
UNIT 10 STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 State and Civil Society: Meaning and Characteristics
 - 10.2.1 Meaning of State
 - 10.2.2 Meaning of Civil Society
 - 10.2.3 Characteristics of State and Civil Society
- 10.3 Concept of the State: An Overview
 - 10.3.1 The Pre-Modern Tradition
 - 10.3.2 The Liberal-Individualist Tradition
 - 10.3.3 The Marxian Tradition
- 10.4 Concept of Civil Society: An Overview
 - 10.4.1 The Pre-modern Tradition
 - 10.4.2 The Liberal-individualist Tradition
 - 10.4.3 The Hegelian, Marxian and Gramscian Traditions
- 10.5 Relationship between State and Civil Society
 - 10.5.1 State and Civil Society: Integrative Relationship
 - 10.5.2 State, Civil Society and Democracy
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Exercises

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of state occupies a central place in Political Science. No discussion on political theory is complete without reference to the word 'state'. The state, indeed, touches every aspect of human life, and this is why it has, very rightly, captured the attention of all political philosophers since the days of Plato. To understand the state as an administrative machinery ordering public life is to know its one aspect. Important though this aspect is, it is not the only aspect which explains as to what it is. The state is where it operates on. Its real meaning together with its other related implications emerges more clearly when it is understood in relation to the domain of its area of operation, which is what society is.

What is state? What is society or civil society? What is the relationship between the two or how do the two stand in relation to each other? What is so particular about civil society that gives the state a different connotation? These questions have been, and actually are, central to the themes of political theory and to these questions, answers have been addressed by numerous political theorists.

A discussion on issues relating to these two terms, the state and civil society, would help us to know their meanings, implications and the relative perspectives in which these two concepts stand to each other.

10.2 STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY: MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

It is very common to address society as civil society, civil society as political society, political society as state. To understand each as one or the other is to know none of them. While the concept 'society' is a generic term, the term civil society denotes a type of society particular to a time and set in a particular situation. 'Society' refers, in general terms, to the totality of 'social relationships', conscious or unconscious, deliberate or otherwise. 'Civil Society', on the other hand, concerns itself to matters relating to 'public'. This brings the term 'civil society' close to the concept of 'political society'. Indeed, the two terms presuppose a society where civility is their characteristic feature, but 'civil society' extends to areas *far away* from the reach of 'political society'. The institution of family, for example, is an area covered by 'civil society', but it is a domain where 'political society' does better to stay away from. 'Political society' covers a whole range of activities related to 'political' directly or indirectly, but it remains *wider* than the term 'state' when the latter is treated merely as a matter of governance.

It is indeed, important to know the meanings of these terms clearly if one seeks to understand the relationship between them, especially between the state and civil society.

10.2.1 Meaning of State

The state, as a word *stato*, appeared in Italy in the early part of the sixteenth century in the writings of Machiavelli (1469-1527). The meaning of the state in the sense of a body politic became common in England and France in the later part of the sixteenth century. The word *staatskunst* became the German equivalent of *ragione di stato* during the seventeenth century and a little later, the word *staatrecht* got the meaning of *jus publican* (see Sabine, "State", *The Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* Vol. XIV). Thus, came the use of the term 'State'.

The state has included, from the beginning, a reference to a land and a people, but this alone would not constitute a state. It refers also to a unity, a unity of legal and political authority, regulating the outstanding external relationships of man in society, existing within society. It is what it does, i.e., creates a system of order and control, and for this, is vested with the legal power of using compulsion and coercion.

A state, thus, is found in its elaborate system. It is found in its institutions which create laws and which enforce them, i.e., in institutions such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. It is found in the bureaucratic institutions which are attached to every executive branch of the government. It is found in the institutions which are called into operation when its will is challenged, i.e., the military and the police. The state is the sum – total of these institutions. Ralph Miliband (*The State in Capitalist Society*) writes, "These are the institutions – the government, the administration, the military and the police, the judicial branch, sub-central government and parliamentary assemblies – which make up the state...". In these institutions lies the state power; through these institutions come the laws of the state, and from them spring the legal right of using physical force.

