



e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710

IJRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 12, Issue 3, March 2023

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.423

 9940 572 462

 6381 907 438

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Political Power: An Approach from Different Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: The concept of power has become a momentous subject in the realms of national and international politics. So much so that the politics is regarded not merely as a study of state and govt. but as a study of power. It is an organized dispute about power and its use involving choice of competing values, ideas, interests and demands. It is concerned with the description and analysis of the manner in which power is obtained, exercised and controlled. The reason for this should be traced in human psychology. Desire for power is deeply imbedded in man as Hobbes says that it is 'a perpetual and restless desire that ceases only in death'.

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a controversy among scholars regarding the meaning of the term power on account of its social, economic, political, psychological and spiritual ramifications. Hence different writers have taken different views to it. Tawney defines it as the capacity of an individual or a group to modify the conduct of others in the manner which one desires. A modern psycho-analyst like Harold Lasswell likens it with influence. Mao Tse Tung believes that power comes 'from the barrel of a gun.' While an apostle of peace, truth and non-violence like Gandhi equates the power with love of truth emanating from the will of the people.

Etymologically the English word power has been derived from Latin and French and it means to 'be able to' It can be defined as the aggregate of the external influences which when thought to bear upon an individual can make him more in a required direction. In a relational situation, it is the capacity to affect the behaviour of others by the threat of some sanctions which are a package of rewards and penalties. Compliance of individuals and groups can be elicited by the promise of actual conferment of rewards or their withdrawal which implies punishment. Though power rests on the potentiality to invoke coercion, frequent use of it in actual practice is a sure indication of gradual weakening of political power.

It has to be seen as a relationship. A proper understanding of the political power involves an examination of the way in which a relationship is conducted. For instance to understand the power of the P.M., one has to probe deep into his relationship with the president, the cabinet, the party and so forth. Due to the complexities of relationship involved in power situation, it is not easy to identify and measure the political power. Political power is unevenly distributed in every political system, especially in the developing countries. Inequality in power-distribution is related to social and economic disputes the rich peasants, the big industrialists and the top-civil-servants have more access to the political power in a political system than the common men.

II. DIFFERENT THEORIES OF POWERS

Power Can be studied from the standpoint of different theories. The power theory finds its brilliant manifestation in the political philosophy of Hobbes. Hobbes tells that the search for power is the root cause of competition among the individuals. Men compete with one another for riches, honours and commands and if their interests collide they take to the means of subduing, repelling, supplanting and killing their opponents. Though the struggle for power is incessant it is also true that men like to live in peace in order to enjoy the iota of power they possess. His theory of the commonwealth shows that men decide to live in peace under a perfect sovereign in order to avoid the fear of death because whether with moderate or immoderate desires, men are necessarily pulled into a constant competitive struggle for power over others or at least to resist his power being commanded by others.

After Hobbes, it was Hegel who absolutise the sovereign authority to the extent of discarding the ethics of international morality. Later on power was extolled by the German thinkers like Nietzsche, Trietschke and Bernhordi and Kanfmann in the 19th century. Among the leading advocates of this theory in the present age is Morgenthau. In this Politics Among Nations he tells that all international politics is a struggle for power. Whatever be the ultimate aim of international politics, power is always the immediate aim. Ideology may only be the mask for hiding uglier picture of power. Power is inseparable from the social life as the lust for power is common to all men. But in order to eliminate

the destructiveness of power politics, rational faculties are needed which are different from and superior to the reason of the scientific age.

The power theory found its concrete manifestation in the emergence of Fascism in Italy in 1922. When Mussolini declared everything for the state, nothing against it, nothing above it'.

Psycho-Analytical theory of power supported by Harold Lasswell, Kaplarr and Robert Dahl. They have identified power with influence which is used in affecting the policies. To them politics is the study of the relation of men. In association and competition and in political negotiations men seek power. The scope of the power refers to the values over which control is exercised. And all the persons over whom control is exercised constitute the domain of power or influence.

Sociological Theory of Power has brought about a transformation in the meaning of politics. Politics no longer remains the study of state or govt. as such it has become a study of the society in its widest sense including all organisations like family, trade unions clubs, business, houses political parties and a host of unofficial groups, interest groups known by the name of pressure groups. Society is a big whole in which all these, units exist and play their part into political process, the concept of power, control, influence manipulation and the like become central to the study of politics.

The sociological theory of power has its brilliant manifestation in the writings of David Easton. He defines politics as 'authoritative, allocation of values within a society'. Why we say that something has value to someone, it means that he desires it to some extent. The extent of the desire is measurable in terms of the amount of money he is willing to pay for it or the amount of efforts he will expend in its pursuit. The authoritative allocation of values finds place in decision - making process and since the decision-making-power is vested in the state, the decisions of the govt. carry the highest sanctity and their enforcement is backed by the use of physical force.

