

CONCEPT OF POWER

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NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF POWER

Significance of Power

'Power' may be regarded as one of the central concepts of political science. It is said that the concept of power holds the same status in the realm of political science as held by the concept of money in the realm of economics. The focus on power emancipates the study of politics from the status of an appendage to the study of philosophy or history or law. It also transcends the realm of formal institutions to focus on the real motives and objectives of human beings which lie behind all political activity and institution-building.

During the early phase of development of modern political science Frederick Watkins had observed: "The proper scope of political science is not the study of the state or of any other specific institutional complex, but the investigation of all associations insofar as they can be shown to exemplify the problem of power" (*The State as a Concept of Political Science*; 1934). This view was confirmed by William A. Robson who suggested: "It is with power in society that political science is primarily concerned—its nature, basis, processes, scope and results . . . The 'focus of interest' of the political scientist is clear and unambiguous; it centres on the struggle to gain or retain power, to exercise power or influence over others, or to resist that exercise" (*The University Teaching of Social Sciences: Political Science*; 1954).

In fact, the significance of power in the political phenomenon was brought out by traditional thinkers like Machiavelli (1469–1527), Hobbes (1588–1697) and Nietzsche (1844–1900) as well as by modern writers like Max Weber, Catlin, Merriam, Lasswell, Kaplan, Watkins, Trietschke and Morgenthau. The exponents of the 'power' view of politics focus on the study of 'the acquisition, maintenance and loss of power'. H. Lasswell and A. Kaplan (*Power and Society*; 1950) have defined political science as 'the study of the shaping and sharing of power'. Max Weber's definition of politics also implies a focus on power in the context of national as well as international politics: "Politics is the struggle for power or the influencing of those in power, and embraces the struggle between states as such as

between organized groups within the state" (cited in G.E.G. Catlin, *Systematic Politics*; 1965). Accordingly, Michael Curtis (*Comparative Government and Politics*; 1978) has observed: "Politics is organized dispute about power and its use, involving choice among competing values, ideas, persons, interests and demands." Elucidating the scope of the study of politics, Curtis continues: "The study of politics is concerned with the description and analysis of the manner in which power is obtained, exercised and controlled, the purposes for which it is used, the manner in which decisions are made, factors which influence the making of those decisions and the context in which those decisions take place". If power is so important for the study of politics, what is meant by power?

Meaning of Power ✓✓

Bertrand Russell (*Power: A New Social Analysis*; 1938) has defined power as 'the production of intended effects'. In other words, power denotes the ability of a person to fulfil his desires or to achieve his objectives. In popular parlance the term 'power' may be used in multifarious contexts. For instance, we talk of the power of man over nature or material things, and the power of man over man. Most of the theorists of power, including Russell, prefer to restrict its use to 'power over human beings'. Thus Robert Dahl (*Modern Political Analysis*; 1991) defines power as a kind of influence; it is exercised 'when compliance is attained by creating the prospect of severe sanctions for non-compliance'. H.V. Wiseman (*Political Systems: Some Sociological Approaches*; 1966) defines power as 'the ability to get one's wishes carried out despite opposition'. Stephen L. Wasby (*Political Science—The Discipline and its Dimensions*; 1972) has similarly observed: "Power is generally thought to involve bringing about of an action by someone against the will or desire of another." ✓

All these definitions give prominence to that aspect of power which is exercised by a man or a group over an 'unwilling' lot. They are, therefore, one-sided. Power, to be effective and stable, often takes the character of 'authority' which also comprehends legitimacy; that is, the capacity to secure willing obedience. Use of force or coercion or sanctions may be resorted to only when legitimacy fails to work. It is authority which ensures social acceptance and effective implementation of rules, policies and decisions.

It is, therefore, necessary to understand the precise relationship between power, authority and legitimacy.