The state as governance is a system related to what may be called the political system or the political society. It includes, on the one hand, institutions such as the political parties, pressure groups, the opposition, etc., and on the other, large-scale industrial houses, religious and caste institutions, trade unions, etc. These institutions, existing outside of the state system, attempt to

influence the functioning of the state, somewhere even dominating it, and somewhere in collaboration with it. Skocpol (*States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*) sums up what Neera Chandhoke (*State and Civil Society*) calls the statist perspective of the state, “the state properly conceived is rather a set of administrative, policing and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority. Any state first and fundamentally extracts resources from society and deploys these to create and support coercive and administrative organizations.... Moreover, coercive and administrative organizations are only parts of overall political systems. These systems also may contain institutions through which social interests are represented in state policy-making as well as institutions through which non-state actors are mobilised to participate in policy implementation. Nevertheless, the administrative and coercive organisations are the basis of state power.”

The other strand giving the state a meaning comes from Michael Foucault (‘Truth and Power’ in P. Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, 1987) who regards the state as built on power relations already existing in society. Chandhoke writes about Foucault, “The state, he (Foucault) concluded, can only operate on the basis of existing relations of domination and oppression in society.”

Rejecting both the perspectives of the state, Chandhoke says, “The statist (Skocpol and others) concentrate on the state at the expense of society, and the theorists in the Foucauldian mode concentrate on social interaction at the expense of the state.” She concludes that the state, with a view to understanding it in relation to society, and vice-versa, “is a social relation because it is the codified power of the social formation.”

10.2.2 Meaning of Civil Society

The concept of civil society, to give it a meaning, embraces an entire range of assumptions, values and institutions, such as political, social and civil rights, the rule of law, representative institutions, a public sphere, and above all a plurality of associations. Commenting on it, David Held (*Models of Democracy*) stated that it retains “a distinctive character to the extent that it is made up of areas of social life the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interaction ... which are organised by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals, and groups outside the direct control of the state.” Adding to political interaction, civil society constitutes what Jurgen Habermas called ‘the public sphere’. Enlarging the view of civil society, one may include in it the structure of modern national state, economic modernization, great interconnectedness with other societies, free enterprise and what John Dunn (*Western Political Theory*) refers to as “the modern representative democratic republic.”

Chandhoke sums up the meaning of civil society “as the public sphere where individuals come together for various purposes both for their self-interest and for the reproduction of an entity called society.” “It is a”, she continues, “sphere which is public because it is formally accessible to all, and in principle all are allowed entry into this sphere as the bearers of rights.”

The concept of civil society came up as and when a social community sought to organise itself independently of the specific direction of state power. Historically, the concept, Chandhoke says, “came into existence when the classical political economists sought to control the power of the Mercantilist State”. With the passage of time, the concept of civil society moved on progressively: becoming a central plank of democratic movements in eighteenth century.

10.2.3 Characteristics of State and Civil Society

State exists within the society. This makes the state and society analytically distinct. The two are not the same. Society is a web of social relationships and as such, includes the totality of social practices, which are essentially plural, but at the same time, are relational. The hierarchically organised and maintained social practices of a given community establish, in their turn, all kinds of power equations and relations among its members. The state comes in to give these power relations a fixity, and thereby to society its stability. The state gives legitimacy to social relationships as expressed in social practices because it recognises them and codifies them through legal acts. It is in this sense that the state can be described as the codified power of the social formation of a given time.

The state, so considered, is itself a distinct and discrete organisation of power in so far as it possesses the capacity to select, categorise, crystallise and arrange power in formal codes and institutions. And this capacity gives to the state its status – power, power to take decisions, power to enforce decisions, and also power to coerce those who defy them. But the state so considered derives its power from society. It is, in this sense, a codified power, but within the framework of the society in which it operates.

