

Unit 19

State; Power as Elaborated by Marx, Weber, Parsons and Others

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Learning Objectives

- The concepts of state and power and their inter relationship
- The conceptualisation of state as an institution by Marx, Weber and Durkheim
- The conceptualisation of power in relation to state and society by Marx, Weber and Parsons
- The conceptualisation of state and power in other theoretical models such as pluralist, elitist, neo Marxist etc.

19.1 Introduction

In this unit we are going to study the concepts of state and power as elaborated by Karl Marx, Max Weber and others. Here we will look into the definitions and components of state and power as enunciated by these thinkers. They have interpreted the concepts according to the historical and political necessities of the period they lived. They have adopted differing methodologies and understanding for interpreting the universal concepts of state and power. Karl Marx and Max Weber are two prominent social thinkers who elaborated the features of modern state as well as the concept of power in relation to state and society. There are also different theoretical models (pluralist, neo-Marxist, elitist etc.) on state and power, most of that are responses to Marxian and Weberian theories on state and on their understanding of how centralised government uses power. Power relations are normally elaborated in terms of the causal factors that enable one person, or a group of persons, to determine the actions of others. And power is usually explained in relation to governmental or state authority. An examination of Marxian, Weberian and other theoretical models of state as an institution has been done in the first half of the unit. An in-depth analysis of the concept of power in relation to state and society has been done in the second half of the unit.

19.2 The Concept of State

The term 'state' is commonly used as a synonym for nation, government, society or country. One of the prerequisites of state is sovereign power, which implies supreme authority, or power. Aristotle defined state as a union of families and villages having, for its end, a perfect and self-sufficing life, which means happy and honourable life. According to Mac Iver the state is an association, which acting through law as promulgated by government endowed to this end with coercive power, maintains within a community territorially demarcated universal external conditions of social order. It can otherwise be said that when a group of people are permanently settled on a definite territory and have government of their own, free from any kind of external control, they constitute a state and it has sovereign power upon its people (Das and Chaoudhury 1999). State uses power as a mechanism to keep the society bound together. The state uses power as legislative, judicial, military and planning function. Through legislative function it enforces the norms of the society. Judicial function uses power to exert physical force for the protection of citizen's lives and property. Military function uses power to establish relations with other societies and planning function is related to the allocation of scarce goods and resources. Now let us examine the concept of state as elaborated in different theoretical models.

19.3 Marx on State

Although Marx had no fully developed theory of state, he did discuss it in various ways throughout his writings. Marx traces the development of the state to the division of labour in the society. Primitive societies are simple and less complex and marked by least division of labour. As the societies grow from primitive to capitalist it becomes more and more complex and there arises some central organising agency to control. This ultimately leads to the formation of state. His views on state are closely related to his classification of society.

For him the basis of state is force and the state exercises power and authority for promoting the interests of the dominant class and suppressing and exploiting the weaker classes who are collectively called as proletariat in the context of capitalist society. He views state as a man-made institution rather than a natural institution. The Marxists look at the state as a product of class struggle and as an instrument of class rule. Thus, for Marx, the state is essentially a class structure, an organisation of one class dominating over other classes. He views that state as originated at a certain stage of economic development in the history of humanity, when society was broken into two classes, namely 'haves' and 'havenots'.

In Marxist theory the most important activity of human beings is economic activity. According to him understanding the way a society organises its production is the key to understand the whole of its social structure. His view is that the production of the means of subsistence forms the foundation upon which various institutions, the legal conception, art and even the ideas on religion of the people concerned have been evolved. Marx stresses economic production as the key structural feature of any society and he called the way it organises its production as its infrastructure. The rest of its social organisation — its non-economic activities such as ideas, beliefs and philosophies, legal system, the state etc. — he called superstructure

(Jones 1991). The super structure of any form of society is affected by its infrastructure i.e., the economic activities of the society. State according to Marx is a non-economic institution and hence a part of superstructure. The formation and functioning of the state is therefore depend on the way the society organises its economic production. Marx called the different ways of production of goods in the society as modes of production. And based on the modes of production Marx distinguished five historical epochs in the development of humanity. These in chronological order are primitive communist, ancient, feudal, capitalist and communist, each depicting its own characteristic state and government. Apart from the first and last modes of production i.e. the primitive communist and communist mode, each mode of production has one crucial characteristic in common. Each of them produces goods based on class. In each of the historical epochs there are two classes, one is the minority dominant class, the one which owns the modes of production and the other majority subordinate class, the class that does not own means of production or the exploited class which do the productive work.

Those who own means of production control the state. Whenever there is change in the mode of production in a society (see Box 19.1), the government (the physical form of state) also undergoes simultaneous change. And irrespective of the form of the society (ancient, feudal or capitalist) the state invariably is, according to Marx, an instrument for exploitation in the hands of dominant class.

Marx's deliberation of state as an institution is mainly based on the capitalist form of society. For him state is a centralised organising agency, which was necessarily involved in the domination of one class over the others. The prominent classes Marx talks about in relation to capitalist society are bourgeoisie and proletariat. According to Marx, capitalism is an inherently expanding system and the social class at its helm (bourgeoisie) is carried into political power not because of any deliberate or conscious action but because that is the way the society develops. It is argued that Marx believed the state to be a sort of conspiracy against the working class, or that the wealth of the bourgeoisie could be used to ensure that whoever is in power pursues its interests (Miller 1991). For Marx, the concern of the state for individual liberty could be seen as an attempt to enforce the right of the individual property owner (bourgeoisie) against those without property (proletariat) whose only power lay in their banding together to take collective action. The political struggle for trade union rights represent the collective action of proletariat.

