power is constant and completely pervasive, sovereign power is periodic (therefore not constant) and of low social penetration (therefore not all pervasive). Secondly, while domination in the disciplinary model makes the required action happen through political rationalities and technologies of power that seem to be inescapable, domination in the sovereignty model is expressed through prohibition, and if that fails, the punishment for the action which should not have been performed. Thirdly, while in the disciplinary model there is contrasting constitution of actors (subjectivisation in the sense of control and dependence) the sovereignty model is based on the givenness of the actors involved (Stewart 2001).

In the words of Foucault (1982:212) himself, "This (modern) form of power applies itself to everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise

in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power, which subjugates and makes subject to. This implies that the law of truth constitutes the defining criterion of modern form of power. Further, modern form of power is based on relations of domination, hierarchy, asymmetry and control. He maintains that new forms of domination develop and he argues that liberation or freedom (both at the individual level and at the collective level) from the constraints is not possible. According to him, global public-oriented emancipatory politics is not possible. Surely, Foucault has been charged with a kind of fatalism, inherent in the conception of power.

8.4 The Concept of Elite

In a general sense, the term 'elite' was employed to refer to commodities of particular excellence. This restricted usage of the term in the seventeenth century was broadened later to include social groups such as higher ranks of mobility and others that could be treated as superior to the rest of them. It was only in the latter part of the nineteenth century that the term gained currency in sociological writings in Europe. In 1930s sociological theories of elite developed in Britain and America particularly in the writings of Vilfredo Pareto.

Pareto (1935) explained the concept of elite the terms of a class of people with highest indices (referring to sign of capacity e.g a successful lawyer has highest index, one who does not get a client has the lowest index in their branch of activity). This class of people is referred to as the elite. In more simple terms, Pareto defined elite by reference to facts which an outside observer is able to verify. Elite class, therefore, comprises of all those who have succeeded and are considered by their peers and the public as the best. When he spoke of the elite consistently, Pareto did not mean all those who have succeeded but those who exercise the political functions of administration or government and those who influence or determine the conduct of governing machinery though they are not officials or ministers (see Arnon 1966). There are two categories: the non-elite (who may or may not have a role to play in the government) and the elite. The latter category i.e., the elite is divided into governing elite and non-governing elite. The elite class is divisible into two classes: the governing elite (constituted of people who have some say or who directly or indirectly play a part in the government) and the non-governing elite (constituted of the rest of the elite i.e., those who have to say or no role to play in the government). Pareto argued that the same individuals occupy the same rank in hierarchy for wealth as for other criteria (such as musical talent, level of intelligence and so on) and for the degree of political and social influence. This implies that the upper classes are also the richest and it is these classes that represent the elite. Later Pareto concerned himself with those who have power i.e., governing elite and the masses.

Pareto, however, recognized the element of mobility in the elite class i.e., he did not insist that the elite was a static category, which was constituted once and for all. He propounded the idea of 'circulation of elite'. There are atleast two channels through which the idea of circulation of elite may be explained. Circulation of elite refers to the process in which individuals circulate between the elite and the non-elite groups. It also refers to the

process in which one elite is replaced by another. Pareto's work does incorporate both the conceptions but the former conception referring to the circulation of individuals between elite and non-elite groups predominates. In the context of decay and renewal of aristocracies, Pareto observes "the governing class is restored not only in numbers but – and it is that the more important thing – in quality, by families rising from a lower classes". Apart from this he also makes mention of showing down of this circulation which leads to increase of degenerate elements in the classes which still hold power and increase in the elements of superior quality in the subject classes (i.e., non-elite class). In such a situation social equilibrium becomes unstable. Even a mild shock may be enough to crumble it. A new elite comes to power and establishes a new equilibrium after a conquest or a revolution. Pareto also repeatedly refers to circulation of individuals between the elite and non-elite classes. He suggested that the governing class constituting the elite might induct those people in the lower classes from whom they perceive threat or danger. When such people are inducted into the elite group they change their character completely and adopt the attitude and interests of the established elite.

Marie Kolabinska (a student of Pareto) identified circulation which takes place between different categories of the governing elite itself, and circulation which takes place between elite and the rest of the population (individuals from lower strata may manage to enter the existing elite class or individuals in the lower strata may form new elite groups which engage in a struggle for power with the existing elite). Kolabinska's work largely devoted to the study of circulation of elite in French society focused between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries (cited from Bottomore 1964).

Gaetano Mosca was the first to draw a distinction between elite and the masses. He explained that in all societies there are two classes of people: one that rules and the other that is ruled. The class which rules performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys all the advantages and privileges that accompany power. The class, which is ruled larger in terms of numerical composition and is governed and controlled by the former class through legal, sometimes arbitrary and violent means. Like Pareto, Mosca was also concerned with elites as groups of people vested with political power. Mosca explained that between the elite and the masses is the category of the sub-elite constituted of the 'new middle class' of civil servants, managers and white-collar workers, scientists, engineers, scholars and intellectuals. The sub-elite provides new recruits to the elite class. The sub-elite itself is a vital element in the government of society. Mosca suggested that the stability of any political system largely depends on the level of morality, intelligence and activity that this second stratum has attained. He accounted for the rise of new elite in part by the emergence of social forces, which represent new interests (e.g. technological or economic interests) in the society (see Bottomore 1964).

8.5 Power Elite and Veto Groups

In the context of power in America, C. Wright Mills (1956) proposed the concept of power elite (explained in terms of a unified power group composed of top government executives, military officials, and corporation directors) while David Riesman (1953) proposed the concept of veto groups (explained in terms of a diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups, each of which is primarily concerned with protecting its jurisdiction by blocking actions of other groups which seem to threaten that jurisdiction).

Kornhauser (1966) compares Mills and Reisman on power in America along five dimensions:

- i) Structure of Power including how power is distributed among the major segments of present-day American society: Mills proposed that pyramid of power may be conceived as formed of three layers. The apex is occupied by power elite, the second layer is occupied by middle levels of power (constituted of diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups) while the third layer is occupied by mass society (constituted of powerless mass of unorganised people who are controlled from above). Reisman, on the other hand, proposed a pyramid formed of two rather than three layers. Reisman did not recognize the presence of power elite. The upper layer is occupied by veto groups. Here, instead of decisive ruling group is an amorphous structure of power centering in the interplay among interests groups that form the veto groups. The lower layer of the pyramid comprises more-or-less unorganised public which cooperates with (and is not dominated) the interest groups in their maneuvers against actual or threatened encroachments on the jurisdiction each claims for itself.
- ii) Changes in the structure of power including how the distribution of power has changed in the course of American history: Mills lays emphasis on increasing concentration of power and the ascending of power elite, while Reisman lays emphasis on increasing dispersion of power and the tendency toward the dispersal of power among a plurality of organized interests.
- iii) Operation of the structure of power including the means whereby power is exercised in American society: According to Mills, the power elite lays down all important public policies particularly foreign policy. The power elite manipulates the people at the bottom. Reisman, on the other hand, denied what Mills asserted. He said that who determines the policy largely depends on the issue about which policy is being laid out. Groups constituting veto groups are largely inoperative on several issues. Most of them become active in making decisions and laying out policies about issues that concern them or are of interest to them. This implies that there are as many power structures as the spheres of policy.
- iv) Bases of the structure of power including how social and psychological factors shape and sustain the existing distribution of power: It is understandable that power is shared among who share common interests: For Mills, the power elite represents a body of people with common interests, for Reisman, the veto groups have diversity of interests.
- v) Consequences of the structure of power including how the existing distribution of power affects American society: Mills said that, (a) the interests of the major institutions (corporations, armed forces, executive branch of government) whose leaders constitute the power elite are greatly enhanced in the existing power arrangements; (b) because of concentration of power in the hands of select few and manipulation for exercising power, there is decline of politics as public debate; (c) concentration of power has taken place without a corresponding shift in the bases of legitimacy of power. Power is supposed to reside in the hands of public and its elected representatives while in reality it lies in the hands of those who direct the key bureaucracies. Consequently, men of power are neither responsible nor accountable for their power; and (d) if power trends to a small group which is not accountable for its power, and if politics no longer involves genuine public debate then

there will be a severe weakening of democratic institutions. Conversely, Riesman said that no one group or class is favoured in a major way over others; politics has declined in meaning for many people which is not essentially due to the ascending of veto groups; there is growing discrepancy between the facts of power and images of power. Power is more widely dispensed than is generally believed; and power in America is situational and mercurial, it is amorphous because of which there is decline of effective leadership.

8.6 Power in Local Communities

The focus of community power is on decisions that are crucial to the people in a community. The basic question, therefore, is who wields the power to say about things which are important to many people in the community. The concern is with the ability to and/or the practice of deciding what is to be done in, for, by the community. (Spinrad 1965, rpt. 1966).

Box 8.2: Motivation for Decision-Making

'In the relatively pluralistic American Community, power over decision is not an automatic reflection of a prescribed hierarchal role description. A significant variable that emerges from the literature in the motivation to intervene in a particular decision-making process. Such motivation is simply a product of the extent to which that decision is salient to the group and / or the individual (Spinrad, 1965).

Two scholars who have contributed significantly to the subject of community power are Delbert Miller and Robert Dahl (see D. Anotnio and J. Ehrlich 1961). They have initiated a debate based on their own studies and research. The basic issue of contention is, who holds power on local communities. Miller asserts that the business elite makes decisions in local communities. Dahl, on the other hand, argues that rather than being monolithic, power structure is pluralistic. We will discuss the critical features of the two points of view in some detail now.

Delbert Miller chose knowledgeable informants from the community. He asked them to select out of a prepared list of important, well-known people belonging to different organisations and institutions those whom they thought were powerful in getting things done. Now, Miller interviewed the people who were selected by the knowledgeable informants. He also asked them whose help they would seek if they wanted to get something done. This was referred to as the 'reputational technique'. Miller concluded that most of the knowledgeable informants said businessmen were the ones who could get things done. They do influence policy making in local communities to a large extent. Here, local governments are not strong bodies and elected officials are often businessmen, lawyers and politicians of the community, itself. This was true of the 'Pacific City. A study of the 'English City' however suggested on Miller that not businessmen but labour is significant as also leaders from the domain of education, religion, and welfare and status groups. Based on two of the above-mentioned studies, Miller concluded that power pattern is not essentially identical in all American Communities.

Robert Dahl studied New Haven. His methodology of research differed sharply from that of Miller. Dahl found out the specific decisions on specific issues. What is more important is that he looked for specific decision makes in

specific situations two. This Technique was referred to as 'event analysis'. He concluded that the role of businessmen in decision-making was minor in contrast to the assertion of Miller. He explained that while there is no denying that businessmen have lot of resources of their disposal but it is equally true that they have several liabilities by which they are constrained and because of which they cannot emerge as the major contributors in decisions making process. Therefore, not one centre of power but many loci of power exist. Dahl believes that mayors and their staff have increasingly become the initiators and organisers of important community decision. Miller insists that the political leaders are uncertain about themselves and wait for the cues from others, while businessmen have a clearly defined image and act with more assertion (Spinnad 1965, rpt. 1966).

