
UNIT 12 FEATURES OF THE THIRD WORLD STATE

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with third world states. After going through the unit you will be able to:

- Understand what is meant by the term third world
- Explain the characteristic features of the States of the third world
- Identify the essential attributes of the states of the third world, and
- Locate the role of third world in world politics.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

There has been a debate on the question of the nature of the State in the Third World, sometimes referred to as the post-colonial societies in political theory and comparative politics. It is important to understand the nature of state in the Third World as it enables us to locate the role of the Third World in international relations.

The term 'Third World' refers to a group of countries with certain common features. According to some writers the developed capitalist countries constitute the first world. The socialist countries are called the second world. The underdeveloped countries in Africa, Asia and Latin American that were subjected to colonial domination are called the third world. Some writers categorize the superpowers as the first world. The other developed countries like UK, Germany, Australia and Canada are clubbed together as the second world. The third world consists of underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Both definitions have a few things in common. In both classifications the attributes of the third world are one and the same. The third world is defined in both the classifications in relation to the developed countries. The Third World Countries are economically poor and they have a colonial past.

In the course of identifying the common features of the Third World one should not ignore variations among them. Some third world countries like the Arab countries are very rich while the others like Bangladesh are very poor. There are countries with democratic institutions. On the other hand some third world countries are ruled by military regimes. There are also differences amount the third world countries in terms of social formations ranging from tribal societies to capitalist societies.

In spite of all these differences, the third world is not a meaningless category because it helps us in grouping together countries that came into being by fighting against the colonial domination. They all encounter similar problems because of their background. Hence, it is useful to study the third world keeping in mind both similarities and dissimilarities without exaggerating one to eliminate the other. There are certain general characteristics that the state in the Third World has acquired which may be attributed largely to the fact that they have been colonised and that colonialism has introduced certain fundamental changes in their societies. There are different theoretical frameworks in which the state can be understood.

12.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

There are several theoretical frameworks for studying the states of the third world. Among them most significant and popular frameworks are the liberal and Marxist frameworks.

12.2.1 Liberal Framework

The liberals argue that the state is a neutral agency and acts as an arbiter between the contending group in the society. In other words no group has a privileged access to state. Different groups in the society make their demands on the political system. The state agencies consider all these demands and take decisions in the general interest of the society. Within the fold of liberalism some writers propose that state agencies are dominated by the elite groups. Elite groups exercise domination by virtue of certain personal attributes not due to the control over economic resources. Liberal theory holds that in a democracy elite groups do not use power in their personal or group interests. Electoral compulsions force them to work for the welfare of all groups. In the third world the westernized elite controls the state and use it as an instrument to transform the traditional agrarian society into a modern industrial society.

The liberal approach has two lapses. In the first instance it refuses to recognize that political capacity of individuals is decided by their economic resources. Secondly it fails to explain how elite groups work for the entire society rising above their narrow economic and social interests.

In other words any explanation of the state in total disregard of the class divisions in the society would be simplistic. State is embedded in the society. Therefore it has to be studied in relation to the society.

12.2.2 Marxist Framework

Marx and Engels argued that states is neither an impartial agency nor a common trustee. It expresses the interests of the dominant classes to protect their interests. In other words it is an instrument in the hands of the dominant classes. The state follows society but does not precede it.

Hence the nature of the state depends upon the character of the division of labour in the society. Unfortunately, Marx has not written elaborately on the state. He made sketchy remarks. The followers of Marx have written extensively about the state. However most of these writings deal with the developed capitalist countries. These explanations are not valid for the third world which are different from the capitalist countries. The third world countries have a colonial past. Even after securing political independence they are subjected to economic exploitation by the western developed countries. Yet another important attribute of the third world countries is that they are dominated not by one single class but multiple classes.

Due to the above mentioned conditions the third world state has a distinct nature. It is known by various names such as peripheral state, the post-colonial state, and the over-developed state.

The third world countries were subjected to colonial exploitation, that disturbed the course of development and brought about lopsided development. The domination of the third world by the imperialist powers continued even after decolonization. There is no unanimity amount writers about the nature of relationship between developed western countries and the third world.