Box 19.1: Dialectical Materialism

According to Marx, all history can be explained by the conflict between opposing forces, thesis and antithesis. Every stage of history which falls short of perfection carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Each stage reached in the march to the classless society, the thesis, calls into being its opposite or anti-thesis, and from the clash between the two a new synthesis will become the thesis until the classless society has been achieved. This philosophy of the inevitability of change resulting from the struggle of opposites and determined by concrete realities rather than ideas is called dialectical materialism. It is the basic philosophy of communism. In dialectical materialism, evolution is the development of the matter from within, environment helping or hindering, but neither originating the

evolutionary process nor capable of preventing it from reaching its inevitable goal.

According to Marx, capitalism had to be replaced because the evolution of society's institutions is a natural and inevitable process of history. Capitalism itself is the product of the struggle between lords and serfs in feudal society. The evolution into capitalism, instead of some other form of social contract, was due to the arrival of machines and the factory system. This synthesis in turn created two new contending forces: the capitalist class or bourgeoisie, which owns the means of production, and the wage workers or proletariat class, which has to sell its labor to survive.

From the writings of Marx one can decipher broadly three models of state, the liberal, arbiter and functionalist. In his earlier writings it can be seen that the bourgeoisie rule the state or manipulate the state machinery to protect their interests or to put in Marx's words 'state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engles 1968). On this model, economic power is quite simply translated into political power, by means of which the dominant bourgeoisie rules over subordinate classes through liberal state.

In his later writings Marx made various modifications of and reservations about these earlier views. In his later writings, which were more empirical, he views and talks about different sections of bourgeoisie engaging in political struggles through and over the state. Here he suggests a different model of the state, the arbiter model. In *The Eighteenth Brumair of Louis Bonaparte* he sketches the modern state in such a way as to suggest its relative autonomy from the interests of bourgeoisie. The modern state has grown so strong that in exceptional moments when bourgeoisie cannot completely dominate the other classes against which it must struggle, the state may become an arena for competing interests, an apparent mediator, and may even act independently to limit the power of bourgeoisie (Nash 2000). For example the Factory Acts and the arguments over the Corn Laws in UK in the 1840s can be seen as a struggle between industrial bourgeoisie and the agricultural bourgeoisie. He also talks about the state being controlled by people who do not belong to the dominant class (bourgeoisie) but nevertheless exercise power in the interests of the dominant class. For example in UK by the end of the 19th century though the central governing body constituted by the landowning class, they exercised power in the interests of industrial bourgeoisie. This reaches to the conclusion that whoever comes to power, they represent the interests of dominant class in the capitalist society. This is because for the economic development of the societies the state has to protect the interests of the dominant class.

In his latest works, Marx suggested a third model of state, the functionalist model. In '*Capital*', volume 3, he depicts state as supernatural, determined entirely by changes in the economic base in the society. He explains if capitalism is to survive, it requires a reasonably healthy work force educated to a level necessary to operate at the relevant level of technological development and it needs to ensure that the next generation is raised in a reasonable way to whatever standards are required. The state develops in order to fulfil these needs. In Marxist view, in a class society, super structure is indispensable to its survival. It represents the society's cultural characteristics and the institutions that promote these characteristics. Its

infrastructure, its class based mode of production, survives so long as class character of the society remains unrecognised, or is considered legitimate, by those whom it subordinates. The superstructure (state as a prominent institution) ensures this happens. That means the state essentially function as a system integrator. This is how Marx views state as working in the interests of the ruling class because it is working to reproduce the sort of economic and social system that favours the class that rules. For Marx, in any state, the dominant class try to promote and protect its own interests as against the interests of other classes and formulates the laws. And thus the purpose of the state is to protect private property and its function is to oppress the non-possessing class in the interest of the possessing class. Irrespective of the form of the state, whether democratic, republic or monarchy, it is used as an agency for the oppression of one class by another. It is only the class interests that are represented at the political level and ultimately the economic power will determine how state power is to be used.

Reflection and Action 19.1

Elucidate the different models of state depicted by Karl Marx.

Marx states that the system integration in capitalism is constantly threatened by class conflict and is supported by the state and by ruling ideologies. He predicts the class struggle in the capitalist society necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat and through the dictatorship of the proletariat, there would be the abolition of all classes through a revolutionary transformation and the establishment of classless society, the communist society. When the classless society is established and there is no suppressive function for the state, it would be required only to perform the economic functions. The abolition of class distinctions would also lead to the fulfillment of the political functions of the state and the people will be accustomed to the voluntary performance of their social responsibilities and the observance of the rules of the socialist life. At this stage, there would be no necessity of state and according to Marx the state would 'wither away'.