Apart from Miller and Dahl, Edward Banfield (1961) made significant contribution in the domain of community power by studying six specific community problems in Chicago. He reached to the conclusion that surely the businessmen in Chicago occupying top positions in national corporations and regional commercial and banking institutions are endowed with resources that give them unlimited power. Yet, the businessmen do not dominate critical community decisions. The chief reasons for abstaining from this sphere is lack of unity and of interests; and cost entailed in making interventions. They seem to be satisfied and let go of situations if their vested interests are not at stake. On the other hand if their personal interests are threatened or jeopardized, they become excessively involved and use their influence in effecting decisions. Banfield agrees with Dahl in upholding that the chief decisions in Chicago are taken by managers of large organisations, few civic leaders, and the chief elected officials.

Banfield seems to consider the political leaders as potentially omnipotent when they go all out on any question. This calls for using up their limited working capital; and coming into confrontation with other power groups besides national government, businessmen other strong community elements that may be affected and take an opposite stand. They, therefore, are slow to take up issues and often look for compromises (Spinrad 1965, rpt. 1966).

8.7 Conclusion

It is evident that the notion of power so commonly used in day-to-day parlance has many dimensions and operated in many different ways. Sociologists have conceptualised power in terms of domination, as a repressive and oppressive force as also an enabling resource. Power, as we have noted rests both with the elite and with the local community. Power enfolds a dynamism of sorts in its very nature and regulates nearly all relationships in society which makes it of special interest to sociologists.

8.8 Further Reading

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Unit 9

Class and Legitimacy

Contents

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Capitalism, Class Relations and Development
- 9.3 Concept of Legitimacy
- 9.4 Why Legitimacy ?
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- 9.6 Traditional Authority
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- 9.8 Charismatic Authority
- 9.9 Legitimacy and Social Changes
- 9.10 Conclusion
- 9.11 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you should be able to

- locate the various types of legitimacy
- outline the bases of legitimacy
- describe the fluid bases of legitimacy

9.1 Introduction

In this unit, we shall be discussing to important concept of sociology that is class and legitimacy. In the first part of this unit, we shall be concentrating on the concept of class as elaborated by Karl Marx. In the second part, we shall be dealing with the notion of legitimacy as propagated by Max Weber. Let us begin with the concept of class.

Class in conventional sense is a collectivity or a group of people who have some characteristics in common. Several scholars have identified several characteristics in identifying classes. They have also located the position of class in the society in different ways. For Marx, economic position is the prime in locating class position of a group of people in the society. To put it very simply, class to him is a category of people, who have a common economic interest against those of other class in the society. These to him, are the objective economic condition for the formulation of classes in the society. To him, however, class is not only an economic category, but also a social force to bring about changes in the society. Here, he emphasises on the issue of subjective consciousness as the key factor for the transformation of the economic categories of the class as the change agents to bring about revolution in the society. Thus, to him a category of people with a common economic interest viz - a - viz other form class-in-itself. And when this class-in-itself is mediated by subjective class consciousness, it emerges to be class-for-itself. Indeed, it is the revolutionary class who is ready for action and change in the society.

It is important that class is not static social category: rather is undergoes a process of transformation of the society. In each of the economic stage of

every society, class is distinctly placed with distinctive social and historical roles. We have to understand, this in detail Marxian concept of class relation and change.

Class Relation and Change

In all the stages of economic transformation of society, there have been specific forms of class struggles. Social classes according to Karl Marx are the main agents of social change. The change is however based on class conflict. Thus to him "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

Classes, to Marx, are formed based on objective material conditions. These are groups of people with a common economic position vis-a-vis those of other class. In essence this economic interest is conflicting and contradictory to each other's class position. These class relations get transformed for hostile action against each other with the intermediation of class consciousness. The objective material conditions form the basis for the formation of 'class-in-itself' which get transformed in 'class-for-itself' in the process of transversing of subjective class consciousness.

To Karl Marx, though the class relation was very complicated in the earlier epochs of history, in the modern stage of capitalism this has been simplified. In the modern capitalist society new classes however have emerged with new condition of operation and new form of struggle between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production i.e., the 'haves') and the proletariat (i.e. the 'have-nots').

According to Marx, under capitalism wage labourers are paupers who grow more rapidly than the population and wealth. The essential conditions both for the existence and sway of the bourgeoisie class is the formation and augmentation of capital. "The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourer, due to completion, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, is its grave diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable (119)

9.2 Capitalism, Class Relations and Development

Modern industry has established the world market that has given immense scope of development to commerce, navigation and communication by land. These developments again have paved the way for the extension of industries and free trade.

The bourgeoisie class constantly maximises its profit through the expansion of new markets, introduction of new technology, extraction of surplus value and exploitation of the proletariat. However, along with these developments there emerge new forces of contradiction within the capitalist system. Notwithstanding the emergence of new forces of contradiction, the

bourgeoisie was very revolutionary in their outlook and action. According to Marx "The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.... the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."

Through the exploitation of the world market the bourgeoisie has given the production and consumption process a cosmopolitan character. The old industries got destroyed. The old national industries got dislodged. Industry in the capitalist system no longer worked only on indigenous raw material but raw materials drawn from the remotest zones, whose products are consumed in every quarter of the globe. "In place of old wants satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature" (112).

The capitalists according to Marx also subjected nature to the force of man and machinery through the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraph, canalisation of rivers etc. All these facilitated the scope of free commodification of the economy at world scales. There also emerged free competition accompanied by social and political institutions to adopt to it.

The modern capitalist however, according to Marx, has inherited and nurtured the seeds of its destruction in its own womb. In proportion to the growth of the bourgeoisie there has emerged the modern working class – the proletariat "These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market." (114)

For Marx the essence of the capitalist is to maximize profit through commodification of the production process. As long as capitalism is based on private ownership of the means of production, it maximizes profit of the private producers. This profit is again maximised by exchange proceeding from money to money by way of commodity. Gradually the proceeds from many to money by way of commodity end up with more money than one had at the outset (Aron, 1965 : 128). To explain the sources of profit Marx talked about the theory of value, wage and surplus value. To him the value of any commodity is roughly proportional to the quantity of human labour contained in it. The wage capitalists pay to the workers as the compensation for the labour power the worker rents to the capitalist is equal to the amount necessary for the existence of the workers and their family to produce the merchandise for the capitalist. Under the capitalist system, workers receive the wage which is less than the actual duration of the work; that is less than the value of the commodity he or she produces. Here comes the notion of 'surplus value' which refers to 'the quantity of value produced by the workers beyond the necessary labour time'. Under the capitalist system the workers do not get the wage for the quantity of the value produced beyond the necessary labour time.

In return the wage received by a workman is restricted only to the means of his subsistence and survival. Marx calculated that the price of a commodity and therefore "also of labour is equal to its cost of production". In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of work increases the wage decreases. With the increase in the proportion of the use of machinery and division of labour the burden of toil of the labour also increases in terms of increase in the working hours, and increase in the quantum of work. "The proletariat is without property. His relation to his children and wife has no longer anything in common with the bourgeoisie family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjugation to capital, the same in England, as in France, in America and Germany, has tripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interest," (118).

Gradually the number the proletariat also increases to gain more strength and awareness. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, artisans, peasants also join the army of the proletariat in their fight against the bourgeoisie. To Marx "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority." And again Marx writes: In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat

9.3 Concept of Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to lawful and regular activity which could be justified on one or the other reasonable ground. For example, the use of public money for some legitimate purposes, legitimate reasons for one's absence from office or work and being born of persons legitimately related / married are such cases that give us some initial ideas about the use of this term legitimacy. In our daily life-experiences we come across several such cases when we accept the actions of others as correct, acceptable and justified. We normally do not question such actions of others. But sometimes we come across such instances when we think that the action of the others are not justifiable. When we begin to question the action of others, we get some vague idea of the term legitimacy. What right one has got to speak to us like this? Who is he to order us to do certain things? These are the questions that arise in our minds when we are not ready to accept other's actions, judgements or orders as such. It could be understood like what is the legitimate ground on which one is asking us to do certain favours. This question is related to the action of others, but sometimes questions are raised about one's status as well. A reference to the questions like this has already been made. People born out of the legitimate relationship like marriage are known as legitimate children. In this way the notion of legitimacy covers much wider area than with which we are normally concerned.

9.4 Why Legitimacy?

Throughout the world - in modern times as well as in history, the people or governments in power have attempted normally to justify their occupation of power over the people over whom they have ruled. The people in power

must be in a position to demonstrate that their occupation of power is legitimate as well. For example, in democratic countries the people who govern are elected on a regular basis. In such countries elections are held after a certain period of time and only the elected representatives can govern over the people. The people in power have always attempted to somehow justify their hold on certain privileged positions which includes rewards as well. They have been able to develop certain mechanisms through which they were able to justify their claims over their subordinates and the people in general. On the other hand, these subordinates also require some basis on which to accept the claims of their superiors. In this way legitimacy could resolve the possibilities of conflict between those who govern and those who are being governed. Legitimacy thus resolves the conflict between differing claims of people as it is important specially in those cases that are related to the distribution of power in society. As stated earlier, the scope for the issues centered around legitimacy is much wider than it apparently appears. A meaningful and scientific analysis of some of these issues is discussed in the sociological discourse.

9.5 Bases of Legitimacy: Traditional, Legal-Rational and Charismatic

The credit must go in favour of Max Weber a prominent sociologist from Germany, who not only identified the importance of the issues like legitimacy but also attempted to make a scientific analysis of it. After establishing legitimacy as an important issue for sociological analysis, Max Weber attempted to clarify the important bases of legitimacy. Max Weber identified three main bases of legitimacy namely, what he calls it, traditional, legal-rational and charismatic, Max Weber has also distinguished between power and authority. According to Max Weber, power refers to the capacity of the actor to carry out his will in spite of resistance. According to him legitimate power is called authority.

9.6 Traditional Authority

One could derive legitimacy on the basis of traditional grounds. Not very long back in history, several kings throughout the world ruled over the people on the basis of traditional authority. If the authority was derived on the traditional basis (as in the case of kings) then it was not generally questioned by the people. Several traditional legends and epics also supported the rule of the king as he was considered to be the representative of God. The basic understanding behind the rule of the king was like this: the king has been ordered by God to look after the welfare of its people.

Box 9.1: Ascribed Status

Apart from the king several village - chiefs in India also enjoyed this traditional authority. In India, traditional village-panchayats as well as caste-panchayats have displayed ample scope for traditional authority to flourish. Similarly there have been numerous cases of the tribal-chiefs in several parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. All such examples address to one central question. Why the rulers in earlier societies were able to rule over people without much problems and resistance from them? The answer is that these rulers used traditional basis of legitimacy to derive power and were able to morally justify their actions in the name of the welfare of the subordinate and disadvantaged categories of people. Traditional authority is also associated

with the ascribed status of most of its people in society. Who actually appointed one to occupy such a privileged position? On what basis one issues certain orders that are to be followed by the most of the people? These type of questions are generally avoided by the people and a major source of such a form of resolution of conflicts generally happens to be the prevalent traditional authority. Thus, if the power structure derives its legitimacy on traditional grounds, it is understood as a case of traditional authority.

9.7 Legal-Rational Authority

According to Max Weber, the second base of legitimacy is legal - rational. This type of authority has been found in almost all the modern societies of the world. It is also known as legal-rational authority. The most appropriate expression of such legal-rational authority could be what is now a days known as bureaucracy. Max Weber himself had identified bureaucracy as an important and emerging phenomenon throughout the world and himself made a conceptual analysis of it. Although some other scholars from other social-sciences as well later tried to understand the notion of bureaucracy in the changing scenario of the world, but due to the intellectual craftsmanship of Max Weber his formulations on bureaucracy still enjoy a commandable respect. In fact Max Weber's discussion involves much more than what is generally attributed to his formulations on bureaucracy. For example, Max Weber's formulations on bureaucracy includes what he calls it "ideal-type", modern organisations and his overall methodology of social-sciences. The basic idea here has been to understand how does bureaucracy get legitimacy in modern organisations on the grounds of legal-rational authority. Before proceeding further it seems necessary to clarify some opinions regarding bureaucracy.

