

RISE AND GROWTH OF THE MODERN NATION-STATE

The modern state is largely identified as the nation-state. The state has acquired its present form through a long historical process extending over thousands of years. The state itself was the product of the interplay of several factors, including kinship, religion, property, war, technical development, and political consciousness. The family was the first institution to emerge from the state of savagery, which brought some sense of attachment, obligation, order and security in the life of man. Originally, man's family was traced from the mother which gave rise to the matriarchal family. This, in due course, gave way to the patriarchal family when woman was reduced to being the property of man. The family gave rise to a larger social organization. Initially, kinship or blood-relationship provided a strong tie for people to live together and to fulfil their needs through division of labour. In due course, some consistent patterns of behaviour and relationships of domination and subordination emerged. Social life came to be regulated by custom and authority. This eventually led to the evolution of the state.

Sociologists have generally identified the following forms of state in the course of its historical evolution: the tribal state; the Oriental empire; the Greek city-state; the Roman world empire; the feudal state; and, finally, the modern nation-state.

The Tribal State

The earliest form of tribal organization of authority—command and obedience—is described as the tribal state. The tribal states were usually small in size. These were governed by chiefs, often assisted by advisory councils. Some of them were nomadic; others were permanently settled in definite areas. While the main purpose of their existence was the preservation of internal order and the waging of aggressive or defensive war, they often retained strong traces of common birth, common religion, and common economic interests. The aborigines of Australia represent this type. The tribes of the Western hemisphere, before they came into contact with Europe, also belonged to this category.

The nomenclature 'tribal state' is, however, controversial. Many authors, including Engels, hold that some forms of tribal society did have the institution of authority, but they did not possess characteristics of the state in the proper sense of the term. Such societies have been described as pre-state societies. In any case, they represent a primitive form of social organization which was later developed into the state.

The Oriental Empire

In course of time, population increased; new techniques of production were evolved and new sources of natural bounty were discovered. A warm climate,

fertile soil, abundance of water and sunlight and vast areas free from geographical barriers, helped men to accumulate wealth and to evolve new forms of social organization. In the fertile valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates, the Ganges, the Yellow River, and Yangtze, which are called the 'cradles of civilization', wealth accumulated and cities arose. Such areas, furnishing abundant food with little effort, attracted surrounding peoples belonging to different kinship groups. This was followed by their conflict and intermingling which eventually resulted in the creation of the state.

The increased prosperity led to the development of the art of war and conquest of territories. As the stronger groups won over the weaker ones, the inhabitants of these valleys were bound together into the empires of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, India, and China. These empires were not strongly centralized, but were made up of subordinate units, practically autonomous in local affairs, yet under central supervision, obliged to furnish soldiers and to pay tribute.

The early advance of civilization was, therefore, marked by oppression and exploitation. In the frequent wars of conquests, the victors became masters, the vanquished slaves, with resultant social differences, castes and despotism. The rulers became supreme, in collusion with a class of priests who became guardians of religion. The subjects were relegated to slavery and debasement. An elaborate network of officials was created by the ruling classes to fortify their authority, but the large size of empires eroded central authority, led to local revolts and external invasions, and consequent disintegration of these empires.

The Greek City-State

As civilization spread to the region around the Aegean and the Mediterranean, new geographical forms gave rise to new forms of social organization. Europe is a peninsula where land is broken by the sea into small units permitting communication, but making invasion from Asia difficult in those days. The peculiar location of Greece helped in the evolution of a new form of political organization in the ancient days. The mountains and the sea divided this area into numerous valleys and islands. These could be easily defended, yet, because of the sea, these were not isolated. In contrast to the uniformity of Asia, the variety and moderation of nature in Greece developed a different mental attitude and genius. Here, small communities were settled in secluded valleys, guarded by mountains and the sea, yet in constant contact with the outside world through their harbours. Quite naturally, they evolved their political organization into city-states.

The Greek city-states were free from the despotism that fettered the earlier empires. The small size of the state provided for closer relations between government and the citizen. Earlier forms of democracy, therefore, evolved in these city-states. However, their population was divided into freemen and slaves. About 75 per cent of the population comprised of the slaves. The prominent city-states were Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Argos, Thebes, and Attica. Sparta is known for its perfect discipline while Athens provided an ideal platform for direct democracy.

The Greek city-states disintegrated due to mutual rivalry, frequent wars between themselves and external invasion, first from Macedon, then from Rome.

The Roman World Empire

After the downfall of the Greek city-states, the main line of political development passed westward to Rome. In due course, Rome became the centre of civilization. It was situated in the centre of Europe, at the head of navigation of the only important river. The various settlements on the neighbouring hills were soon united with Rome by conquest or by federation. This led to a fusion of various types of people. Thus, in Rome the rigid fetters of custom were broken earlier than usual. Relations of various tribes were governed by compromise or treaty. This led to the growth of Rome's wonderful system of law. The process of conquest eventually resulted in the formation of Empire.

The Roman empire evolved a well-knit political organization. Monarchy was replaced by aristocracy of birth and wealth. Though the population was still divided into patricians and plebeians, yet the plebeians enjoyed greater privileges than the Greek slaves. Internal dissensions were largely averted by extending citizenship. Assemblies were widened. However, the power of wealthy aristocrats increased with the expansion of empire. Religious sanction was added to the authority of the emperor which led to a concentration and centralization of authority. The result was suppression of individual freedom; the institutions of democracy and local self-government disappeared. The strong empire eventually disintegrated under its own weight.

The Feudal State

hierarchical pol. org
lord
serf

After the decline and fall of the Roman empire, central authority was eroded. In the Medieval Age which began in the fifth century of the Christian era, powers began to be exercised by feudal chiefs, i.e. the landlords holding big estates. This led to a hierarchical political organization with the king as the supreme lord at the top, and serfs at the bottom. In fact, the king exercised only superficial control as the lord over the feudal vassals who enjoyed the real power within their domain. The serfs were landless peasants, obliged to pass on a very major share of their produce to their feudal lords. Thus, society still remained divided into the exploiter and exploited classes—the lords and the serfs, respectively.

With the erosion of the authority of kings, the Christian church emerged as another symbol of authority. The Pope emerged as the head of the Holy Roman Empire. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Popes were using their authority arbitrarily, the authority of the church was challenged and power of monarchy restored. On the other hand, the advent of the industrial revolution brought about a change in the mode of material production, leading to the emergence of a new industrial-merchant class, requiring large numbers of workers for the new industries. All these factors led to the dissolution of the feudal system and the emergence of a new state-system.