Box 19.2: Marxism

Marxism as a theoretical system developed out of, and drew inspiration from the writings of Karl Marx. However, 'Marxism' as a codified body of thought came into existence only after Marx's death. It was the product of the attempt by later Marxists to condense Marx's ideas and theories into a systematic and comprehensive worldview that suited the needs of the growing socialist movement. However, a variety of Marxist traditions can be identified, including 'classical' Marxism (the Marxism of Marx), 'orthodox' Marxism or 'dialectical materialism', the mechanistic form of Marxism that served as the basis for Soviet communism, and 'Western', 'modern' or 'neo' Marxism, which tend to view Marxism as a humanist philosophy and are skeptical about its scientific and determinist pretensions. The cornerstone of Marxist philosophy is what Engles called the 'materialist conception of history'. This highlights the importance of economic life and the conditions under which people produce and reproduce their means of substance, reflected, simplistically, in the belief that the economic 'base', consisting essentially of the 'mode of production', or economic system, conditions or determines the ideological and political 'superstructure'. Marxist theory therefore explains social, historical and cultural development in terms of material and class

factors. The basis of the Marxist tradition is Marx's teleological theory of history, which suggests that history is driven forward through a dialectical process in which internal contradictions within each mode of production are reflected in class antagonism. Capitalism, then, is only the most technologically advanced of class societies, and is itself destined to be overthrown in a proletarian revolution which will culminate in the establishment of a classless, communist society. The intellectual attraction of Marxism has been that it embodies a remarkable breadth of vision, offering to understand and explain virtually all aspects of social and political existence and uncovering the significance of processes that conventional theory ignores. Politically, it has attacked exploitation and oppression, and had a particularly strong appeal to disadvantaged groups and peoples. With the collapse of communism in former USSR and some East European countries some group of academicians started arguing that the relevance of communism and Marxism came to an end. However the fact of the matter is that the forms of communism as practiced by those countries failed to deliver goods and the system itself failed due to variety of reasons. This has nothing to do with Marxism as a theory which is still one of the foremost theoretical formulations of class, power, state and society.

19.4 Weber on State

Max Weber suggested in *Politics as a Vocation* that the state is a human community or a special kind of institution that claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (Weber 1948). By this he meant not only that the state had the ability to ensure the obedience of its citizens but also the acknowledged right to do so. A monopoly of legitimate violence is therefore the practical expression of the state sovereignty. He saw the state as the most powerful institution in modern society since it has gained the legitimate monopoly of force over a given territory (Weber 1948).

He elaborates four defining characteristics of modern state. First, it has a legal and administrative order, which is subject to change by legislation only, not by the whim of a lord or the dictate of a charismatic leader. Secondly it has an administration which works in accordance with legislation. This means that civil servants and judiciary do not make up their own rules but implement those formed by the legislature. Thirdly the state has binding authority on all its members and over the acts carried out in its territory. And the membership is usually given by birth. Finally state can use force if that is legally prescribed and permitted.

For Weber the 'political society' is one whose existence and order is continuously safe-guarded within a given territorial area by the threat and application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff. And a political organisation becomes a 'state' where it is able successfully to exercise a legitimate monopoly over the organised use of force within a given territory. According to Weber legal, religious and political institutions and their inter relationships has decisive significance to economic structures and economic development not vice-versa as seen by Marx. Weber opposed to Marx's economic determinism. He took concentration of the means of administration as most important factor in the nation-state.

It can be seen that Weber's theory of state and authority are cordially

associated. This in turn has close association with his typology of domination. Weber talks about three types of domination: charismatic, traditional and legal-rational. According to him these three types of domination coexist in any situation but it is likely that one or other will be dominant. Weber says legal-rational domination is more predominant in modern state.

According to Weber the modern state is legitimate if people believe in its legitimacy. Any three kind of domination can exist in a modern state. We cannot choose between the three on any rational ground, each can be justified on its own ground. Each system justifies on itself; traditional domination justified by tradition, charismatic domination by charisma and in rational legal domination laws are legitimate if they are enacted according to the law. There is no overall or superior set of values by means of which we choose better or worse systems. Weber believed that in modern state any norm could be enacted as a law with the expectation that it would be obeyed; government and government apparatus are bound by the abstract system that these laws comprise and justice is the application of this laws. In such a system of governance people hold authority, doing so by virtue of being temporary office bearers rather than possessing personal authority and people obey laws not the office bearers who enforced them. The state with a national legal authority could not interfere with individual rights without the consent of the people through the duly elected representatives.

Reflection and Action 19.2

What are the salient features of Weber's State? Compare and contradict the views of Marx and Weber or State.

For Weber bureaucracy is the organisational apparatus of the modern state and the modern capitalist state is completely dependent upon bureaucratic organisation for its continued existence. Weber describes the state as gaining its power in modernity by concentrating the means of administration in the hands of an absolute monarch. Bureaucratic set up developed, for example in ancient Egypt, when the monarch needed a permanent army, to ensure supplies of arms and military equipment. According to Weber these developments were the most important factors promoting the emergence of the modern state in which the expert officialdom, based on the division of labour is wholly separated from ownership of its means of administration. Officials in modern, rational bureaucracies have little or no control over what they do since the rules and procedures of bureaucracies take on a life of their own, restricting the activities and decisions of those who work in them to the functions of the offices they fill. The bureaucracy (see Box 2 for features of ideal type of bureaucracy) become the 'steel-hard housing' in modern state.

This growth of rational state, which has its corpus of bureaucratic officials, is not wholly derivative of economic rationalisation, but to some extent preceded the development of capitalism as well as created condition, which promoted its rise. The head of the system of the legal authority or bureaucracy is the head of the state. And it can hold a position through appropriation, election or designated by succession. But even then his or her power is legally limited.