12.2.3 Dependency Theory

Some writers who propounded the dependency theory argue that the third world countries do not enjoy political freedom and continue to be dominated by the imperialist powers. According to these writers the world is integrated into a single capitalist system.

The developed western countries constitute the core of the world system. During the colonial periods, the third world countries were shaped by the imperialist countries to suit their requirements. Due to this process, the third world is structurally integrated with the economies of the developed countries and is dependent on the developed countries. In world capitalism the third world survives as an adjunct of the core also known as metropolis — and lies on the periphery of world capitalism. In this model the third world state is an instrument in the hands of the metropolitan capital.

While agreeing with the notion that the underdeveloped countries are dominated by the developed capitalist countries, critiques of the dependency theory rejected the argument that the third world state has no autonomy. According to these writers, political freedom has enabled the third world countries to use the state to further their interests within the constraints imposed by neocolonial dominations.

Similarly, divergent opinions are expressed about the nature of the dominant classes in the third world. Some argue that the third world is dominated by the native capitalist class. But the predominant view is that there is no well formed dominant class in the third world. A loose alliance of various classes dominates the third world.

The third world state is also analyzed in terms of its relationship with the dominant classes. Most of the writers on the third world argue that the state has autonomy from the ruling classes that is delimited by the social structure.

Due to certain historical personalities, the third world state has acquired another distinct character. The colonial rulers have a created a highly centralized state machinery to maintain their domination over the colonized. The state machinery is thus imposed from above and it has not evolved out of the internal social dynamics. Hence the third world state is not in tune with society, it is either advanced or over developed when compared with society at large.

After taking a look at the third world from various angles one may say that the third world state is an over-developed, post-colonial state, with autonomy from the ruling classes. In other words, it is a product of a complex social formation of the third world.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Write short notes on
a) Liberal framework

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b) Marxist framework

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c) Dependency theory.

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12.3 CHARACTERISTIC OF THE STATE

The State as an institution came into existence as part of a historical process. In the third world, decolonisation shaped the state, giving it specific characteristics. The boundaries existing at the time of colonisation were modified in some cases; in other cases entirely new states were carved out. The territorial boundaries of the state did not always coincide with the Nation; that is, often people belonging to different ethnic groups, nationalities were brought together and the boundaries of the colonies were traced, delimited according to the needs of the colonial powers. African states are the best examples to indicate the artificiality of the state. Nigeria for example was entirely a British creation. The Third World States became states before they became nations. This, to a large extent, is responsible for territorial conflicts and for problem of national integration. A number of Third World Countries face ethnic and secessionist movements in the post-colonial era. British colonial policies and the dynamics of nationalist movements led to the creation of Pakistan's secessionist movement which in turn led to the creation of Bangladesh. The artificiality of the colonial boundaries, the impact of colonial legacy and the dynamics of decolonisation processes explain the complexity of the Third World State.

The third world state has the following distinct features.

1. It is an over developed state;
2. It enjoys autonomy from the dominant classes;
3. It protects the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie also.

12.3.1 An 'Over-developed State'

In the Western capitalist countries the modern nation-state has emerged due to internal dynamics of society. It came into being in the course of a historical transition to capitalism. The rising capitalist class took the initiative to establish a nation-state.

In the third world the motive force for change in the political institutions came from outside. During the colonial period the third world was dominated by the western capitalist countries. The colonial rulers had created political institutions in their own image to facilitate domination over the native classes and economic exploitation of the colonies.

To perform these functions the colonial rulers have related an elaborated legal-institutional structure to control the colonies. The many and the bureaucracy who manned these institutions played a vital role in managing the affairs of the colonial rulers.

Even after independence the elaborate structure remained in existence. There are two salient features of this state: one, that it is not formed by the local classes nor is it established as a consequence of social change, two, the native ruling classes had no control over the state.

The state is far ahead of the time and space in which it is located. In the third world countries therefore bureaucracy and the army have acquired a central place. In the western capitalist countries the bureaucracy plays an auxiliary role. It is an instrument of the dominant class, whereas in the third world it has a central place and it enjoys autonomy from the dominant classes.

