



Notion of The State

Dr. Shaileja Upmanyu

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

1. Introduction

Theories of state and paradigms of state development are significant issues in political analysis. The word 'State' is generally associated with the notion of force which is able not only to issue commands but also to enforce them. The fact that the notion of the state is associated with that of a superior force, does not imply that this force is inscrutable and arbitrary. On the contrary, the notion of the state is closely associated with that of power, exercised in accordance with definite procedure, with rules that are having popular acceptance. The recognition of the power of the state which exercises definite rules implies the recognition of the citizens to submit to these rules. The term 'State' refers not only to a force which exists in actual fact or to a power which exercises certain rules, but to an authority which is recognized and justified in practice.

However, all political thinkers do not accept the state as the necessary institutions nor do they consider it as inevitable for human destiny. Even in the primordial world, state as such did not exist and we can see that a large number of tribes and civilizations lived without the existence of the state¹. Judging from ethnographic descriptions, many pre-literate tribes have done so. We can see by means of astounding and highly humane adaptation to a harsh and risky environment Inuits (Eskimos) in northern Canada and South Pole evidently existed for many centuries without a state. They lived in a tiny group of dozens or so families united by multiple bonds of kinship, culture, religion, myth and a common fate. Transgression of important rules were met with shame, ridicule and occasional ostracism. Even today, some philosophers and thinkers regard the state as an anathema or an avoidable evil. The 'individualists'² consider the state a necessary evil and regard its every action as subtraction from the freedom of the individual. The 'anarchist'³ modify the position of the individualists to the extent of holding that the state is an evil but hope that some day it will become unnecessary. The extremists among them considered the state as an unmitigated evil. Therefore, they opine that the sooner one gets rid of the state, the better it will be for the moral growth of man. The 'Pluralists'⁴, 'the Gandhians'⁵ and even Marx was for the withering away of the state. However, one has to submit that the state has been accepted by individuals, groups and societies, by and large, in spite of the fact that it may be the root cause of wars – big and small, widespread and local and resulted in immense loss to human society.

2. Varying Nature of the State

The notion of the 'state' has varied from time to time with the ever-changing processes and conceptualizations. The social environment in which the socio-political institutions operate, undergoes many changes – both in scale as well as in dimensions, necessitating changes in the notion of the state. The above phenomena push the state in a condition of flux constantly. It is this factor which makes the concept of the state hazy, and the state is confused with similar societal structures like society, nation, government etc.

3. State and Other Identical Societal Formations

By and large, the content of man's life is largely set by the state and its institutions. It is seen that the modern state is a territorial society divided into government and subjects, claiming within its allotted boundaries, a supremacy over all other institutions. The state is in fact, the supreme legal depository of social will⁶. As a technical term, the word 'state' belongs to jurisprudence and political theory. As a generic term, the word has a reference to land, people and government. The term commonly denotes no class of objects that can be identified exactly for the same reason, it signifies no list of attributes which bare the sanction of common usage. State must be defined more or less arbitrarily to meet the exigencies of the system of jurisprudence or political philosophy in which it occurs⁷.

Men live in a society with other human beings and that society in relation to all other forms of man-made associations is integrated into a unity called the 'state'⁸. In Political Science, the word 'state' usually means a community or society politically organized under one independent government within a definite territory. The 'state' is charged with various human destinies of the society and it is normally known as the key stone of the social arch. Although it is asserted that the state and society are both co-



extensive in their membership, the legal association of the state and the social organization of the society includes the same body of persons but the purpose of both are different. The 'state' exists for one single but great purpose but the society exists for a number of purposes.

Generally, society works for the purpose of satisfaction of mutual wants and desires of the society and their basic wants are – social and economic in character but the purpose for which the state is formed may be conceived differently as the maintenance of law and order and defense against external aggression. The province of state is determined by the prevailing outlook of the society. The 'state' is thus an instrument of society. It is legally integrated society possessing coercive authority which is supreme over every individual and groups of that society.

An examination of society reveals within its boundaries not only individuals but also associations of men grouped together to promote all kinds of objects –political, cultural, economic and religious in whichever they are interested. Such a society is 'state' when both the individuals and associations must conform to a particular way of life. This is defined by a coercive authority binding upon them all. This power is called 'sovereignty' and it is by the possession of 'sovereignty' that the 'state' is distinguished by all other forms of human associations. Its will is unchallengeable, otherwise it could not be supreme.

It is by large known that man's whole life is encircling largely around the institutions set by the state. The model state is a territorial society divided into government and subjects which claims a supremacy over all other institutions within its allotted physical area. The state moulds the form and substance of all human lives with whose destinies it is charged with. It can be said that the state is a way of organizing the collective life in a given society. Since the state's coercive power is supreme, there is no activity within its jurisdiction, the character of which it may not seek to define. Thus, the state appears peculiarly a politico-legal body responsible primarily for the maintenance and enforcement of law and order. It claims to be independent of any control from outside and it solely has the monopoly of exercising all coercive powers.

4. Identical Terms

As the state has the capability to realize various goals of the citizens it is discussed widely amongst political thinkers since the beginning of civilization. When a state is territorially organized, it is called a 'Country', when it sings the ballads of nationalism, it is proclaimed a 'Nation'. A state speaks of common values, traditions and culture to uplift the society. When we examine any national society, we come to the conclusion that it encircles within itself not only individuals, but also associations of men grouped together to promote all kinds of objects –Religious, Economic, Cultural and Political whichever sphere they are interested. We call such a society as the state when the way of life of both – Individuals and Associations are defined by a supreme coercive authority. Whenever we try to explain a society – either by abstract theory or with the help of concrete observable social facts, many complexities and contradictions of the social development can be seen – which has to be coped up by the state to tie them in one unit.

5. Conclusions

Any changeover from the abstract to the concrete is possible only if historical specifications of a society are properly related with general laws of human social development. Since human beings are constantly evolving, they are continuously involved in creating new and diverse productive forces in society. When productive forces and the relations of the individuals are strained, many crisis situations evolve in the society. It is here that the emergence of the state and its importance is felt for resolving the social contradictions and ultimately the state comes up with the most important institution that defends and guards the social order.

It can be said that the state is the central social institution which can be accounted for the maintenance of the society and the specific character of the state can be determined by its role and its legitimacy. The ultimate essence of the state which lies in its coercive power, does not exhaust the totality of the functions that the state performs for the development of its members of society. Further, the nature of the state cannot be properly comprehended without relating it to the totality of the ideological philosophical, cultural and social mainstreams of the society.

References

1. Such accounts are from the readings of Bowle, John, Man through the ages – 1977; Mellersh, H.E. – The story of man – 1959; Coon, Carleton – The history of man -1955 and others
2. Pioneers among them are J.S. Mill and Herbert Spencer.
3. Some of them are: Pierson Proudhan, Henry Thoreau, Mikail Bakunin, William Godwin and others.
4. The leading thinkers are Harold J. Laski, G.D.H. Cole, A.D. Lindsay and others
5. Bose, Nirmal Kumar: studies in Gandhism, Navjeevan Press, Ahmedabad – 1972



6. MacIver, R.M., *The modern state*, Oxford University Press, London, 1926
7. *Encyclopedia of social sciences*: Macmilan, 1959, Volume XIII and XIV
8. Akzin, Benjamin, *State and nation*, Hutchinson University, London, 1964