Box 19.3: Ideal Type of Bureaucracy

The characteristic features of the ideal type of bureaucracy according to Weber are:

- 1) A continuous organisation of official functions bound by rules.
- 2) A specific sphere of competence. This involves (a) a sphere of obligation to perform functions, which has been marked off as part of a systematic division of labour. (b) The provision of the incumbent with the necessary authority to carry out these functions. (c) That the necessary means of compulsion are clearly defined and their use is subject to definite conditions.
- 3) The organisation of offices follows the principle of hierarchy; that is, each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one. There is a right of appeal and of statement of grievances from lower to the higher. Hierarchies differ in respect to whether and in what cases complaints can lead to rulings from an authority at various points higher in the scale, and as to whether changes are imposed from higher up or the responsibility for such changes is left to the lower office, the conduct of which was the subject of complaint.
- 4) The rules which regulate the conduct of an office may be technical rules or norms. In both cases, if their application is to be fully rational, specialised training is necessary. It is thus normally true that only a person who has demonstrated an adequate technical training is qualified to be a member of the administrative staff of such an organised group, and hence only such persons are eligible for appointment to official positions.
- 5) In the rational type it is a matter of principle that the members of the administrative staff should be completely separated from ownership of the means of production and administration. Officials, employees and workers attached to the administration staff do not themselves own the non-human means of production and administration. These are rather provided for their use in kind or in money, and the official is obliged to render an accounting of their use. There exists, furthermore, in principle complete separation of the property belonging to the organisation, which is controlled within the sphere of office, and the personal property of the official which is available for his own private uses. There is a corresponding separation of the place which official functions are carried, the 'office' in the sense of premises, from living quarters.
- 6) In the rational type case, there is also a complete absence of appropriation of his official position by the incumbent. Where 'rights' to an office exist, as in the case of judges, and recently of an increasing proportion of officials and even of workers, they do not normally serve the purpose of appropriation by the official but of securing the purely objective and independent character of the conduct of the office so that is oriented only to the relevant norms.
- 7) Administrative acts, decisions and rules formulated and recorded in writing, even in cases where oral discussion is the rule or is even mandatory. This applies at least to preliminary discussions and proposals, to final decisions, and to all sorts of orders and rules. The combination of written documents and continuous organisation of official functions constitutes the 'office' which is the central focus of all types of modern action. Source: Craib, 1997

According to Weber, though rationalisation is evident in economic life, cultural life etc. of a society it is fundamentally evident in the modern institutions of administration, more especially bureaucracy. He says neither capitalism with its connection with liberalism nor state socialism with its formal commitment to social justice, can avoid the use of bureaucratic means of administrative domination. The impersonality and calculability characters of the bureaucracy are seen not only as constraining but also as extremely efficient in securing the popular compliance with the structures of domination. They are for Weber a key instance of the typical modern form of legitimate domination that is replacing the appeal of tradition as society's predominant legitimating principle.

19.5 Durkheim on State

Durkheim discusses the nature and features of the State in his work *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (1957). According to him the opposition of governing and the governed is central in political life. His views on state are very much associated to his explanation of division of labour and types of solidarity. Durkheim traced the development of the state to the division of labour in the society, as societies became more complex there occurred the distinction between governing and governed, which in turn results in the formation of state. For Durkheim the function of state was to mediate between different interests and in particular to protect the individual against the power of smaller groups. That is how state protects individual and balance group interests.

Mechanical solidarity is the trademark of less developed or primitive society where division of labour is very little. Whereas societies with highly developed division of labour are held together by organic solidarity. For Durkheim there was no politics or state existed in primitive societies because there was no or little division of labour and hence no grouping into government and governed.

At the same time he argues that the division of a social group into governing and governed do not only exist in states; there is a similar division in the patriarchal household as well. Durkheim tries to make a distinction between state and such organisation. The size and control of a determinate territory will distinguish state from such organisation. But for Durkheim the crucial feature of a state is that it controls not necessarily large numbers of people but a number of different secondary social groupings. The state is the organisation of officials concerned with governing these secondary groups. It is not an embodiment of society as whole, but a specialised institution.

Durkheim next takes up the relationship of the state to the individual. This according to Durkheim, is not an issue in societies where mechanical solidarity dominated where individuals were absorbed into the social whole; But as organic solidarity develops, the power of the state develops so also the rights of the individuals. The growth of the state does not threaten but enables the rights of individuals.

Reflection and Action 19.3

Compare the perspective of Marx and Durkheim on the state.

Durkheim makes a clear distinction between society and the state. Every society is despotic, at least if nothing from within supervenes to restrain its

despotism (Durkheim 1957). As societies become more compelled, then there is a need for individuals to move from group to group and need to prevent the secondary groups exercising despotic control over its members, it is the function of the state to provide this need. Durkheim's argument was that, given that individual members of society felt their commitment to society, the function of the state was to create and protect the space where the individuals could exercise such responsibility.

For Durkheim society is 'suigenerous'. His notion of society dominated everything else; society exists over and above the individual over whom it exercises an immense power. This notion of society reflects in his idea about state also. For Durkheim State essentially is a mediator between secondary groups. The secondary groups are developed in society, as the division becomes more sophisticated as in modern societies. The secondary groups mediate between society and the individual just as state mediates between the individual and secondary group.