Liberal Democratic Theory treats power strictly in the physical term while missing the normative dimension of the concept. But the liberal - Democratic theory of power believes that power is not merely a fact that has its manifestation in the form of coercion, influence, persuasion and manipulation. It is a value too. According to the theory the power is the capacity of an individual which refers to his ability to develop his personality and extract advantages from the like abilities of others. In other words it is the ability to use and develop human capacities. In this way it has two aspects - developmental and extractive which may be labelled as normative or ethical and empirical or applied respectively. Its developmental aspect has qualitative character and ethical connotation in the sense that it informs man to seek what Aristotle enjoined the best possible development of his personality. It desires the development of the essentially human capacities. Its empirical aspect has a quantitative character since it wants man to use his capacities in a way that he may extract benefit from others. It leads to the idea of extractive power. Thus the idea of power has both the qualitative and quantitative aspects.

Marxian Theory takes power as an instrument of class domination. According to Marxism, politics is a social activity in which two contending classes engage in a struggle for the control of the state which is an organised force of the society. Power is an instrument that connects economics with politics. Those who control the means of production, determines the distribution of political power. In other words the owners of the property who control the production, also control the political power. Hence political power is merely an organised power of one class oppressing the another. But only the class that is aware of its interests, has a will to put forward that interest and possesses a political organisation, can be said to cut politically.

The theory believes in the disappearance of the political power with the ushering in of a new society having its hallmark in the emergence of stateless pattern of collective life. Thus like state the power becomes a transient phenomenon. Since in a communist society the private property will be abolished, it will entail the disappearance of classes and hence the class-conflict and when the class rule has disappeared, no state in the current political sense will exist. In this way political power will lose its political character.

The theory is mechanical in which economy absolutely determines the character of political structure. But the fact is that the source of power lies not only in the realm of economics but also in the forces of psychology and sociology. Lust for power is a psychological fact. Marx wrongly argues that the state is a class instrument and protects the interests of the bourgeois class in an exclusive manner. In fact the state is a welfare agency. It has an ethical end and exists for the realization of the ideal of what Aristotle calls 'a good life'.

Elite theory presents a sharp contrast to the Marxist theory of power. It insists that power flows not from the ownership of property but from political and bureaucratic organisations. It argues that politics cannot be studied without identifying the ruling class or the governing or non-governing elites and measuring their respective roles. The theory is expounded by Mosca who opines that politics is the struggle for power and functions within the social group.

Max Weber supported the theory by saying that highly specialized division of labour which is the backbone of the modern economy, inevitably leads to greater bureaucratization of a society which is based on state interference and control of economy and social life. The difference between Michel and Weber is that Michel identifies power with domination while Weber treats these two differently Michels defines power as the ability to impose one's will on



another against his apposition while domination hinges on legitimate authority. It is an imperative control which flows directly from the belief that authorised commands will be obeyed without the sanction of physical coercion.

The elite theory of power can be summed up that there can be no organisation without power and in every organisation power resides in the hands of a very small section or the chosen few. The struggle for power takes place between the contending elites and hence the men in authority change from time to time. Whether it is a capitalistic system in which the society has a pluralistic character and there are several political parties and pressure groups, or a socialistic system having a classless society under the dictatorship of the proletariat, power remains with a very small section of the society.

III. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, power is one of the key concepts of political theory. But there is a lack of agreement among the scholars regarding its meaning and features. It is generally identified with the capacity of the persons to get things done, effectively, and particularly when their goals are obstructed by some kind of human resistance. The problem of coping with resistance leads to the role of coercive measures and use of physical force. Concept of political power has normative and empirical dimensions. It is an ideal to be pursued as it helps man to achieve the development of his personality and in extracting benefits from others by peaceful means like persuasion, negotiation or violent means like coercion and sanctions. Some writers have identified power with the economic power. But we must confine our view to the economic aspect. It has other aspects too - for instance the spiritual power has its charisma and plays its part in a process called political.

The concept of power is integrally connected with legitimacy. People obey not because they realise the powerful position of their rulers but due to their connections about the genuineness of the commands of their superiors. It is this point that makes the democracy different from totalitarian systems in which people obey meekly without questioning their rulers' actions or they do it at the expense of their very existence. Power is also identified with the active participation in the decision making process. A decision could be affected by arguments, persuasion, threats, strikes, demonstrations and violence. It is for these reasons that the concept of power is regarded as a difficult and elusive one. Since the distribution of power is unequal in a social system, the problem of the theory is how to make the proper use of it so that maximization of democracy takes place and the developmental and extractive powers of men are developed to the fullest extent.

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INNO SPACE
SJIF Scientific Journal Impact Factor
Impact Factor: 8.118



ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
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