An over developed state weakens democratic institutions. Even in those third world countries where democratic institutions exist and the elected representatives control the state agencies, bureaucracy retains its domination over the state. However it exercises control in league with politicians.

In countries having democratic control politicians occupy central place. Politicians articulate the demands of the people to cultivate support. They formulate policies to fulfill the demands of the people. In this process politicians provide legitimacy to the political institutions. However, the power is hemmed in by bureaucratic procedures and controls. Politicians are converted into brokers between the state and the people.

12.3.2 Autonomy

The western countries are dominated by a single well-formed dominant class. In all the western countries the capitalist class is the dominant class. The third world is marked by the existence of multiple dominant classes. The landlord class, i.e. local bourgeoisie of the metropolis control the third world. An alliance consisting of all these classes dominates the state. The alliance is called historic bloc. The historic bloc arises because the social formation in third world consists of elements from both capitalist as well as precapitalist social relations. The capitalist class is weak and incapable of fighting against the pre-capitalist relations in society.

The capitalist class is weak because it exercises limited control over the economic activity. A large part of the economic production is controlled either by the metropolitan bourgeoisie or by the local landed gentry. No class is enough strong to exercise control over the state.

Since there is no single dominant class, the state acquires the autonomy to regulate the relationship between different classes of the historic bloc. The third world state, by deploying vast economic resources to reproduce capitalist production process in the interest of local dominant classes and the bourgeoisie of the metropolis, sustains its Autonomy.

12.3.3 Control of the Metropolis

The third world state is subjected to control by extraneous forces. The under-developed nature of the economy and the nature of the ruling elite/classes renders the state dependent on foreign aid and capital. The ruling elite by acting as mediators between the state and the external capital amass profits. This process does not help development. The gap between the ruled and the rulers and between the rich and the poor widens. It is far-fetched to argue that the third world state is completely under the control of imperialist rulers. Independence from colonial domination has eliminated the scope for the bourgeoisie of the imperialist powers to exercise direct control over the third world state. However it influences the third world state indirectly. The over-developed third world state by dissolving the national boundaries, creates favourable conditions for the world market to penetrate into the third world. The state by facilitating the induction of technology and investment brings about the integration of the third world into the global market. The state, the ruling elite, negotiate with the external world with diminishing power and ability to do so.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the characteristics of the third world?

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2) Write a note on the continuing control of the ex-colonial powers on their former colonies.

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12.4 LET US SUM UP

The Third World state/states are to a large extent colonial creations in the sense that their boundaries, the nature of their regimes have been deeply influenced by colonial policies. The nature of the Third World state is analysed in liberal democratic, Marxist and new Marxist frameworks. The Third World economies are integrated into the World economy, which is guided by the principles of free market, and represent the interests of the dominant sections of the society. While they are dependent on the former colonial power, they also exercise a certain independence and mediate between the state and the metropolis. The Third World state is desired as 'over developed', as one with 'relative autonomy', as 'dependent' state.

12.5 KEY WORDS

Capitalist Class : The class of people who own the means of production, exploit the wage labour and appropriate the surplus value produced by the wage labour.

Latin America : The areas of central and South America where Spanish or Portuguese is the principal language.

12.6 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Hamza Alavi and Teodor Shamin (Ed.) **Introduction to the Sociology of Developing Societies** — Longman

Harry Galbowrne : (1979) : **Politics and the State in the Third World**, Macmillan.

James Manor: 1991 : **Returning Third World Politics**, Longman.

Pool and Tardoff : 1981 : **Third World Politics : A Comparative Introduction**
Gamnoch — Macmillan.

12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- a) Liberals believe in democracy and rule of law. They do not subscribe to the view that the individuals are guided by their economic interests.
- b) Consciousness is a product of matter, it is the reflections of the external world. As per Marxist theory of state, the state is neither an impartial agency nor a common trustee. It is an instrument in the hands of the dominant class.
- c) As per the dependency theory the post colonial states are not in the real sense independent; they are still dependent upon their ex-colonial masters.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1. The chief characteristic of the third world countries is the economic backwardness.
- 2. The former colonial countries and other western developed states have been continuing their control over the states of the third world through unequal trade terms and through tied economic aid.