19.6 The Concept of Power

Although power is a universal phenomenon in human activities and social relationships, there is no uniform conceptualisation of this concept. It is highly abstract and overlearned concept deeply embedded in human society and culture. Though the vast literature in social science on power is scattered and heterogeneous, the concept has been discussed in these literature on a conceptual framework based around power as characteristic of individual, power as interpersonal construct, power as a commodity, power as causal construct and power as philosophical construct. Each framework illustrates unique dimensions of the concept of power (Kakabadse, 1984). The concept of power is often expressed in this literature as the ability to bring about the outcomes as one desire. The social significance of the exercise of power is that it limits the range of choice open to individuals. Sociologists often distinguish between two forms of power - authority and coercion. This unit concentrates in elaborating power in relation to state and society.

19.7 Marx on Power

Marx does not give a clear definition of power, for him, power means coercion. Marx views power to be held by a particular group in society at the expense of the rest of the society. According to him the source of power in society lies in economic infrastructure and those who own the modes of production i.e. the dominant group uses power to further its own interest and there by exploiting those who subject to power. Marx argues that although from time to time dominant classes do have to resort to naked force to maintain their power and supremacy, the absence of such obvious coercion should not be taken to signify an absence of exploitation, a lack of naked oppression does not indicate lack of oppression and the lack of any need of force. Lack of naked oppression does not mean that domination is not taking place. It is only that the dominated are unaware of their condition, because of the effectiveness of the ideologies into which they have been socialised.

How do such dominant ideas, which hails the dominating power of the dominant class and the exploitation of the subordinate class, gain such general acceptance. Marxists argue that particular ideas come to prevail through various key agencies of socialisation. Institution like the family, education systems and the mass media play a crucial role in promoting generally

held beliefs and values. For Marxists through these institutions of socialisation the real character of class society is justified and thus it ensures social inequality and domination and thereby the acceptance of the power structure in the society. This is the key element in Marxist approach to the superstructure, a society's non-economic institutions and the ideas and beliefs they promote. The assumption is that they exist to prop up a class-based mode of production. Thus the power inequality in the economic infrastructure is reflected in the superstructure.

Dominance and Subordination

Marxist theorists argue that institutions like education, state and mass media justify the stereotypical images of superiority and inferiority coinciding with class position. Thus in terms of Marxian theory the relationship of dominance and subordination in the infrastructure is justified and legalised by the super structure. For example, in capitalist society the unequal relationship between employees and employers will be reflected and legitimated in the legal system. A range of legal status protect the rights of property owners and in particular their right to a disproportionate share of the wealth produced by their employees. Marxists argue that such an analysis of the relationship between the infrastructure and super structure tells in great deal about power in a class society. That means, for example, in capitalist society the infrastructure produce particular kind of state, education system, family structure etc, all institutions of super structure that reflect the domination of class structure reinforce the power and privilege of the ruling class in the society.

Marx views power as to be held by a particular group (dominant class) in society at the expense of the rest of the society (subordinate class). This is a constant sum concept of power since a net gain in the power of the dominant group represents a net loss in the power of the next society. The dominant group uses power to further its own interests and these interests are in direct conflict with the interests of their subject to its power.

For Marx the source of power in society lies in the economic infrastructure. The basis of dominance or power is the ownership of forces of production. The ruling class, those who own the forces of production uses power to exploit and oppress the subject class in all societies. The case of power to exploit others is defined by Marx as coercion. It is seen as an illegitimate use of power since it forces the subject class to submit to a situation which is against its interests.

The only way to return power to the people is communal ownership of the forces of production. Since everyone will now share the same relationship to the forces of production, power will be shared by all members of society. Here Marx's concepts of false consciousness and class-consciousness are of importance. When the subordinate class subscribe to dominant ideologies which obscure the real nature of class society from their gaze, their picture of the world and their place in it is false. When the exploited class realises their exploited status and start recognising themselves to belonging to the same class, there originates class consciousness among them. In their subjective view of themselves and their condition comes to match its objective reality. It is the emergence of a class consciousness by a subordinate class that is the key which unlocks the revolution which overthrows the existing power structure of the society to replace it with one which suits to the new economic arrangements.

19.8 Weber on Power

Weber deals power primarily in the context of society and state. Weber defines power as the probability that an actor will be able to realise his own objectives against opposition from others with whom he is in social relationship (Weber 1994). This is a broad definition. His definition of domination is more specific. It refers only to those cases of exercises of power where an actor obeys a specific command issued by another. In making the distinction between power and domination Weber put forward two types of solution to the problem of order. Power represents action likely to succeed even against the opposition and resistance of those to whom it is applied. This solution is typically found in warfare and class conflict, but it has the limitation of being unstable as long term source of order. Legitimate domination, by contrast, involves an element of voluntary compliance from those to whom it applied and therefore embraces the issue of meaningful action. Domination can be legitimised in terms of the appeal to the different principles, namely tradition, national legality as embodied in enacted law and charisma (Turner 1996).

Weber's concept of class, status and party along with his analysis of state and bureaucracy are the centre of his concept of power. Each grouping is focussed around or oriented towards power as an independent point of conflict. Each represents an aspect of and a basis for power. Let us discuss each of them in detail.