Box 9.2: Ideal Type Bureaucracy

The notion of bureaucracy has been hailed as well as condemned by various scholars, academicians and political strategists. The discourses on bureaucracy also go beyond the academic discussions and several times its role has been questioned on political and moral grounds. On the basis of his understanding, particularly in the U.S.A., Max Weber constructed an ideal-type of bureaucracy which included eleven characteristics attached to it. A clarification seems necessary at this stage. Although Max Weber's notion of ideal-type is not being discussed here as such, but certain points about it must be kept in mind, since he discussed about ideal-type of bureaucracy.

First, it must be kept in mind that ideal-type has nothing to with the ideal conditions that are supposed to be achieved by any individual or organisation. Second, it was suggested by Max Weber that all the characteristics as they are stated to comprise bureaucracy are not to be found in any actually existing bureaucratic organisation. Third, the opposite of ideal-type is real-type which might actually be found in society. But as ideal-type received importance in the sociological literature, its counterpart real-type neither received importance nor it was used as such in the discipline at later stages of research. But then what was the need to construct the ideal-type. Max Weber believed that ideal-type is useful and could be constructed whenever we are dealing with unknown or less familiar situations.

Reflection and Action 9.1

What is the difference between charismatic and rational-legal authority. Note down your answer in your notebook.

Max Weber has clarified the notion of legal-rational basis of legitimacy in detail. This legal-rational basis of legitimacy is realised through bureaucracy in modern organisations. At this stage the readers are advised to keep in mind, compare the contrast this type of legitimacy with its other types. The main characteristics of bureaucracy could be discussed in the following way.

- 1) In any bureaucratic organisation there are written rules which are followed by everyone from top to the bottom in a defined way. The work and orders related to it are given from those who are at the top of the organisation and are to be followed by those at the lower level. Bureaucracy involves a lot of work on paper, which means that no verbal orders could be given. Similarly only such orders could be given which are appropriate according to the rules. Meaning thereby that wrong orders could neither be given nor they are to be followed. The work and orders on paper reduce the chances of personal biases against each other. The idea behind such an organisation and style of work is that if the issues are correct and correspond to the existing state of laws then they should be completed. The aims of the perfect bureaucratic organization include the cases and not the people.
- 2) As bureaucratic organisations do their work on paper, it is done by its permanent employees. Rules of the office regulate recruitment of the staff and its promotions. The nature and working of such an organisation happens to be different from the individuals who comprise it. The idea behind such an organisation has been to ensure complete non-interference from any quarter, completely transparent and impersonal working.
- 3) Although Weber's work was concerned with the public bureaucracy his emphasis on rationality associated with it extended the use of this concept in the private sectors as well. Since Weber believed in the rational basis of legitimacy for both i.e. bureaucracy as well as the then emerging enterprises, it was to be hoped that bureaucracy might finally find a place in the private business organisations as well.
- 4) There seems to be a need to understand and examine this legal - rational form of legitimacy as it expressed through bureaucracy. In practice, however, certain characteristics which were contrary to the formulations of Max Weber were noted by some scholars. For example, the issues like misgovernance, incompetence, unnecessary paper work and frustration of people in bureaucracy have been referred by several scholars. These dysfunctions of bureaucracy have been referred in the case of capitalist as well socialistic type of governance - systems. But the credit of highlighting the legal-rational form of legitimacy and its analysis goes to Max Weber.

9.8 Charismatic Authority

Max Weber has defined it as the third basis of legitimacy. These grounds of acquiring legitimacy are quite different from the previous bases. Charismatic authority is based neither on traditional nor legal-rational basis. It is quite different from the two previously discussed bases of legitimacy. Charisma refers to certain qualities in a person which provide him something like a

spiritual grace or capacity to inspire others and fill in enthusiasm among the people. These are certain qualities that are not found in every type of personality-systems, they appear rarely among the people. Those who possess these qualities are generally able to garner support without much difficulty. They are able to lead the people on the basis of these rare qualities located within their personality-system and also due to their unique approach to tackle the problems of society. In this sense each Charismatic leader has got not only a unique personality system to convince others but also an approach that looks different from other previous approaches to solve the problems of society. If we attempt to analyse the relationship between a Charismatic leader and his followers, then we realise that this sort of a relationship itself is quite different from others.

Box 9.3: Personal Traits and Qualities

As a Charismatic leader thinks and delivers, his followers simply work deliberately according to the whims and wishes of their leader. On this basis the leader derives legitimacy for his words and action as people simply follow him without questioning him. We can understand it in other words as well. The personal traits and qualities in Charismatic leaders happen to be such that in a majority of cases they are capable enough to overpower the others particularly those who are his followers. It is like, if the Charismatic leader proposes something his followers are likely to second it immediately without asking for much. The followers of the Charismatic leader in fact keep him in high esteem and his personal qualities influence the followers in such a way that they generally agree to do anything for him. It reflects an unending, enduring and permanent sort of faith of the followers in their leader. The Charismatic leader on its part also seems capable of solving any problem, at least his followers believe it.

The followers believe in the Charismatic leader and don't generally attempt to distinguish between what is right or wrong about his approach. The Charismatic leader is actually able to inspire others who in turn develop a sort of faith in him which to a great extent is like a permanent one. Weber has expressed the optimistic point of view about the Charismatic sort of leadership. Accordingly, Charisma has been considered as a force which could challenge or question bureaucratic rigidity. For example, in the context of modern society a Charismatic leadership might critically examine the role of bureaucracy on particular issues like the child labour or human rights. Charismatic leadership presumes a set of belief - system which keeps intact the relationship between the leaders and his followers.

Reflection and Action 9.2

Outline the notion of charisma. How does charisma get reutilized? Write down your answer in a notebook.

Max Weber was of the opinion that it is possible for a leader to show his Charisma once, but it is not enough. Since the expectations of the followers gain new heights, the leadership in question gets compelled to show its Charisma once again. In fact the followers expect their leader to show his Charisma more than once. Once is not enough sort of situation generally engulfs the leader. These higher expectations of the followers compel the leader to think again and again and to work out for something new which could be considered as a functional equivalent to his own Charisma shown

earlier. And since his personality - system has certain unique attributes, sometimes he becomes able to show his Charisma again. Max Weber has identified process this 'routinisation of Charisma'. Without it one fails to remain and occupy the status of a Charismatic leader. T.K. Oommen has studied one such case of leadership in the context of the Indian society. According to him the role of Vinoba Bhave in the Bhoodan-Gramdam movement could be identified as that of a Charismatic leader. It was found in the study that the Charismatic leadership of Vinoba Bhave resulted in favour of the stability of the system but change in the approach, especially when certain powerful people donated their land willingly in favour of the poor people. Thus Charismatic authority refers to a unique sort of basis for legitimacy which is different from earlier discussed traditional and legal-rational bases of legitimacy.

9.9 Legitimacy and Social Changes

Although Max Weber referred to three bases of legitimacy, but society has undergone several changes since then. Max Weber's characterisation of legitimacy into three types resembles with his others conceptualisations as well and in a sense they could be considered as ideal or pure types. Max Weber's formulations, although included important bases of legitimacy, but his list of such bases might not be an exhaustive one. For example, in modern society another important base for legitimacy has been identified which is related to professional authority. There are people like doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, computer personnel and lawyers who specialise in their own jobs and undergo rigorous training and study for longer years to learn about their jobs. As a result of it, these professionals have a say of their own, they are free to take decisions in their specialised areas and for such an action they are quite competent to do so. Thus, the power acquired in such a way is known as professional authority and it derives legitimacy on the basis of specialisation achieved after a longer period of training. One example might be given here, it is the doctor who is capable to decide the type of treatment to be given to the patient. Such decision can't be taken by the people having traditional, legal-rational or Charismatic authority.

Now a days societies of the world are changing at a much faster pace than before. This period of change is also referred to as the period of transformation of societies. During this process of change, sometimes it becomes difficult for the people to understand various claims for legitimacy. At times we come across conflicting claims about legitimacy. For example, who must be the appropriate person to decide about the marriage of a boy in the Indian society happens to be one such important question. If the parents take the decision about the marriage then it is the case for traditional authority and if the boy himself takes the decision and decide to marry in the court of law then it is a case for legal-rational authority. A married couple could derive legitimacy of their relationship to each other either on traditional or on legal-rational basis. In the empirical situation sometimes we come across conflicting claims based upon different grounds for legitimacy. For example, regarding the decision of marriage conflicting claims might be seen between traditional and legal-rational basis of legitimacy. In the rapidly changing societies, sometimes it becomes difficult to really identify the real basis for legitimacy. The rapid changes that are taking place in the societies of the world have created such conditions where sometimes it becomes difficult to decide the grounds or bases of legitimacy. In the classical

sociological literature itself we come across discussions where societies could not really enjoy the fruits of development. Development of societies alongwith it have brought some undesirable conditions as well. For example.

Emile Durkheim has referred to 'pathological conditions of society'. Karl Marx has talked about 'alienation' in the capitalist society. These conditions provide the grounds for the crisis of legitimacy. Under such conditions sometimes one fails to decide on how to decide the legitimate grounds for actions. In modern societies, particularly in the case of the U.S.A., C. Wright Mills referred to the prevailing 'uneasiness' and 'indifference' in society which has emerged as a result of the threat on the existing values which itself are eroding fast. In simple words, whenever we come across some assertions like "Who are you to say so?" or "Who is he to issue orders like that", we could see the beginning of the emerging crisis of legitimacy. Whenever the older and known bases of legitimacy are questioned and new bases have not yet emerged, it could be identified as the situation referring to crisis of legitimacy. This crisis of legitimacy has been seen particularly in the case of the western countries, but some developing countries of the world might also see such conditions as emerging. Although the older grounds for legitimacy have been challenged in the modern society, but this resultant crisis of legitimacy could well be managed on the newer grounds of legitimacy. But one trend which could be seen as emerging throughout the world at the moment is that the area of legal-rational basis of legitimacy is increasing everyday.

9.10 Conclusion

The notion of legitimacy has got much wider applications than as it appears from its conceptual usages. In the changing era and in the new world order the notion of legitimacy has acquired newer meanings and wider applications. Some countries of the world have democratically elected governments and they derive legitimacy on the grounds of being elected by the people. Non-elected governments might face some problems at home and abroad as it might become increasingly difficult for them to derive the sort of legitimacy required to rule over the people. On the other hand people who wage an armed struggle against the state and terrorists groups do not enjoy legitimacy even though they claims like fighting for the cause of the people. In recent times all the terrorist - groups throughout the world have lost public support or sympathies and the public opinion has been built-up against their violent actions. In the modern political analysis, one significant question that has come up is concerned with the issues related with elections. Elections have acquired a new meaning and new dimensions in modern society. The issues like terrorism and organised violence are losing grounds in the modern polity. People in general and intellectuals in particular have been asking the questions like : Why these terrorist organisations can't contest elections ? In this way elections and elected governments have acquired the sort of legitimacy of which even the thought or idea was not possible just a century ago. Some international organisations like the Common wealth of Nations accept the participation of only democratically elected governments as its legitimate member - states. The war against terrorism has acquired international dimensions. In modern political - analysis, thus the issues concerning legitimacy have acquired a new scope, meaning and dimensions. Similarly the international agreement on human rights and the establishment of various national human rights commissions in different nation states have given a new meaning to the quality of life. It sounds like that these human rights

should become the legitimate possession of the people and any violation against it whether it is by any individual, group or even state could be judged as a crime which is an illegitimate action. Such issues provide us an opportunity to understand the changing dimensions of the issues concerning legitimacy.

