TOPIC: State: Definition, Nature and Elements

Prepared by:

Aparajita

Department of Political Science,

G.J College, Rambagh

Bihta, Patna.
Definitions:

As a community of persons, permanently occupying a definite territory, legally independent of external control, and possessing a organized government which create and administrates law over all persons and group within its jurisdiction is ‘State’.

According to Lasson, “The state is a community of men which possesses an organized authority as the highest source of all force.”

John.W.Burgess defines the state as a “particular portion of mankind viewed as an organized unit.”

Theories of Origin of State

1. Theory of Divine Origin

The state was created by God and people had no role in its creation. The King was considered as the representation of God and they had the divine right over the people.

2. The Force Theory

It came as a result of forced subjection by the strong over the weak. Two groups, one supported this theory as State as a powerful entity and the other emphasised on individual’s freedom
and limited state action. Theologians, individualists and socialists criticised this theory.

3. **Social Contract Theory**

The state is the outcome of contract among the people. There is a contract between the people and the ruler. The people have surrendered their few freedoms to the authority in exchange of the protection of their rights. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau are the major exponent of the Social Contract Theory.


**Elements of State**

**Population (Jansankhya):** Population comprises of a considerable group of people present in the definite territory.

**Territory (chetra):** Territory comprises of definite area on the surface of the earth on which the population resides.

**Government (Sarkar):** It is an agency or political organisation that carries out the administration of the state. It is the agency through which people can express their collective will.
Sovereignty (Samprabhuta): It means the State is supreme over all individuals and associations internally and is free from any other external control. It is free to take decisions both internally and externally.

It is important to note that the element of any of the four elements will nullify the state.

**Distinction between the state and other associations**

**State and Society**

Society is a wider concept as compared to the state. The state covers only an aspect of the society whereas society includes all social relationships and social institutions. The society is much older than the state and it does not contain the four elements of the state. State is highly organised and comprises sovereignty but society may be unorganized and does not possess sovereignty.

**State and Government**

Government is one of the elements of the state. Government is the only agency of state through which the will of the people are formulated, expressed and executed.
State and Nation

Though there are lots of debates on the distinctions between nation and state. It is important for the students of political science to understand that the basis of nation is cultural and psychological whereas that of state is political and physical.

Nature of the State

1. Idealist Theory of State

Plato and Aristotle are considered as the founders of the Idealist Theory of State. They opined that man by nature is a political animal and it is through state that man can develop their personalities and get best out of them by being part of the state. They did not differentiate between the state and the society. Immanuel Kant is regarded as the father of the Idealist theory and has expressed about it in the book ‘metaphysical first principles of theory and law’ in 1976. Hegal considered it as an ethical institution. According to this theory,

1. State is an ethical institution.
2. State is the best friend of the people.
3. State has its own personality and indent will.
4. Man is the social animal.
5. State creates and protects the rights of the state.
2. Marxist Theory of State

According to traditional Marxists, the state is controlled by the dominant economic class and used as an instrument of exploitation and as an agency of class coercion. The State promotes and protects the interests of few rich sections at the cost of the labour class. The State exploits the economic weaker section since its origin to its various phases of development. Marxist State has certain features:

1. State is an instrument of exploitation at the hands of economically dominant class.
2. State was formed to protect the private property of economically dominant class.
3. State was considered as the symbol of injustice.

However, there are neo-Marxists like Max Weber who rejected the class theory of Marx and emphasised on the independence of State power. He opined that State has its own resources and have full control over the legitimate source of force and do not serve the private interests. He further opined that the Bureaucracy is an organisation maintained by the State that monitors, formulates and implements the state policies. The State cannot be said to have served the class interests.
Similarly, according to Antonio Gramsci, institutions, beliefs and social relations in the society like family, school, church and other groups in the society play an important role in creating consent that encourages capitalism. The use of force is required only when the consent does not work.

**Liberal Theory of State**

The Liberal theory emphasises on the privileges and rights of the individuals. The restrictions by the government curb the personality and rights of the individuals and limit their growth. So, it advocates limited state. The state is liberal if it acknowledges the behaviours, attitudes and opinions of the individual.

Some of the features of the Liberal Theory of State:

1. It advocates the rights and liberty of the individuals.
2. The state should be accountable to the people and is a limited state.
3. There are different groups and organisation and they coexist with each other.
4. The liberal state is accountable to all groups and rights and liberty of the people.
Conclusion

Though, different definitions have been given regarding state but there is no universally accepted definition of State. Different scholars have given different ideas regarding state. The Idealist theory of state has different views compared to Marxist and Liberal Theory of State. Therefore, the definitions and nature of state have been changing in response to the need of the time. At present, there is a welfare state that has to work for the welfare of the people residing in their territory. The welfare state has to protect the health and the well-being of the people especially those in social and financial need. Subsequently, the functions of the State have also been changing with the nature of the state. So, the definitions, nature and functions of the state have been changing and never same.