Weber's discussion of 'class', 'status' and 'party' are three dimensions of stratification in society, each of which conceptually separate from the others, and specifies that, on an empirical level, each may causally influence each of the others. Weber did not ignore economic sources of power, and considered these to be among the more important sources, especially in capitalism. But, unlike Marx, he claimed that power did not emerge only from economic sources, and he certainly does not restrict power relationships to ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. Power can also emerge from status or party (associations concerned with acquiring power) or can also be pursued for its own sake. Among these different forms of power, there are cross-cutting influences and effects, so that power obtained in one of these spheres may lead to power or a change in situation in another sphere.

For Weber class is an expression of economic order to be more precise it is determined by a persons' market situation. Here a class denotes an aggregate of individuals who share the same class situation. So as per the identification of class situation with the market situation there could be as many class divisions as there are minute gradations of economic position. But similar to Marx, Weber also argues that the ownership versus non-ownership of property is the most important basis of class division in a competitive market. Weber distinguishes two types of classes, positively privileged class who are the property owners and acquisition or commercial class. He also identifies middle class, a group that can be placed between these two. For him property or lack of property is the basis of all class situations. He also distinguished social class which is composed of the plurality of the class statuses between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generation is readily possible typically observable. For Weber power is associated with property class in terms that they enjoy more status and privilege in the society. The acquisition classes are in a negatively privileged situation

and they are workers of the various principal types. They are less powerful in the society. Social mobility is possible between different classes or strata in the society. But this movement is possible only to a limited extent according to Weber. He says moving into a wider range of position is blocked by power differentials between different classes (Crib 1997).

Box 19.4: Characteristics of Status Groups

Since Weber rejects the notion that economic phenomena directly determine the nature of human ideals, he distinguishes such conceptualisations independent of class interests and hence the distinction of 'status' groups from 'class' groups. By status situation Weber refers to that part of a person's life chances, which are decided by the social esteem in which he/she is held, such esteem might be positive or negative. The status situation of an individual refers to the evaluations which others make of an individual or her/his social position, thus attributing to her/him some form of social prestige or esteem. A status group is number of individuals who share the same status situation. They normally manifest their distinctiveness through following a particular life-style, and through placing restrictions upon the manner in which others may interact with them. It is a system of stratification that may petrify at times into classes though they are clearly differentiated. The status groups are amorphous though they are conscious in and of themselves. Along with the social esteem there occurs a specific lifestyle and restrictions and this becomes the characteristic of particular status group. In Weber's view class distinction and status distinction remained separable in analysis and in fact but they were also linked and they moved across each other in patterned ways.

Weber consider both class and status group membership as basis of social power. But the formation of political party has more influence upon power. For Weber a party refers any voluntary association, which has the aim of securing directive control of an organisation in order to implement certain definite policies within the organisation. Parties are organisations, rather than communities or groups, and they involve striving for a goal in a planned manner. Weber notes that classes are in the economic order, status groups in the social order, and parties in the sphere of power. In some senses, power is not a separate order, in that classes and status groups are concerned with power. The difference between parties on the one hand, and status groups and classes on the other, is in the level of analysis. Parties are organisations, whereas classes and status groups are groupings of people. If status groups or classes become well organised, they may form parties, or their parties may become the organisational wings of the class or status group. Trade unions, professional associations, ethnic organisations, and religious institutions are examples. Parties represent power at the macro level. When it comes to his perception of power at macro level, his concepts of power and domination are closely associated. He distinguishes between these types of domination: charismatic, traditional and legal rational.

In charismatic leadership the basis of power is the charisma of the leader. The term charisma is applied to certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary individuals and treated as endowed with supernatural or specifically exceptional powers and qualities. In traditional domination the basis of power is age-old traditions. Patriarchalism is a good example of traditional domination. The basis of power in legal-rational domination is legitimate law.

For Weber all three – class, status and party are sources of power. Thus his view on power is extensive cutting across economy, social and political parameters.

State; Power as Elaborated
by Marx, Weber,
Parsons and Others

19.9 Parsons on Power

Parsons regards power as something possessed by society as a whole. As such power is a generalised facility or resource in the society. It is the capacity to mobilise the resources of the society for the attainment of goals for which a general public commitment has been made. In this sense the amount of power in society is measured by the degree to which collective goals are realised. Thus, the greater the efficiency of a social system for achieving the goals defined by its members, the more power exists in society. This view is known as a variable sum concept of power (different from Weberian and Marxian constant sum concept of power), since power in society is not seen as fixed as contrast. Instead it is variable in the sense it can increase or decrease (Haralambos 1980, Turner 1996).

Parsons' view of power is developed from his general theory of the nature of society. He believes that order, stability and cooperation in society are based on value concerns, that is a general agreement by members of society concerning what is good and worthwhile. He assumes that this value consensus is essential for the survival of social system. From shared values desire the collective goals, that is goals shared by members of society. For example if materialism is a major value of the Western Industrial society, collective goals such as economic expansion and higher living standards can be seen to stem from this value. The more able Western societies are also to realise these goals, the greater the power that resides in the social system. Steadily rising living standards and economic growth are therefore the indications of an increase of power for the society as a whole.