9.11 Further Reading

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Unit 10

Power: Functional Perspective

Contents

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- 10.2 Early Writers: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau
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Learning Objectives

After reading this unit lesson you should be able to

- Grasp the meaning of power
- Understand the praxis of power

10.1 Introduction

We begin by grasping the meaning of 'power' in day to day use and dictionaries.

- Then we turn to the way three political philosophers of 17th and 18th centuries reflected upon its need for society, and the nature of power acceptable to people.
- A political scientist and another turned as a sociologist gave their views on limits of power and sovereignty, thereby introducing the significance of other associations and groups in society. Their orientations are presented briefly.
- Two major sociologists - Max Weber and Talcott Parsons contributed to the discussion on the nature of power and its legitimacy. Their scope for power holders as discussed by the former; and the capacity of the social system to realise common goals and increase its capacity as brought out by Talcott Parsons are explained.
- In understanding the unit, the student will find it useful to refer to units on function and others on power.
- To make the concepts and situations clearer an effort has been made to illustrate a few points from the Indian setting and such material is not based on examples drawn from the classical authors.

The word 'Power' has its roots in Latin 'potis' 'posse' or 'pot-ere' which signify 'to be able'. The word has been used in several senses in daily life like 'horse power' that measures energy, 'power-loom' as distinct from the hand-loom, conveying the idea of mechanical energy. In mathematics when we write x^3 , that means x is multiplied by itself three times. If the value of x is 2 then 2^3 is 2 raised to the power 3, that is $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$. Here 'power' is used for making a small number larger. These examples give a general idea that power implies a capacity to increase energy and to enable a person or

a thing to enlarge its scope. It is a good idea to learn how we come to such an understanding. We recommend the use of a standard dictionary to get first acquaintance with a word we want to learn about. In this paragraph, two sources have been used : (i) The Concise Oxford Dictionary and (ii) Chamber's twentieth Century Dictionary. The larger volume of Oxford English Dictionary also mentions how a word was used first and by whom. The curious students may develop this as a habit for learning various meanings and usages of a word consulting any standard dictionary. That is the beginning. Dictionary of sociology and international encyclopedia are further advancements.

When a word is used many times, the dictionary also notes some words that convey a similar sense. The Oxford Concise Dictionary for example uses words like ability to do or act, influence authority under one's control. This question has been answered in another lesson unit. Now we reach the second stage.

10.2 Early Writers: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

Discussion of a few key words are found in general literature in the writings of early scholars who expressed their view even before sociology was born. In their writings we try to locate the meaning and significance of these words. Here the word 'power' and its possible links with function are seen through the contribution of three writers : Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.

By definition power relations relate to unequal positions and the inter relations among persons placed therein. Here a serious question is raised 'why should' inequality to tolerated or accepted even at the philosophical level? We have the other idea 'Man was born free, every where he is in chains. This idea was most vigorously talked about in France when it was socially preparing for the French Revolution of 1789. The king claimed 'divine right' so the struggle had to be targeted on both the king and the priest who justified that right, there was a struggle for human secular forces to become stronger. 'Man is the measure of all things' become the new dictum. Secular knowledge was compiled in Encyclopedias.

Among political philosophers, Hobbes (1588-1679) had raised the question about the nature of man. It appears that he talked about the primitive persons who were equal to one another.

The difference between man and man is not so considerable, as that one man can claim himself any benefit to which another man may not pretend, as well as he if any two men desire the same thing, which they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies, endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another. In the nature of man, we find three causes of quarrel : Competition, Diffidence, and Glory. The first one leads men to use violence, to make themselves. Masters of other men's persons wives, children and cattle', second to defend them; the third for trifles as a word a smile or by reflection in their kindred friends nations or profession. (Ref. In Parsons *et al.*, 1960).

'Everyman is enemy to every man. No account of time, no arts, no letters, no society..... and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. Hence, the need for the laws of nature and a common power to keep them in awe and answer the need for maintaining order. His solution lay in agreed reasoning and the institution of a ruler (king) for the purpose. Hobbes has been considered a brilliant thinker for raising the problem of order in society,

though other thinkers disagree with the depiction of human nature and the solution. However, for our present purposes, it may be clarified that power is seen to fulfill the function of maintaining order.

John Locke (1632-1704) agrees on the equality of man and confers a right on him to punish the wrong doer such liberty could be misused; if the victim is to be the judge also. Hence there need for the state that with common consent will perform this role, and the advocacy of the civil government.

Rousseau (1712-1778) is the most famous of the three writers and had tremendous influence on the ideas leading to the French Revolutions (1789). He is associated with the remark 'Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains from the state of nature, human beings moved to develop a general will which could provide the rationale for exercise of power and even kings and tyrants could not ignore the power of the general will, hence the rationale for abolition of kingdoms and bringing in Republics. View of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were examined in critical details by political philosophers, but the main reasons for referring to the three written are the following:

- 1) The need for having central authority to maintain order was emphasised; and in this sense state was associated with a function.
- 2) Unequal distribution of power needs an explanation and a justification. Here two aspects become important: who gets power over whom? What is its legitimacy?

These two questions will be dealt with in relation to the individuals and the state itself.

10.3 Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century discussions on society were dominated by the ideas and progress (August Comte). Herbert Spencer joined together ideas of society as an organism with evolution, the former giving the state a prime position in the functioning of the society. The near musical chair race was the main feature of the French society, where the monarchy and the republic continued to replace one another. Ultimately the Third Republic got stabilized in 1871. The intelligentsia had a stake in its success. An army that was as efficient as an emperor's was created. Special institutions for training the civil service, technicians and leaders came into being. The church still controlled education. The education minister restricted opening of new schools, state sponsored schools were started. Yet, their efficiency had to be maintained (In India, we are familiar with the difference in mission schools and state run schools). The Minister consulted Durkheim, whose professional advice was that the teachers had to be trained first for the new tasks. The politician offered this task to Durkheim, and asked him to undertake the responsibility. Durkheim's first appointment was Professor of Education in provincial town Bordeaux. Education was seen as a socializing force for a secular society. The role of the Church in education and the state was reduced; and education was seen in a functional manner strengthening the Republic. Education through the Church was functional for the monarchy, after the revolution new education became functional for the Republic, and dysfunctional for the Church and the monarchy in France.

10.4 Twentieth Century Writers

Among sociologists of the twentieth century, the name of **Robert M. Maclver**

in the USA is the most significant. He began as a professor of Political Science and wrote the book 'State'. This was a departure from those who considered that sovereignty of the state was absolute and indivisible (Austin). In his famous statement Maclver said "The state is not coeval and co-extensive with society." He re-examined the relations among different organs of society and examined three possibilities:

- 1) Activities that the state alone could do
- 2) Activities that the state could perform better than other associations, and
- 3) Activities that other organisations could perform better than the state.

In his view the state was one of the great associations in society. These views were elaborated in a classical text book he wrote in collaboration with Charles H. page under the title *Society* which has been read carefully in India for nearly half a century by students of sociology.

Reflection and Action 10.1

Are state and society the same? Examine all sides of this question.

In the U.K. Harold Laski had a great influence on political movements and in his work *Grammar of Politics*, he propounded the view that there were plural centres of power in society, and the state was one of them. For students who read Laski as well as Maclver, the plural sources of power become important in discussing the nature of inter actions of the state and other associations group in society. The overall effect is that the state and polity began to be treated as dependent variables.

10.5 Max Weber and Talcott Parsons

Of the two questions mentioned earlier those regarding the nature of power and its legitimacy, were centrally considered by the German classical sociologist Max Webler and commented upon among others by Talcott Parsons who advanced the view that the state represented the agency for realising the collective goals of a social system. It is to these writers that we now turn our attention.

Box 10.1: Max Weber: An Introduction

Max Weber, an eminent German sociologist was born on 29th April, 1864 and lived and worked upto 1920. We invite your attention to the reference to his works as given in the units for the Bachelor's degree and other units for Master's programme of the IGNOU. It may be recalled that the period was marked by economic growth and political consolidation of Germany as a great power, with intense international competition and the first world war (1914-1918), and Weber's expert opinion was available at the time of signing of the peace treaty at Versailles in France and later for drafting a constitution for the Weimar, Republic. His family background of active politicians university professors and religious schools had given him ample first hand experience of the political processes capitalistic and bureaucratic working. As an eminent thinker, he conceptualised and analysed these experiences and at the world level of discussions tried to find why in Western Europe and Western Europe alone, a series of events happened in the ninetieth century to make it a globally significant entity. He had compared systems of different religions to

find out the way ideas had a major influence on economic growth. This little reminder reintroduced Max Weber to us; the German pronunciation of Max is like Maax. The European scholars continue to refer to his works is original in German. In India, we rely on the English translations which at times disturb the European scholars. Among sociologists in India, Irawati Karve, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Chadrasekharaya and Surendra Munshi had acquired competence in German and tried to help us imbibe the flavour of that language in the study of the German sociologists i.e. sociologists choosing to write their major works in German (Max Weber, Marx Simmel, Tonnies and later Dahrendorf).

For Max Weber the organisation of social life on the basis of relational calculations and rationality as a system of thought was the most distinguishing feature of nineteenth century Europe. He viewed different aspects of life like economy, polity and even music according to the way they expressed rationality. Thus, he distinguished profit based on plunder and illegal practices from rational capitalism. Likewise the performance of music in orchestra with a number of instruments tuning together drew his attention. His discussion on power is related to the use of legitimate power or authority. He mentions three types of power based on three types of rationality or rules :

a) Tradition

When power is acquired and passed on to the next person in traditional societies from a king to the eldest son; it becomes a case of legitimation of power through tradition. In a matrilineal society, it is the sister's son who becomes a king (Malayalam region). In the north-eastern part of India, the youngest daughter's husband, known as nokrom becomes the effective manager. The king's brother succeeded the king in other territories. These differences are examples of tradition in their own societies. In an American tribe power belonged to a person who destroyed or burnt the valued things – in that case called potlatch one who burned the largest number of blankets became the chief and retained his position until some one else broke the record. The world over, in tribal setting or in chiefdoms, rules of acquiring power were based on traditions of the region concerned. These examples have been added by us, not by Max Weber, to illustrate the central idea. He used the examples of feudal lords and their relations to a king to analyse tradition as a source of legitimation of power.

b) Bureaucracy

The word bureau literally refers to a large table with a number of drawers. Different papers dealing with a common subject can be placed in one drawer. A number of drawers help in the classification of papers. Collectively, the Bureau becomes an organisation dealing with classified information e.g. we refer to the Press Bureau that provides official information to the public. In the government a number of offices are so organised. They have rules for recruitment, training, promotion and termination of services. The person is separated from office and his powers are defined, as also those of the seniors and subordinates. There is the hierarchy of office and rules govern them, in their bases, they pass on papers or act or refuse to act. Merton has noted that the bureaucrat is a link between decision makers on the one hand and persons below the bureaucrat, and he acquires power because he can decide which papers may be forwarded or held back. But from Weber's

point of view bureaucracy is a rational legal system and works that way. Bureaucracy is rationalised legal system and derives its legitimacy from it.

c) Charisma

The Persian (and Urdu) word *Karishma* is the root word that traveled to European languages almost in the same sense. *Karishma* or charisma indicates extraordinary abilities of a person, and is used to describe the powers of a saint as well; something like a divine element, that sustains itself performing miracles. Its continuation depends upon its capacity to deliver goods. If a person's qualities do not remain effective, may be through age or infirmity, he/she loses the charisma. The legitimacy of charisma does not flow from tradition or rational bureaucracy. In fact the charismatic figure overrules both and introduces personal extra-ordinary performance as its own justification. Quite a few revolutionary personalities exercise such a power in the secular setting as well. Here Weber adds that a charismatic leader may come to power through extraordinary methods, but his continuation in power needs legitimacy either through a recourse to tradition or relational bureaucracy. That is how we find quite a few revolutionaries becoming conservatives assuming power. After taking the three ways of legitimations of power together, we may point out that the modern democracies specialize in constitutional ways of acquiring or getting replaced in power position, mainly through the ballot, not the bullet. In fact the test of democracy is the smoothness of transfer of power through elections and the continuation of the political system. On this score the placement of countries on the human development index is counted and at least here India gets more favourable points than many of the Asian and African countries, and a few Latin American countries as well.

