

State and the Political System

Dr. Shaileja Upmanyu

HOD, Dept. of Political Science, M.L.V. Govt. College, Bhilwara

1. Introduction

The modern state has evolved since ages with the combination of political facts and political philosophy. Thinkers in the past discuss the state as a reflection of its society. In the modern times, sometimes the state was considered as an "instrument of class operation"¹, sometimes as an organization that transcends class and to certain thinkers it was considered "an entirely legal construction"². Many political thinkers considered the state as a necessary evil and to some, it was the "world spirit"³. To certain thinkers, it was considered "a necessary evil"⁴, to some it was an order of cooperation, and to others it has been indistinguishable from society. For the liberalist, state was acting as a measurement for the attainment of welfare goals and the Marxist considered it as a symbol of managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie. With the changing of times – change in the socio-economic and materialist condition of the society, the meaning and purpose of the state has also changed, and so has its elements.

2. Elements of the state

Since the evolution of the human civilization, the state has been studied along with its various elements. In this context, the Greeks had made an attempt to study this aspect. They considered the state acting as a union of families and whose end would be the attainment of perfect and self-sufficing life, in which we lead a happy and honorable life. For the Greeks, people and human beings leading a moral life, were the goals of their ideal state. The Greek city states were known as "Polis" which implied political organization. With the passage of time, the Roman states were more powerful and were more concerned with territory, political and military organization and then the state centered around military strength. As generations passed, the rise of Christianity added the element of faith and divinity as the supreme element of the state. Infact, the church started acting as a political body releasing commands to the people to lead their political life. State as a political entity was put in the secondary position. Centuries passed and with the coming of Feudal era, the disintegration of the state put more emphasis on personal elegance and hierarchical relationships which in turn led to the rise of various nationalities. Thinking in accordance with the situation, Machiavelli framed a new element known as nationalism which grew as core of modern state. And so, Machiavelli was known as father of modern age in Politics. These developments provided an element of sovereignty which separated the state from all social, religious and cultural organizations and projected the state as supreme. Thus, we can study till this age that the modern state had the elements of organized structure, people, territory, nationalism and sovereignty. But along with it was the element of divinity which dominated the whole medieval era.

As studied in political science, most of the scholars gave primacy to the above elements of a modern state. Garner also had made a precise mention of the elements stating "state is a community of persons, more or less numerous, permanently occupying a definite portion of the territory, independent or nearly so, of external control and possessing an organized government to which the great body of inhabitants render habitual obedience"⁵.

As the socio-political structures got involved in various national and international activities, the number of elements of the state which was also a growing entity began to increase. Philimore, the English lawyer defined the state, "as a people permanently occupying a fixed territory, bound together by common laws, habits and customs into one body politic, exercising through the medium of an organized government independent sovereignty and control over all persons and things within its boundaries, capable of making war and peace and of entering into all international relations with the communities of the globe."⁶

Thus, the emerging elements of the state evolved around the basic elements of A. Population, B. Territory, C. Government and D. Sovereignty. Amongst all, sovereignty is considered as the soul of statehood. Certain studies made by the pluralist do not regard sovereignty as the soul factor. Due to industrialization and its effect, it added a new dimension of economy or economic power as one of the important elements that effect statehood. This, we can see from the readings of Marx, who advocated the role and importance of economic forces in the state system. Through his studies of the evolution of the state from the ancient to the modern times, we can say that the list of state elements is not limited – when we study the western scholars, they propagated four elements as stated above, whereas the ancient Indian scholars⁷, had advocated the "Saptang theory", which propagated the seven elements of the state system. The study of the state in the modern era brought around elements like legitimacy, decision making process etc. as important elements.

It can be stated that an inclusion of some new and deletion of few elements in the conceptualization of the state presents the state system as dynamic. Most of the scholars have visualized the state as a static entity which undergoes slight changes and having a few fixed universally accepted elements. In order to have a dynamic study, the state should be studied along with the changing socio-economic conditions which transformed the state and re-formulated it.

It clearly shows that the state is not a static entity. It stands for a number of particular forces and processes which interact in part or as a whole that may be called a state system. The state is not formed only of four elements. There are many institutions – the government which gives it a concrete form, the administration, the military, the police, the provincial or the small political unit, the judicial branch and many other such

forces that make the state. The entire relationship of these forces forms the state system, which makes it a wider term, however the state and the state system operate within the ambit of the political system of every society.

3. The State under Political System

The nature of the state can be studied through various theories and approaches. One of this, considered as most appropriate is the systems approach⁸. Political system is considered as a set of interrelated variables conceived to be politically relevant and treated as if they could be separated from other variables, not immediately relevant to politics. A set of concepts in the political system helps one not only to understand the government and politics of a particular country, but to aid in understanding the government and political working of any country that matters. Modern scholars considered the traditional concept of the state as a limited one and preferred the study of political system where various acts were performed to serve specified purposes and defined functions for the society that accepts the allocations of values as authoritative and legitimate. It can be mentioned that the political system operates within the confines of broader social systems.

It is stated that all political systems regardless of the type, perform a set of tasks. These are considered as the functional requirements of any system. For Almond, the political system is made up of a set of roles, structures and sub-systems whose interactions are affected by the psychological attributes of the actors involved. The process can be seen in relation to its environment and the whole range of political activities can be interpreted as consisting of either input from the environment or the political process itself or conversion of inputs within the system into outputs to the environment. As the time passes, the outputs may produce environmental changes, which may lead to new demands and change the system itself. The notion of feedback enables a system to incorporate dynamic factors which may lead to development.

Thus, the concept of political system encompasses within it the process of political development. The political system includes the traditional structures that are present in the society as well as modern government institutions. The political system is an evolution of growth and development of a particular society, where there is effect of multiple factors and processes.

The political system can be understood as the system of interconnections between various groups and social forces in which party apparatus and pressure groups are included by means of which decisions are taken authoritatively. It may include institutions that are not political and the state functions within the conceptual boundaries of the political system. It is coercive in nature.

The state is a collectivity of dynamic human beings having socio-cultural cohesion. It is made of many elements and variables which vary in number, effect and influence. We can study a state system within a political system in three sets of elements – A) essential elements, B) accompanying elements C) Supporting elements. However, there is a “core” in every state system around which these elements revolve. The core is responsible to mobilize elements at different levels. Whenever, leadership is the core, it brings the concept of state and political organization within its essential elements and makes the state strong. And other elements like role of bureaucracy value system may go to the accompanying elements in the political system. A study of state within the political system would reveal the relationship between the two and the capacity of the state to deal with disruptive forces. The supporting elements keep on fluctuating between the state and political system periphery. Certain elements may come to the essential element or go back to the accompanying ones or become supportive ones, these elements change their positions according to the core. The role of a particular element may vary, it is in this context that we can study the state system as operable in a political system.

References

1. Marxist view propagates this forcefully.
2. Views of George Jellineck, Roudalf Van J. Herring, Austin etc. are important in this regard.
3. Marcuse, Herbert – Reasons and Revolutions: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory, quoted from Bottomore, Tom, a dictionary of Marxist thought.
4. The Anarchist's like Proudhon, Bakunin etc. and Gandhians have adopted this view.
5. Garner, J. W., Political Science and Government, The World Press, Calcutta 1955
6. Gokhale, B.K., Political Science, O.P. Cit
7. Most Indian thinkers like Manu, Kautilya, Shukra and others put forth these ideas.
8. For details see – Eugene Meehan, Young, O.R., Robert Dahl, S.L. Verma etc.