Parsons' view of power differentials within society also derives from his general theory of social system. He argues since goals are shared by all members of society, power will generally be used in the furtherance of collective goals. Thus, for Parsons, power is an integrative force in social system just as social stratification. Parsons argues that as value consensus is an essential component of all societies, it follows that some form of stratification results from the ranking of individuals in terms of common values. Thus those who perform successfully in terms of society, values will be ranked highly and accorded high prestige and power since they exemplify and personify common values. And Parsons, a functionalist, believes that this differential distribution of power and prestige among the different strata of society is just, right and proper since they are basically an expression of shared values.

Parsons views relationship between the social groups in a society as one of cooperation and interdependence rather than conflict and confrontation. Particularly in complex industrial societies different groups specialise in particular activities. As no one group is self sufficient it cannot meet the needs of its members and hence each group enter into interaction with other groups for exchange of goods and services which makes the relationship between different social groups one of reciprocity. This relationship extends top the strata in a stratification system. In individual societies, which exhibit highly specialised division of labour some members will specialise in organisation and planning (those who govern), others will follow their

directions (those who governed). Parsons argues that this inevitably leads to inequality in terms of power and prestige.

Box 19.5: Power and Prestige

Parsons argues that inequalities of power are based on shared values. Power is legitimate authority in that members of society as a whole generally accept it as just and proper. It is accepted as such because there are positions of authority use their power to pursue collective goals, which derive from society's central values. Parsons views power and prestige differentials associated with social stratification is both inevitable and functional for the society. It is inevitable because it derives from shared values, which are necessary part of all social systems. It is functional because it serves to integrate various social groups.

Parsons' later work on power involved a conscious modification of his previous views (Giddens 1995). In his later works criticising C.W. Mills' power theory Parsons viewed power as generated by social system in much the same as wealth was generated in this productive organisation economy. The parallels, which Parsons developed between power and money, were based upon the supposition that each had similar role in the two of the four functional subsystems of the social systems evolved by Parsons.

Power for Parsons is a direct derivative of authority; authority for him is institutionalized legitimation which underlay power and was defined as the institutionalisation of the rights of leaders to expect support from the members of the collectivity (Parsons 1960). By speaking of binding obligation, Parsons deliberately brought legitimation into the very definition of power, so that for him there was no such thing as illegitimate power (Giddens 1995).

Reflection and Action 19.5

Outline the Parsonian view of state and power.

Parsons stressed that the use of power is only one among several different ways in which one party might secure the compliance of another to a desired course of action. Parsons says compliance can be secured by applying positive (rewards) or negative (coercion) sanction. But in most cases when power was being used, there was no overt sanction (either positive or negative) employed. Parsons argues it was particularly necessary to stress that possession and use of power should not be identified directly with the use of force.

19.10 Other Theoretical Models on State and Power

The state and power, both concepts essentially are contested concepts. There are a number of sociological theories/models of state and power each offering different accounts of its origin, development and impact. Liberal theory, plural theory, elite theory, neo-Marxist and anarchist theory are some of the theories explained here in brief.

The liberal theory of state dates back to the writings of the social contract theorists such as Hobbes and Locke. These thinkers argued that the society had risen out of voluntary agreement, or a social contract, made by individuals who recognised that only the establishment of a sovereign power could safeguard them from the insecurity, disorder or brutality of the 'state of nature'. Here the state is a neutral arbiter amongst competing groups and

individuals in society capable of protecting each citizen from the encroachment of his or her fellow citizens. The state is therefore a neutral entity, acting in the interests of all and representing what can be called the 'common good' or 'public interest'.

The liberal theory has been elaborated by modern writers into a pluralist theory of state. Pluralist theory argues that political power is dispersed amongst a wide variety of social groups rather than an elite of ruling class. It is decentralised, widely shared, diffused and fragmented deriving from many sources. Arnold Rose, Peter Bentley, Robert Dahl, Talcott Parsons, Neil Smelser are some of the key pluralist theorists. Robert Dahl, an advocate of this theory who termed rule by many as 'polyarchy'. According to pluralist perspective competition between two or more political parties is an essential feature of representative government. According to pluralists interest groups and pressure groups representing various interests play a major role in affecting the decision making process of state. Pluralists believe that a rough equality exists amongst organised groups and interests in that each enjoys some measure of access to government and government is prepared to listen impartially to all. They claim that competition for office between political parties provides the electorate with an opportunity to select its leaders and a means of influencing government policy. Pluralist theory explains the origin of liberal democratic state. For pluralists, state represents institutionalised power, an authority and it is in the supreme guardian of representative democracy in the modern society. The primary task of state is to balance interests of a multitude of competing groups, represents interests of society as a whole and coordinating other major institutions. They view the state itself as a set of competing and conflicting institutions rather than a monolithic entity which exerts its power over the rest of the society (Smith 1995). They argue that power exists only in situations of observable conflict and that people's interests are simply what these overt preferences reveal.

An alternative neo-pluralist theory of the state has been developed by writers such as J.K. Galbraith and Charles Lindblom. They argue that the modern industrial state is both more complex and less responsive to popular pressures than the classical pluralist model suggests. According to them meaning of democracy is changed from one of direct popular rule to that of competition between and within elites to control the states. They argue the elites are not single integrated group but multiple centres of political power. Neo-pluralists see elites, especially corporate elites as having a greater degree of influence than other groups on government/state policy and it may constrain the effective influence of other interest groups.