Max Weber's formulation on power leads one to ask who has power on whom? If A commands B even against his will, A has power over B. In this as, A has positive power and B has negative power. Let us now think again — if A can exercise 4 commands over B, we may as well say A has + 4 units of power and B have -4. The sum total of power with A and B is $+ 4 - 4 = 0$. This concept is called zero sum of power.

10.6 Talcott Parsons

Talcott Parsons translated a few works of Max Weber from German into English and made important contribution to the study of power and its functions for society. Here power is seen as a necessary condition of maintaining a society, enabling it to realize a few collective goals of a society. In a modern society, functions are differentiated, and interrelated. The characteristics of a system are reproduced in subsystem. Polity is one of the subsystems. How it is organized and works is stated briefly. Functional approach does not mean absence of conflicts it in fact depicts the capacity of the system to deal with problems and solve them within its resources, you will thus get an idea of how in a modern society of differentiated institutions, each institution fulfills the needs of the society, each gets related to the others, and derives strength from others. This is the essence of functional approach. Power is seen through this perspective mainly through the manner in which famous sociologist Talcott Parsons clarifies issues keeping American Democracy on the center of attention. Some examples will be given from India to make a few points clearer.

Reflection and Action 10.2

Is conflict functional? Explain your position and discuss with friends.

Power: Functional
Perspective

Parsons has reexamined this position on two counts. Firstly, zero sum can happen as a special case. Generally, however, we come across cases where the gains and losses do not cancel out. A may issue 4 commands over B. B follows them, then on the future occasion it may happen that B gets his will carried out by A. In our daily life we come across such situation, when a son's will has to be carried out by the father or an officer has to agree with a subordinate clerk's opinion. In village life relation among the patron and client also follow such a course. In a Rajasthan village a drummer beats the drum to mark the close of a wedding ceremony. He stands firm and does not beat the drum. This is a tactic to make the patron pay the dues respectably. When the drummer is satisfied with proper payment, he sounds 'the last post'. A carpenter by tradition supplies a wooden board to decorate a welcome design. He keeps the entire proceedings halted until his rightful claim is accepted. Here, the public performance, or delay in performance, adds to the power of the otherwise lowly placed artisan. Examples can be multiplied to cover many rituals in pilgrim centres and other secular situations. One of the reasons for continuation of the jajmani relations has among others, been the capacity of the artisan or the serving group to exercise his 'vcto' as it were, on such chosen occasion, where the roles of domination are reversed. We are using these examples from our society to clarify that distribution of power that appears to have one direction from the high to the low can have the reverse flow as well. In such cases power equation could be +4 units for the patron and -4 with the serving group, yet on 2 other occasions the latter may wield the upper hand. Then the sum total of A's power could be +4 in favour and -2 in other cases; may be a zero sum case +4-4 and -2+2 = 0, yet if we add both that would be +4 for A and +2 for B. This is described as Non-zero sum power. Parsons asserts that non-zero sum is a normal feature, and if it happens that the becomes zero, that is a special case covered under the more general non-zero sum case.

The second aspect of power is that it be discussed not for individual cases, but for the total social systems, its needs and part played by different agencies in that regard. It will be helpful here to recall the functional requisites of a system and use the paradigm thus:



A stands for adaptation of the system to nature and the environment. For the society as a whole this function is performed by Economy.

G stands for goal attainment, this means that the collective of the society are realized. The agency charged with this function is the Polity. Here the Polity acts on behalf of the society to realise the goals common to all.

I stands for integration, society has different units with their own interests. At times may be in conflict with each other. There is a conflict theory which suggests that conflict is also a normal phenomenon in society. The functional point of view does not deny this proposition but it asserts that the social

system, if it exists, has to have a mechanism or capacity to resolve these conflicts. The term 'conflicts resolution' precisely states that process. In a modern society, the legal system tries to perform this role. The contesting parties put forward their claims and counter claims, and the judiciary settles the case. So long as this mode works, we say 'integration' is maintained in the system. In the field of games and sports, there is intense competition, we have laws of the game, and a referee or an umpire to give decisions that have to be accepted by both the parties. There may be a few disappointments, yet so long as the decision makers role is duly accepted, we say that the system works or exists.

L refers to latency or pattern maintenance. They define the basis for making laws in terms of or in consonance with the values of the society. There have been societies where birth or order of birth qualified a person to become the prince or the chief. Such societies were based on the principal of **ascription**. Modern democratic societies insist on **achievements** as the basis for gaining status. In the past religion provided the justification for status allocation. In the new situation secular values of achievement are considered valuable. In case of modern democracies e.g. the preamble to the constitution of India specifies such values which are common knowledge – yes, you guess correctly: these are liberty, equality, fraternity etc. you can fill in the rest.

The four aspects of a system are arranged in a specific order. Adaptation is related to boundary maintenance of the system, helps define the place of the system with regard to other systems and determine where it stands. Society has to define its relation with external environment, nature and its resources. Economy acts as an organized efforts to make use of those resources and energies. In this sense economy is treated as a sub-system. Analysis of economy as a subsystem was undertaken by Neil J. Smelser in collaboration with Parsons. Smelser had studied economics in the U.K. and when he joined Parsons at Harvard in the U.S.A., economy began to be linked to social systems. The two great authors thus produced the major work *Economy and Society* (1956).

Box 10.2: Parsons and Mills

A few years later Parsons wrote another work under the title *structure and process in modern societies* (1960). Parsons by that time had had begun to write in a simpler language to a writer had been hired for him to put his ideas in simpler form, Parsons gave a lecture based on that book at the University of Berkeley where smelser had started teaching. I was present at that time, After the lecture students talked among themselves Look, I could understand what Parsons said'!; the other said' but what was new in it!'

I had read comments on that book given by the authors of *Power Elite* C. Wright Mills, and brought the same to his notice. Parsons vigorously maintained his position, and pointed out that defects indicated by the critics of American democracy were unfounded. The American judiciary (system) was strong, and could take care of cases of violation of the democratic procedure. This anecdote serves one more purpose : it emphasises how Parsons considered the system as a going concern - that is a system that was active and vigorous; secondly that it had the capacity to take care of mistakes, and finally that the people had faith in the judiciary. These views clarify how a system exists against those of critics who say that the system does not exist, hence any approach for studying it was itself mistakes.

We may now summarize the points that make functional analysis possible:

- A social system exists and is capable of handling conflicts within it.
- A social system consists of parts.
- The parts are active and through their activity contribute to the maintenance and continuation of the system.
- The system has a tenure and working longer than the life of the incumbents to positions and the life span of a generation.
- The method of studying parts of a system, their interrelations and contribution for the maintenance of the system is characterised as functional approach.
- The basis for functional analysis was laid by spencer. Durkheim, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. For more details, see earlier units in analysing modern societies through this approach we recall the names of Parsons and Merton who are referred to by some analysis as neo-functionalists. Malinowski and Raddiffe-Brawn had basically studied the primitive societies. Durkheim had used this approach along with two others—the evolutionary and explanatory in terms of comparative approach. Merton had extended the ideas to modern societies and coined phrases like function and dysfunction, manifest and latent functions and related these to the study of anomie in which he discussed the inter relations of goals and means. Parsons was associated with the study of social system. His main points have been briefly pointed in this unit in the AGIL paradigm and functional requisites of the system. This approach has been further extended to each part like economy, polity and religion by various writers.
- Power as a concept belongs to the area of polity. The functional analysis of power treats it at two levels;
 - i) Who has power over whom? The sum is zero. This is a traditional answer. In the other hand the functional approach to power treats it as a non-zero sum, which as a special case may also be a zero-sum, that is the zero-sum is included in the more comprehensive case of non-zero sum.
 - ii) Power is the generalised capacity of a system to realise its collective goals. This approach goes beyond the competitive aspect of power over some one else. Functional approach treats power of the system, not merely struggle for power within a system. The power of the system can grow and enable the system both to continue and strengthen itself. In this sense again the power of the system is not a zero-sum concept, but one that keeps on adding to its capacity to face collective challenges.

10.7 Polity as a Subsystem

Now, we shall turn to the analysis of polity as a sub system of society. Such academic exercises have their parallel in India. When, we study caste in India, we also refer to sub-castes and are reminded of G.S. Ghurye's famous statement 'sub-caste is the real caste' Later Indian and American sociologists began using the indigenous term jati to refer to sub-castes. Our main concern here is how a system and a sub-system are analyzed at a general level. Does the sub-system behave like a system? Parsons and Smalser agree, say: yes, thus economy is a sub-system; polity is a sub-system they act that way, what does this mean? We shall see next.

Higher Level and Generality

Diagram : Political complex

A	Means : Regulation	Goal specification : Authority	G
L	Values : organisational effectiveness	Primary Norms : Leadership	I

Each of the four reveal internal characters of a sub-system – for example Authority in second cell (g):

Lower Level and Generality (Authority)

Allocation of budgetary resources	Allocation of organisational responsibilities
Valuations of control of membership contributions	General powers of making bonding decision

The other 3- regulations, leadership and valuation are similarly grouped in other diagram by Parsons. Ref.: (Parsons 1960: 167-168.)

A sub system reproduces the characteristics of a system and acquires its properties. We have referred to the case of a caste, likewise in a family cycle, a joint family gets the shape of several nuclear families on the death of a father as his two or four sons set up their own units. Later they beget sons, who get married and the household again becomes joint the addition of children confirms if further. The sons of one generation become parents in the next and grand parents for the third generation. Such tendencies are seen in plenty in rural areas. In the process of growth of an economy, a company or a bank may set up a branch office, which soon acquires the status of a full unit. In the educational sphere in Punjab and neighbouring states, we see a university opening a new campus, which for all purposes becomes an autonomous unit. In the sphere of polity, we see a federal (central) government, many state governments, and a few union territories. All of them are cases of representative government with some differences in power distribution. Next steps through decentralization carry forward this pattern to district, panchayat samitis and village panchayat. At all these levels in varying degrees, exercise of power has to be functional for the units concerned and if the system has to continue, the four requisites have to be attended to recall the four as AGIL.

