

**SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCIENCE I**

**COURSE: BA LLB SEMESTER I**

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**MODULE: MODULE III, CONCEPT OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

### **CONCEPT OF STATE**

The concept of the state has figured as the central theme of traditional political theory. R.G. Gettel (*Political Science*; 1949) defined political science as 'the science of the state', while J.W. Gamer (*Political Science and Government*; 1928) claimed that 'political science begins and ends with the state'. In modern political theory, the significance of the concept of the state has been fluctuating. Some exponents of the behavioural approach in political science have even suggested abandoning the concept of the state altogether. Their main objection is that this concept does not help in understanding political reality or the political process, because (a) the term 'state' refers to a formal concept while real politics transcends the formal organization of the state; (b) the 'state' is usually conceived in terms of the 'ends' of the state which drags us to the realm of moral philosophy, far removed from the real world of politics; and (c) the concept of the state postulates a particular type of organization which excludes top organizations of certain societies, real or imaginary, and thus introduces the idea of 'pre-state' societies and 'stateless' societies. This leads to the assumption that political organization is not a universal phenomenon. David Easton, in his *Political System— An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (1953), observed:

“One person sees the state as the embodiment of the moral spirit, its concrete expression; another, as the instrument of exploitation used by one class against others. One author defines it as simply an aspect of society, distinguishable from it only analytically; another, as simply a synonym for government; and still another, as a separate and unique association among a large number of other associations such as the church, trade unions, and similar voluntary groups.” After dwelling on these ambiguities in some detail Easton came to the conclusion that the word 'state' 'ought to be abandoned entirely’.

It is important to note that distaste for the term 'state' was confined to some exponents of liberal political theory, especially to some American political scientists. Marxist political theory continued to use the term 'state' to denote a specific form of political organization: the terms 'slave-owning state', 'feudal state', 'capitalist state', 'socialist/communist state', as well as 'pre-state society' and 'stateless society' are the current coins of Marxist political

theory. Even the empirically-oriented political scientists of the liberal tradition used the term 'state- building', especially in the context of developing societies, which signified a renewed interest in the concept of the 'state' as an institutional and constitutional mechanism. Then, in the 1980s attention swung back to the state, as exemplified by T. Skocpol, 'Bringing the State Back (In *Bringing the State Back in: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research*, 1985). However, in contrast to the earlier concept of the state as an institutional structure, it was redefined as an active agent of shaping and reshaping society. It is thus evident that, in spite of some initial suspicions and objections, the concept of the state never became entirely redundant for the study of politics. What is, then, meant by the term 'state'?

## MEANING OF THE STATE

It is significant that though some sort of political organization has existed since ancient times, such as Greek city-states and the Roman empire, yet the concept of the 'state' as such is comparatively modern. The contemporary concept of the state owes its origin to Machiavelli (1469-1527) who expressed this idea in early sixteenth century as 'the power which has authority over men' (*The Prince*; 1513). This was an important idea because it describes the nature of the state, not the end of the state which was a question of political philosophy rather than political sociology or political science. This peculiar feature of the state has been the focus of attention of many recent thinkers.

Max Weber (1864-1920), a famous German sociologist, sought to evolve a 'sociological' definition of the state: Sociologically, the state cannot be defined in terms of its ends... Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific *means* peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely the use of physical force. From this standpoint, Weber arrives at the following definition which is widely acknowledged in modern political theory: 'A State is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory'.

R.M. Maclver, in his famous work *The Modern State* (1926), sought to distinguish the state from other kinds of associations in that it embraces the whole of people in a specific territory and it has the special function of maintaining social order. It performs this function through its agent, the government 'which speaks with the voice of law'. Similarly, R.M. Maclver and C.H. Page (*Society: An Introductory Analysis*; 1950) have observed: "The state is distinguished from all other associations by its exclusive investment with the final power of coercion." Harold J. Laski, in *An Introduction to Politics* (1931), similarly points out: Whereas all other associations are voluntary in character, and can bind the individual only as he chooses membership of them, once he is a resident of some given state, legally he has no choice but to obey its commands. The state, so to say, is the crowning-point of the

modern social edifice, and it is in its supremacy over all other forms of social grouping that its special nature is to be found.

As used in political science, the word state means a community or society politically organized under one independent government within a definite territory and subject to no outside control. There can be no community without the people to form one, and no common life without some definite piece of territory to live in. When people live a collective life, they fulfil the meaning of Aristotle's famous phrase, "Man is a social animal" and when they live a settled life on a definite territory to realize the purpose of collective living, they fulfil the meaning of Aristotle's second famous phrase, "Man is a political animal". The people are bound by rules of common behaviour and their violation is accompanied by punishment. That is the state. Society meets man's companionship, the state solves the problem created by such companionship. Therefore, the state is some form of association with some special characteristics, particularly that of its territorial connection and of its use offeree. It is charged with the duty to maintain those conditions of life for which the state came into existence and for which it continues to exist.

Therefore, the state is a natural, a necessary, and a universal institution. It is natural because it is rooted in the reality of human nature. It is necessary because, according to Aristotle, "The state comes into existence originating in the bare needs of life and continuing in existence for the sake of good life". Man needs the state to satisfy his diverse needs and to be what he desires to be. Without the state he cannot rise to the full stature of his personality. In fact, in the absence of such a controlling and regulating authority, society can not be held together and there will be disorder and anarchy. What food means to the human body the state means to man. Both are indispensable for his existence and development. The state has existed whenever and wherever man has lived in and organized society.

## **REFERENCES:**

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