The elite theory of state argues that all societies are divided into two main groups the ruling and the ruled. The classical elite theorists such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels argued that the political power always lies in the hands of a small elite and the egalitarian ideas such as socialism (Marxist theory) and democracy (pluralist theory) are a myth. Elite theorists are concerned with the question of how and why it is that a minority always rule over the majority, a fact which see as inevitable in any society. According to them societal power is concentrated in elite groups who control resources of key social institutions and regardless of how democratic a society may be elites hold the bulk of power, use all or any means of power and power becomes end in itself.

Pareto places particular emphasis on psychological characteristics as the basis

of elite rule. He argues there are two main types of governing elite, which he calls 'lions' and 'foxes'. Lions achieve power because of their ability to take direct and decisive action and they tend to rule by force. Military dictatorship provides an example of this type of governing elite whereas foxes rule by cunning and guile, by diplomatic manipulation and wheel dealing.

Major change in society occurs when one elite replaces another a process, which Pareto calls circulation of elites and he believes history is a never-ending circulation elites. For him state is a tool in the hands of the ruling elite. He saw modern democracies as merely another form of elite domination.

Box 19.6: Rule by a Minority

Gaetano Mosca believed that rule by a minority is an inevitable feature of social life. He claims that in all societies two classes of people appear a class that rule and a class that ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions and monopolises power and the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first. He viewed that there are important differences between democracies and other forms of rule. By comparison with close systems such as caste and feudal societies the ruling elite in democratic societies is open. There is, therefore, a great possibility of an elite drawn from a wide range of social background. As a result the interest of various social groups may be represented in the decisions taken by the elites. The majority may therefore have some control over the government of society.

C.Wright Mills explains elite rule in institutional terms. He argues in his sociological model of power, "the Power Elite" that the structure of institutions is such that the top of the institutional hierarchy largely monopolises power. According to him the American politics was dominated by big business and the military, commonly referred to as the military industrial complex, dictate the government policy. He claimed that the picture of the United States of America as a democratic pluralist society, characterised by decentralised decision-making and the separation of powers, was false. Beneath the cover of constitutionality there was in reality a unified class or power elite which could always get its way on important decisions. The personnel of this elite were drawn from three interlocking elements in American society; business, politics and military. Michels took the concentration of power in the hands of an elite to be a necessary outcome of complex organisations. His famous 'iron law of oligarchy' states that, in modern societies, parties need to be highly organised and so inevitably become oligarchic, being hierarchically run by party leaders and bureaucracy such that the bulk of members are excluded from decision-making (Michels 1962).

The classical Marxists stressed the coercive role of the state. But neo-Marxists took account of the apparent legitimacy of the bourgeoisie state particularly in the light of the achievement of universal suffrage and the development of the welfare state. Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser influences post-Marxism to a great extent. According to Antonio Gramsci, in the modern conditions it is the political party, which forms the state. He was an advocate of arbiter theory of state. He emphasised that the degree to which the domination of the ruling class is achieved not only by open coercion but is also elicited by consent. He argued that the ideological and political superstructures are relatively autonomous of the superstructure. He

believed that bourgeoisie had established hegemony, ideological leadership or domination, over the proletariat and insisted that the state played an important role in this process. By hegemony, a key term propounded by Gramsci, he meant the way in which the dominant class gains consent for its rule through compromises and alliances with some class fractions and the disorganisation of others, and also the way in which it maintains that rule is a stable social formation. According to him hegemony is gained in the first place in civil society where ideology is embodied in communal forms of life in such a way that it becomes the taken for granted common sense of the people. For him all relations of civil society involve issues of power and struggle, not just class relations. The French Marxist Louis Althusser gives a functionalist interpretation to the Marxian conception of state. Although he viewed the state as relatively autonomous of the economic base, for him the state is fully implicated in the logic of capitalism where it functions to reproduce the mode of production. He adds, since the capitalist mode of production requires the state to reproduce its conditions of existence, there is a reciprocal determination between the economic and political levels (Althusser 1971).

Reflection and Action 19.6

Examine how pluralists and elitists differ in their deliberations on state and power.

Although the neo-Marxist theory echoes liberalism in seeing the state as an arbiter is nevertheless emphasises the class character of the modern state by pointing out that it operates in the long term interests of capitalism and therefore perpetuate a system of unequal class power.

Anarchists condemned the state power and they believed that the state and all forms of political authority are both evil and unnecessary. They view the state as a concentrated form of oppression; it reflects nothing more than the desire of those in power often loosely referred to as a ruling class, to subordinate others for their own benefits.

19.11 Conclusion

This unit familiarised the conceptualisation of state and power as done by Karl Marx and Max Weber and other thinkers. Marx has explained the concepts of state and power on the basis of dialectical materialism and the antagonism of classes. Economic activities like modes of production, means of production and distribution formed the core idea of Marx for explaining state and power. Marx emphasised the role of economic power and he argued those who control the economic power do command the super structures of the society. Weber defined state as a human community that claims legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. He explained how the state acquired legitimacy to use power. He gave primacy to bureaucracy for deciding the affairs of the state and stressed rationalisation for the legitimate use of authority within the state. Weber closely linked power with legitimacy. To him class status and party are three dimensions of stratification in society. Unlike Marx, Weber did not give much emphasis to economic phenomena. He distinguishes between charismatic, traditional and legal rational types of domination.

The unit also briefly look into how the concepts state and power are deliberated in functionalist and other theoretical models such as liberal, pluralist, neo Marxist and elitist.

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