- 1) Each political unit has to define its boundaries and get adapted to external situations. It has its natural and other resources to be used for the common good.
- 2) The common goals are attended to through the polity. Thus there are rules of governance that spell out who gets what and how if there is a dispute or a conflict.

Problems like anomie, bureaucracy, relative deprivation have been examined in the context of accepted values and alternate means for satisfying them by Merton (1968).

The agency for resolving the conflict is activated. Finally, agencies act in accordance with the value patterns of the system – for example education, health for all, as reflection of the rights of all citizens. These functions have to be performed by every sub system of the polity – in the Indian case by the central (federal) government, the states, Zila Parishads and Municipal governments, the Panchayat Samiti and the Gram Panchayat. Details will be different, the scope too varied, yet the functional requirements will have to be attended to. This example clarifies how a sub-system reproduces the characteristics of a system and at each level our understanding of the way these requirements are met proceeds along functional analysis of the system (sub system).

Parsons had analysed political process involved in the American democracy. It needs be emphasized that the functional approach takes note of conflicts in power; in fact as Coser pointed out there is a function of social conflict. What does this mean? It suggests that when a conflict occurs say between two political parties that are in power in different states or the party at the state level is different from the one at the centre, such a difference promotes a competition among the parties to do better than other. Secondly, the conflict leads to assertion of one's rights against the other, and shows how both the opposing parties are actively involved in maintaining the system from which each derives its legitimacy. The goals are enshrined in the Constitution, powers too defined and in its exercise the little vigilance on the part of each promotes the total solidarity. The generality and its strength grows through this conflict, or competition.

In the context of the two contending parties or two combinations of parties, the situation of a conflict leads to internal solidarity of the otherwise disparate sub-groups, thereby creating a functional unity among them to fight for a common cause. The definition of a common adversary leads to a process of integration within a society or groups so obliged.

10.8 Conclusion

Normally, functional approach is considered also be most suitable for the undertaking the study of simpler society. Merton brought forth a fresh paradigm of functional studies to cover problems of industrial societies at the middle level. At the macro level the most generalized in scope as a 'grand theory' Parsons extends the approach to the study of modern societies marked by increasing differentiation among institutions. Polity, like economy is seen fulfilling the needs of society. Polity represents collective organisation of society for attaining common goals and the product is power. It is a non zero-sum concept. It is exercised through authorisation by a legitimated leadership and is used to minimize dissent, exercise control and realise common goals. In a modern society like the USA, power in combination with a strong legal system and economy derives strength from the value system of success through competition i.e. achievement not by ascription, birth or tradition (leadership and authority basically reflect bureaucratic legal processes combined with bits of charismatic effect, though the office is separated from the individual who holds it). In turn these aspects strengthen one another and the social system persists. Problems arise but are seen in the total systems perspective.

10.9 Further Reading

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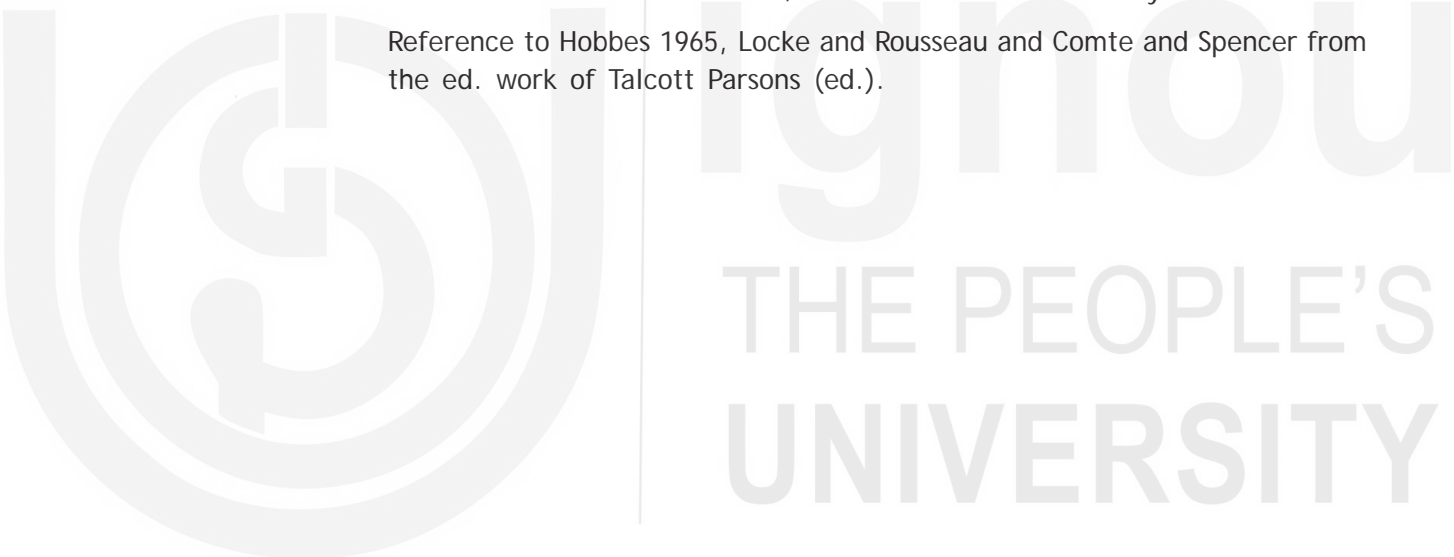
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Unit 11

Power and Institutions

Contents

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Instruments of Power
- 11.3 Sources of Power
- 11.4 Contexts of Power
- 11.5 Conclusion
- 11.6 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand

- concept of power and related concepts
- the various institutions of power and its uses
- instruments of power
- sources of power
- contexts of use of power

11.1 Introduction

Social power is a universal phenomenon in human societies and social relationships. It is possessed by both individuals and social groups. It is, in fact, the basic common element in all social relationships, politics and economics. Social power is generally experienced in an unbalanced situation. These power imbalances are the root causes of most of the social problems.

Power can be understood in two main ways. One way of understanding power that has gained prominence in recent academic discussion is the *idea of power* as a simple quantitative phenomenon. This type of conception of power pins at a kind of generalised capacity to act. The approach considers power as enhancing the capacities of those who possess it, and thereby impinges to those persons who do not possess as an imposition on their freedom and liberty. The writings of Hobbes, Locke *inter alia* on the discourse of power may be considered under this general approach.

The other and more complex conception of power is that power which involves both *capacity* and a *right to act* which derives from the consent of those over whom power is exercised. This approach looks at the effects of power as generally identified by reference to 'counterfactual conditions'. In other words, the approach holds that power in the hands of others prevents its victims from doing what they otherwise would have attained, or 'even from thinking what they otherwise would have thought'. Foucault's analysis of power is a good representative (Foucault et al 1980) of this approach. This second conception of power is often implicit rather than explicit. The concept is central to much modern social and political thought today.

Power has also been viewed in various ways. Some scholars (Mills 1959) would consider power as a 'zero-sum' concept. Here, power is defined in a mutually exclusive manner. The concept would mean that if one person or party wins, the other necessarily loses. In other words, the approach conceives power

as to be possessed by only one person or group in such a way that a second person or group over whom power is wielded does not possess. There are others who opine that power should be looked at as a kind of a 'non-zero-sum' concept (Parsons 1961). According to them, each person or party shares power to the extent that both the parties ('share-holders') gains. In this approach, power is defined in terms of mutually inclusive objectives.

Thus, social power is defined in different ways. However, for our purpose, we generally define power as the ability of an individual or group to carry out its wishes or policies to control, manipulate, or influence the behaviour of others, whether they wish to cooperate or not. Social power is also the capability to influence others or resist influence from others. The agent who possesses power has resources to force his/her will on others. People with great wealth, muscle, status, intelligence, competence, etc. have more chances to influence other people.

Power has been invariably used as synonyms for the closely related concepts, such as, prestige, influence, eminence, competence, ability, knowledge, dominance, rights, force, coercion, authority among others. But they are not identical concepts *per se*. We shall therefore examine the differences of these terms.

Let us first of all differentiate between the independent variables of power and prestige. The relationship of the two terms may be understood in a way that power can occur without prestige while prestige would not occur without power. For instance, a scientist would have prestige but no power; whereas, a policeman would have power, but little prestige. In the same way, we could establish relationship between power and closely related terms such as competence, ability, knowledge, eminence and so on. These concepts can be accompanied or may not be accompanied by power.

The concept of power is very closely related to the concept of dominance. Basically, power is in essence a sociological concept whereas dominance is a socio-psychological concept. In other words, power is located in groups and it manifests in inter-group relations, whereas dominance is essentially located in the individual and it is expressed in inter-personal relationships. Again, power manifests in the statuses that people occupy in formal organisation, whereas dominance appears in the roles people play in informal organisation. Power is a function of organisation of associations, of the arrangement and juxtaposition of groups, and of the structure of society itself. On the contrary, dominance is a function of personality or temperament; it is a personal trait (Bierstedt, 1969). However, this distinction in terms of sociological and psychological discourses, and also group vis-à-vis personality need not be in a strict sense. Because nowadays, we often talk about collective dominance and hegemony and so much so, we also talk of power relations even in the inter-personal levels.

Likewise power and influence may be distinguished by an important feature, viz., power is by and large coercive, whereas influence is persuasive. In this context, we could consider that Karl Marx, the philosopher has a great influence exerted upon the 20th century; but he was not a powerful man. In almost the same manner, right, like privilege, is not power itself, but one of the perquisites of power. But then we can pose the question as whether force and authority are power? The answer would be that they are not, even though they are very closely related terms. In a simplistic way, then, we may

distinguish them by mainly considering that power is a latent force; force is manifest power; and authority is institutionalised power (Hindess, 1996). Power is potential, so that when it is used, it becomes either force or authority. For example, the threat of a minority to withdraw from an association would effectively wield power, but once the minority group withdraws from the association, it is no longer power, but force.

11.2 Instruments of Power

There are three main institutions or traits that accord the right to use of power. In other words, there are three instruments for wielding or enforcing of power. They are *coercive* or *condign*, *compensatory* and *conditioned* power. These three instruments need not be strictly compartmentalised. They overlap each other at one point of time or another. We shall deal with them in brief before we get on to other aspects of power.

Coercive or *condign* power wins acceptance by threatening, intimidating and/or inflicting on others with dire consequences. It includes power exercised by any form of adverse action or its threat in the form of fines, resource or property expropriation, rebuke, and condemnation by any individuals or the community concerned. The process of such power takes place in a situation where power is gained by attaining submission from others to abandon their preferences or desires through the capacity to impose an alternative to those preferences of the individual or group that are unpleasant or painful.

We could understand coercive power in two levels: First, a situation where a person or a group who undergo a very painful experience would still opt for the *defacto* condition as the alternative provided appear to be either no better or even worse than what they have been experiencing at a given point of time; Second, a situation where the individual or group withdraws from acting against certain impositions or refrains from speaking his/her mind and opts to submit to the view of others in order to avoid unpleasant implications. In other words, the person or group just accepts the dictat of others and would not speak up because of the impending rebuke and harsh consequences that would come upon him/her or them.

Box 11.1: Comparing Condign and Compensatory Power

The most distinctive feature of both condign and compensatory power is their objectivity- or visibility. Those accepting the will of others are conscious of doing so; they are acting in consequence of a fairly deliberate calculation that is the better course of action. It has become so because of the offer of some specific quid pro quo for their submission. Those exercising the power are also purposefully aware of what they are doing.

The difference between condign and compensatory power is the difference between negative and affirmative reward. Condign power threatens the individual with something physically or emotionally painful enough so that he forgoes pursuit of his own will or preference in order to avoid it. Compensatory power offers the individual a reward or payment sufficiently advantageous or agreeable so that he (or she) forgoes pursuit of his own preferences to seek the reward instead. In less abstract language, condign power wins submission by the promise or reality of punishment; compensatory power wins submission by the promise or reality of benefit.

Source: Galbraith, 1984.

Compensatory power attains submission from others by offering affirmative action in the form of rewards to the individual or group who submits to the coercion. In economic terms, compensation in rural areas could be in various forms, such as, payments in kind or cash for services rendered, the right to work a plot of land, or sharing the product of the landlord's fields. In socio-economic and political sense, the affirmative rewards, be it, economic package for development *inter alia* provided to certain communities or regions infested with socio-political unrest could be another example of compensatory power in the modern situation.

In the above two cases, viz., coercive power and compensatory power, the individual or group is aware of his/her submission to the coercing agent through compulsion and persuasion and/or inducement respectively.

Reflection and Action 11.1

How would you define power? Can you differentiate power from dominance, prestige and influence?

The third instrument of power- *conditioned power* in contrast to condign and compensatory power (which is visible and objective) is subjective. In this case, neither those exercising the power nor those who are subject to it, need not necessarily be aware of its exertion. This kind of power is achieved by changing the attitude and belief of the individual or group. In this situation, a person or group accepts the will of another or others because they feel that the initiative taken seems to be right, by way of persuasion, education, social commitment, or promises. They submit to the initiative because they feel that it is in a preferred course or track. In such situation, submission is not necessarily acknowledged. Conditioned power is, in fact, the most crucial and pervasive kind of power to the functioning of modern society, whether it be in the aspects of economy and polity, and in capitalist and socialist countries as well.

11.3 Sources of Power

There are several sources or institutions of power. These sources or institutions of power differentiate those who wield power on others from those who submit to them. Scholars have identified different sources of power according to their perceptions. For instance, Bierstedt (1969) identifies three sources of power, namely, numbers of people, social organization, and resources. He includes various components in the third source of power, such as, money, property, prestige, knowledge, competence, deceit, fraud, secrecy, and natural resources. Mann (1986) would identify four sources of power, namely, ideological, economic, military, and political relationships. Tumin (1992) opines that there are five sources of power, namely, role-specific authority, goods and services, skills and abilities, personal qualities, and coercive power. Galbraith (1984) classifies three sources of power- personality, property and organisation. There are also many other scholars who classify them in many different ways. Therefore, it is difficult to follow one single classification of the sources of power. But all of these classifications have more or less similar elements of the sources of power. For our purpose, we shall consider the following main sources of power: *personality, numbers of people, resources or property, skills abilities and knowledge, media, coercive force, and organisation.*

competence and other personal traits that enables a person to have access to the instruments of power. Personality also means personal qualities such as beauty, charm, or charisma that paves way to persuade others to get one's favour. In modern times, personality has its primary association with conditioned power, viz., the ability to persuade or change the attitude and belief of others.

Numbers of people is yet another important source of power. In other words, majorities constitute a residual locus of social power. Given the same organisation and the same resources *inter alia*, the larger number can always control the smaller and obtain its compliance. We can see the number game of power in various contexts. In simple societies, the access to power was usually through physical strength and coercion. Families with large youths and muscular males would have advantage of wielding power on others. In other words, the muscular male youths in these families would be great sources of power. This does not, however, mean that diplomacy and intelligence does not work in these societies. There are many instances where intelligent people wield powers in the simple societies.

In the modern societies, we can also understand the number factor of power as seen in elections of all kinds, where the majority is given the right to institutionalise its power as authority. This kind of power is observed in all associations, be it democratic, autocratic, or otherwise. The power of a majority as found in both formal and informal associations is beyond doubt the key to either threat or sustaining the stability of the association concerned.

Skills and abilities is one source of power which enables people to provide services that others need or desire. These skills could be in terms of craft skills, military acumen, economic expertise, medical knowledge, and literary artistry. It also includes knowledge and media power, among others. These skills give the possessors the advantage to have power over those who desire the benefits of their skills and expertise. Knowledge becomes power because it is an asset to comprehend circumstances, to predict and plan, and to create effects, especially by knowing how to use other forms of power.

Media in the modern world has become one of the great sources of power. Its contribution is most significantly manifested in influencing or controlling information and communication by having access to the media and through controlling and manipulation. For example, the projections that the columnists make in the print media or television reporters on important but controversial and important issues have great impacts on the readers and viewers.

Resources or Property is one of the important attributes to wield power. Resources may be of many kinds. It includes property, money, prestige, knowledge, competence, skills and abilities, deceit, fraud, secrecy and all the things pertaining to natural and also supernatural resources. In the later case (viz., supernatural resources), we can understand of religious associations which, as agencies of a celestial government, apply supernatural sanctions as instruments of control. A wealthy person commands respect and authority. In the process of its activities, a wealthy person can attain conditioned submission by way of submission or otherwise. The possession of goods and services enables the possessors to purchase and acquire what they want.

However, property-wealth, income, etc. is mainly associated with compensatory power.

In *coercive force*, power is derived from coercion, be it, psychological, social, or physical that one possesses. Through this coercive force, the possessor of the force can threaten others to submission and carry out one's intention and objective. People out of fear for torture or any kind of punishment—physically, mentally, or otherwise, and the fear of the loss of their freedom and resources yields to the force. They thus become victims of coercion. These threats could be real or imaginary perception.

Organisation is said to be the most important source of power in modern societies. A well organised and disciplined body of army or police can control a much larger number of unorganised majority. In many instances, we also experience an organised minority control an unorganised majority. This simply speaks largely of the power of organisation. Organisation is associated with all the three instruments of power, namely, conditioned power, coercive power, and compensatory power.

Reflection and Action 11.2

What are the sources of power? Describe at least four sources.

Role specific authority is also an important component of organisation power by virtue of the authority sanctioned by the organisation or position that one holds. For instance, the president of an organisation has the power or authority of the office. Similarly, power is also possessed by judges, police, employers, teachers and others in a formal relationship in which one partner has the legal or customary right to command or control some or all aspects of the relationship. These powers may be seen within the limits of the formal relationship. It is specific to the status relationships one is associated.

An organisation usually has the ability to persuade others towards realisation of their objectives. Organisation has also the access to coercive or condign power like in the case of the state. The kind of access of an organisation to compensatory power would however depend on the quantity and value of the property it possesses.

Box 11.2: Distinguishing Legitimate and Illegitimate Sources and Uses

Legitimate and acceptable powers must be distinguished from those that are deemed illegitimate and unacceptable. Yet all illegitimate powers rest on the same bases as those which yield legitimate power. Gangsters, thieves, terrorists, prostitutes, gamblers, and others in the illegitimate world are able to exert power because of their role-specific authorities in that world, or because of their material resources, skills, personal qualities, and psychological and physical coerciveness. Moreover, those who secure resources from the illegitimate world, that is, money from stealing, gambling, or drug peddling, can use such illegally acquired assets as a source of power in both the legitimate and illegitimate world. Money secured in legitimate ways, such as through work, can be used for either legitimate or illegitimate ends, such as to purchase illegal drugs or to gamble illegally, or to secure a position or contract through bribery. In the same vein, a person with superior role authority can use the power of his position, such as the ability to fire another person, to coerce the subordinate, illegally, into desired forms of behavior.

Source: Tumin, 1992.

The sources of power would also have quite a number of combinations among and between them. They also include both legitimate and illegitimate sources of power (Talcott Parsons et al, 1967). They are also combined in various strengths. Due to the variation of combinations, varied results are also yielded for enforcement of power.

11.4 Contexts of Power

There are four main contexts where power can be exercised. They may be seen in the contexts of *political affairs*, *institutional patterning*, *ensuring life chances*, and *personal relations* (Tumin, 1992).

In the milieu of *political affairs*, it is essential to set the structure and mechanism of the affairs and conduct of political communities, such as towns, cities, states, nations and/or international community. In this context, power has bearing with both realms of individuals and groups. The groups would include associations, political parties, whole communities, *inter alia*. Such collectivities derive power mainly from their positional roles. For instance, we have a situation where the federal governments have more powers than the local governments as provided by the constitution of the respective states. In the context of the Indian state, the Union government has greater powers than its federal states.

Institutional Patterning is also an important context of power appropriation. Power is relevant in the interplay of roles in the basic institutions, such as the family, polity, the educational system, religious institutions and the economy. In these institutions, we find some kind of relations, be it between employers and employees, teachers and pupils, priests and laymen and so on. Even in our everyday life, we all have some position and role in these basic institutions which govern our life. Because of our involvement in such relationships, we do experience differential power relations, the patterns of dominance and submission which are important elements in determining the pattern of conduct. In such patterning of institutions, role-specific authority is a crucial component and role-player.

Power is also exercised in *ensuring life chances* in one's life. It operates in the competition for share of valued life chances. It could be in terms of the chance for surviving the first year of life, maintaining good health, securing good opportunities for schooling and jobs, and living a reasonable long life span. These valued life chances are important factors to control one's destiny because they are contributory attributes for enhancing one's position and role and the ability to shape and control one's future.

Reflection and Action 11.3

Discuss the various contexts in which power is exercised.

Personal relations outside the purview of the institutional roles are relevant to the appropriation of power. These relations could be of many forms and would take place at different situations. We meet people in the market, in stores, on the street, in buses, sub-ways, trains, planes, parks, stadiums, seminars and conferences. We do make friendships and love relationships at one time or the other. We also meet people in the neighbourhood and other people who are not formally bound to us. But we know with whom we must network with for realizing our interests, desires and movements. All these

relationships are good examples where power plays important role in personal relations.

We also have situation where people are attracted and so won their friendship through one's personal charm and beauty. The same quality can influence other people in winning their love and confidence. These situations are some of the instances where power works through personal relations.

All these powers discussed above are not equally relevant nor are they relevant at all situations. But one or more of these forms of power will be relevant in all the four contexts of power.

Box 11.3: Measurement of Amount of Power

The amount of power exercised by an individual may be measured either by the ratio of his successful power acts to all of his attempted power acts or by certain criteria These measures may be used as a basis of comparison between different power-holders. The two "amounts" represent not alternative techniques of measurement but differences in what is measured. Amount in these cases does not mean the same thing. Most investigations of power, in so far as they deal with the amount of power, utilise "amount" in the second sense.

Two principal criteria may be used to measure the amount of power exercised by a power-holder: the number of actions of any given person in each of any number of selected types of behavior, over which control is realised (or potential); and the number of persons so controlled. The definition of dictatorship as "a form of government where everything that is not forbidden is obligatory" indicates complete power in terms of the spheres of behavior over which control is exercised.

Source: Goldhamer and Shils, 1969.

There is no necessary relationship either of the amounts of power of an individual or group in one context and their power in the others. A person may be very powerful in one context and may be powerless in quite the other. For instance, a person may be powerful in the family, but he may be a subject to the will of everyone outside the family. Likewise, one may be powerful in national affairs and yet be relatively powerless in personal relationships.

11.5 Conclusion

Social power is a universal phenomenon that transcends all human societies. It is experienced in everyday social relationships in one way or another. Power may manifest as a generalised capacity to act and/or as involving both capacity and a right to act. Generally, power may be understood as the ability of an individual or group to carry out its wishes or policies to control, manipulate, or influence the behaviour of others, whether they wish to cooperate or not.

Social power is also the capability to influence others or resist influence from others. The concept of power is often considered as synonymous to its closely related concepts such as dominance, prestige, influence, force and so on. But they are not the same.

There are three main institutions (instruments) for enforcing power. They are coercive or condign, compensatory and conditioned power. These three instruments are however not strictly compartmentalised. Again, there are several sources of power such as personality, numbers of people, resources or property, skills, abilities and knowledge, media, coercive force, and organisation.

Power is manifest in various contexts, be it political affairs, institutional patterning, ensuring life chances, or personal relations. The amounts of power of an individual or group are not necessarily the same for different contexts. A person may be powerful in one context and may be powerless in another.

11.6 Further Reading

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Unit 12

Power/Knowledge

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Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit you should be able to

- define and discuss power
- discuss the relationship of power/knowledge
- outline what is Foucault's Archeology and Genealogy

12.1 Introduction

Sociologists usually define power as the ability to impose one's will on others, even if those others resist in some way. "By power is meant that opportunity existing within a social relationship which permits one to carry out one's own will even against resistance and regardless of the basis on which this opportunity rests" (Max Weber, Basic Concepts in Sociology). Power manifests itself in a relational manner. That is, one cannot meaningfully say that a particular social actor 'has power' without also specifying the other parties to the social relationships. Also power almost always operates reciprocally, but usually not equally reciprocally.

The understanding and analysis of power has been critical to sociological thought. One of the prominent delineations of power has been provided by Michel Foucault (1926-1984). His works analyse the link between power and knowledge. Foucault began his intellectual pursuits in philosophy but became disillusioned by its abstractions and "naive truth claims" and turned to psychology and psychopathology. This resulted in his early writings, 'Madness and Civilisation', 'The Birth of Clinic' and initiated his lifelong interest in the relationship between power and knowledge.

The main influences on Foucault's thought were German philosophers Frederick Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Nietzsche contended that truth, knowledge and power are inextricably associated. He maintained that human behavior is motivated by a will to power and that traditional values had lost their power over society. Heidegger criticized what he called 'our current technological understanding of being'. Foucault's thought explored the shifting patterns of power within a society and the ways in which power relates to the self. He investigated the changing rules governing the kind of claims that could be taken seriously as true or false at different times in history. He also studied how everyday practices enabled people to define their identities and systematize knowledge; events may be understood as being produced

by nature, by human effort or by God. Foucault argued that each way of understanding things had its advantages and its dangers.

12.2 Definition of Power

Foucault never attempts at any definition of power but gives a definition of power relations at best. "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individuals or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others. Which is to say, of course, that something called power with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist."

Foucault goes on to insist that knowledge and power are always and necessarily interdependent. A site where power is enforced is also a site where knowledge is produced and conversely, a site from which knowledge is derived is a place where power is exercised. In 'Discipline and Punish' he sees prison as an example of just such a site of power, and as a place where knowledge, essential to the modern social sciences, was formed. Reciprocally the ideas from which the social sciences were formulated were also the ones that gave birth to the prison. The belief that a scientist can arrive at an objective conclusion, Foucault argues, is one of the greatest fallacies of the modern, humanist era.

"Modern humanism is therefore mistaken in drawing this line between knowledge and Power. Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time where knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge. It is impossible for knowledge not to endanger power."

So instead of referring to power and knowledge separately, he prefers to compound the term **power/knowledge**.

Box 12.1

The concept of "discourse" is central to many of Foucault's ideas. He describes discourses as ways of identifying truth and knowledge at historically specific moments, thus providing set of rules that define realities.

This is especially pertinent to scientific discourses, which are legitimated by the rationality paradigm. Discourses contain power because they establish particular truths and knowledge, and their power is exercised through the creation and sustenance of social norms, practices and institutions. In Foucauldian analysis, power is not monopolised by any one subject through its control of a predominant discourse; the discursive field comprises multiple subjects who manipulate various discourses to some extent. For Foucault, the issue is not origin of discourses, but the implications of their power effects and the types of knowledge they produce and institutionalise. Since power originates in discourses, it has no unitary source but is heterogeneous and pluralistic, coming from everywhere and being everywhere.

12.3 Power Knowledge and Discourse

Foucault analyses the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse that develops from the establishment of Enlightenment rationality which

presents itself as progressive and emancipatory. The hegemony of Enlightenment rationality and its institutions, and the marginalisation of other discourses, create and validate a social network of normative power which disciplines and constrains the individual at the micro level. Foucault studies the emergence of several kinds of rationalities in history. The emergence of a particular kind of rationality, then, presupposes that the field of knowledge is tightly linked with an empirical field. Due to its instrumentality, a form of reason as well as any form of knowledge define a set of possible practices and is thus an instrument of power. Further, being embodied in an empirical field, a form of reason (or any form of knowledge supported by it) has no 'being' beyond any set of practices. Therefore, the field of knowledge defines a field of power and vice-versa.

Power, thus, is not to be considered as opposite to reason; but on the contrary as the necessary condition for the construction of knowledge. Moreover, because power produces knowledge, it can be, at least partially, grasped by archaeology.

Reflection and Action 12.1

What is the relationship between power/knowledge. Does one always imply the other? Discuss and write down your answer in a note book.

Foucault's discussion of the nature of modern power is located within the postmodern framework. In keeping with the postmodern perspective, he critiques modernity and the universalising claims of modern rationality, and emphasises multiplicity, discontinuity and fragmentation. Foucault calls for a "theoretical production" (Foucault 1980:81) which is independent, localised and free from traditional discourse, such as his own application of the differing but overlapping perspectives of psychology, medicine, criminology and sexuality in his exploration of modernity.

The two major approaches employed by Foucault in his analysis of power and knowledge were **Archaeology** and **Genealogy**. His aim is to establish a genealogy of how power is exercised in our own society basing his analysis on archaeology of the discursive formations. Hence, his analysis is aimed towards the 'modes of functioning' of power in our society.

12.4 Foucault's Archeological Writings

Foucault's early work provides an archaeology of knowledge, wherein he deconstructs the underlying unconscious rationalities of historically specific domains. In his first major work, *Madness and Civilisation* (original French edition 1961; English edition 1965), Foucault traces the evolution of the relationship between insanity and modern reason. He examines the historical and discursive process whereby insanity is constructed as the opposite of rationality and is systematically separated from reason through "discourses of exclusion and institutions of confinement".

Box 12.2

According to Foucault, the "scientific psychiatry" (Foucault 1965:158) that emerged in the nineteenth century was invested with morality, and the scientific treatment of the insane was to occur through confinement. For Foucault, the power mechanisms involved in the process were more repressive than the shackles of the past.

Foucault's most elaborate archaeological exposition occurs in his following book, *The Order of Things* (original French edition 1966), in which he describes the emergence of the human and social sciences as the product of "the underlying rules, assumptions and ordering procedures of the Renaissance, classical, and modern eras" (Best and Kellner 1991:41), and the creation of "man" as a discursive construct of scientific knowledge and inquiry. In his final archaeological writing, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (original French edition 1971), Foucault provides a reflexive critique and clarification of his intellectual project: the development of a historical and theoretical epistemological space.

Foucault's archaeological writings have been criticized for an excessive focus on discourse, to the exclusion of social institutions and practice. Nevertheless, Foucault's archaeologies clearly privilege the analysis of theory and knowledge over social practices and institutions. An inquiry into the effect of discourse on the social and political environment would require an evaluation of material institutions. This principle guides Foucault's next intellectual phase, in which he borrows from the Nietzschean principle of genealogy to concentrate explicitly on power effects and their relationship with knowledge (Best and Kellner 1991:45).

12.5 Foucault's Genealogical Writings

Genealogy signals a shift and broadening of Foucault's focus, but not a fundamental change in his vision. Like Foucault's archaeological writings, his genealogy explores discursive discontinuities and clarifies the historical contexts of positions which are presented as absolute. Following from archaeology, genealogy focuses on the multiplicities and pluralities within a field of discourse; explicates the shifting, discontinuous undercurrents of evolutionary history; and examines the role of reason in the production of the human sciences. In contrast to archeology, genealogy aims at social, political and economic institutions and practices; and the relations between discursive and non-discursive domains.

Following from this position, Foucault began to theorize about power in the 1970s from a non-totalizing, non-subjective and non-humanist perspective. His conception of power is radically different from earlier juridical, political and economic macro perspectives. He suggests that power cannot be observed in these apparatuses, and that it is diffuse, non specific and polymorphous, shaping individual identities and bodies. Thus, unlike most earlier explanations, he does not see power as inhibiting and negative, but as productive and prescriptive, operating through the authority of social norms (Best & Kellner 1991:48-49).

Reflection and Action 12.2

Reflect on Foucault's genealogical approach. What are the advantages of such an approach?

In his first genealogical work, *Discipline and Punish* (original French edition 1975; English edition 1979), Foucault describes "the historical formation of the soul, body, and subject" within "disciplinary matrices of power" which operate in schools, armies, hospitals, factories and prisons. He thus examines the relationship between modern social institutions and the power relations of rationality. In his later work, Foucault explicates the nature of rational power.

Foucault critiques the 'repressive hypothesis' by stating that the idea of sexual repression is a mechanism situated within "the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure" (Foucault 1978:11), which creates and sustains the discourse on sexuality and focuses on the body as the site of control. Thus, Foucault reveals the ubiquitous and insidious operations of power; problematizes rationality, subjectivity and knowledge; explores the links between power and knowledge. Foucault's vision has often been considered oppressive. His archaeological and genealogical works reveal the colonizing power of modern rationality and its dispersed presence throughout the social field.

Nonetheless, Foucault's theorising is grounded in the belief that knowledge can be transformative. At the same time, although discourses reinforce power, they also provide potential for resistance, whereby the disenfranchised can extend oppositional discourses and demand legitimacy, frequently by appropriating institutional categories.

12.6 Conclusion

Even if one does not agree with Foucault, at the very least, he reveals the pervasive presence of power in human existence and critiques the demonstrated validity of rationality, subjectivity and knowledge. His analyses describe the extensive effects of power and its multiple operations: in rational institutions such as schools, hospitals, factories, asylums and prisons; in the production of scientific knowledge; and in the construction of epistemological systems (Best and Kellner 1991:68-69). However, Foucault also has clear limitations. His critique of modernity has been accused of being one-sided, presenting only the negative results of rationality, which limits his applicability. More significant is the startling neutrality of his analyses. Although Foucault states that power operates through knowledge and discourse, he ignores the reality that established epistemologies favor certain groups or individuals to the exclusion of others. The discourse of rationality itself has historically specific roots to white Western male intellectuals: thus, its predominance has very real and specific effects. Although he speaks of bringing subjected discourses into play, he does not address the fact that subjected discourses are discovered among clearly identifiable sections of the human population: among non-white, non-affluent, non-West European, non-heterosexual men and women.

In spite of practical goals of his analysis, Foucault has been broadly criticized by his adversaries on the 'backdoor determinism' inherent to his conception of power.

However Foucault has made an invaluable contribution to the study of power/knowledge by opening new fields of understanding and interpretation.

12.7 Further Reading

Foucault Michel, 1973. *Birth of the Clinic* N.4. Pantheon

Foucault Michel, 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* N.4. Pantheon

Foucault Michel, 1965. *Madness and Civilization* N.4. Pantheon