The state, as a social relation and also as a codified power in a given society, would have certain characteristics of its own. These characteristics can be stated as:

- a) The state is a power, organised in itself. It has the power to legitimise social relations and gives them recognition through formal codes and institutions. This gives the state a distinct and irreducible status in society while making it autonomous from classes and contending factions existing in it.
- b) The state emerges as a set of specifically political practices which defines binding decisions and enforces them, to the extent of intervening in every aspect of social life.
- c) The state monopolises all means of coercion. No other organisation in the society has this power.
- d) The state gives fixity to social relations, and social stability to society. The social order, according to Chandhoke, “is constituted through the state and exists within the parameters laid down by the state.”
- e) The state exists within the framework of a given society. As society responds to the changing conditions compelled by numerous social forces, the state responds to the changing society. The state always reflects the changing relations of society. As society constantly re-enacts itself, so does the state.

The liberal and the marxist perspectives of civil society differ drastically. For the liberals, civil society presupposes democratic states together with the accountability of the states, the limits on state power, the responsiveness to the spontaneous life and the interactions of civil society. For the marxists, civil society is the arena of class conflicts, selfish competition and exploitation, the state acting to protect the interests of the owning classes. A definition of civil society comprising the insights of both the liberals and the marxists must take into account the following:

- a) The state power must be controlled and it has to become responsive through democratic practices of an independent civil society

- b) Political accountability has to reside not only in constitutions, laws, and regulations, but also in the social fabric or what Habermas calls the competence of the 'political public' which, in turn, has the following implications: (i) it implies that the people come together in an arena of common concerns, in debates and discussion and discourse free from state interference (ii) it implies that the discourse is accessible to all (iii) it implies a space where public discussion and debate can take place.
- c) Democratic norms and processes have to be imbibed in the social order.
- d) Civil society is the public sphere of society. It is the location of these processes by which the experiences of individuals and communities, and the expression of experiences in debates and discussions, affirmation and constitution are mediated. It is also a theatre where "the dialectic between the private and the public are negotiated. It is the process by which society seeks to "breach" and counteract the simultaneous "totalisation" unleashed by the state" (Bayart, "Civil Society in Africa", in Chabal, P., ed., *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power*). It is a site where the state is forbidden to shape public opinion and perceptions.

10.3 CONCEPT OF THE STATE: AN OVERVIEW

The state, being at the very core of political theory, has been defined differently by different political philosophers since the time of the ancient Greek. For some, it is an institution of coercion, while for others, it is the custodian of the rights of the people. While some, like the anarchists, would like to abolish the state straight away, others like the socialists of the non-marxian shade would want it to stay to establish socialism.

Despite the fact that the state has meant different things to different people, one cannot ignore the central place the state has in political theory. One would do better, if one attempts to discuss the meaning of the state vis-à-vis society which has come to us by a host of eastern political philosophers.

10.3.1 The Pre-modern Tradition

In all his works in political theory, there is a strong case which Plato (428/7- 348/7 BC) builds in favour of an omnipotent rule. The problem to which Plato addressed himself was not as to how best a government could be created, but as to how the best government could be installed. It is the job of the government, Plato affirmed more than once, to help people live a complete life. It is, thus, with Plato a matter of just not a government, but a just government, just not a government any how, but a perfect government, the government that was able to deliver happiness for all who lived therein. For Plato, a state is a system of relationships in which everyone does his own business and where the job of the state is to maintain, and promote such relationships.

Following his teacher Plato, Aristotle (384-322 BC) defined the state as *polis* (the ancient Greeks used polis for the state) as a community, which exists for the supreme good. He says that the state is "an association of households and villages sharing in a life of virtue, and aiming at an end which exists in perfect and self-complete existence."

Both Plato and Aristotle, and for that matter all Greeks, thought of polis as more than a state. It was an arrangement of administrative machinery, a government or a constitution, but was also a school, a church laying the guidelines for a way of life, which for them, was nothing but

leading a full life. For Plato and Aristotle, there was no distinction between the state and society: the state was an organ and a part of the society; it was submerged in the society itself. In addition, the Greeks thought of the polis as an ethical entity and that was why they assigned, ethical functions to be performed by the rulers of the state, i.e., good, happy and complete life. Barker writes, "It (the polis) is more than a legal structure: it is also a moral spirit". An ancient Greek would never imagine himself without the polis, he was only a part of the polis, a part of the whole. Barker says, "Here (in ancient Greece) were individuals, distinct from the state, yet in their communion forming the state." Wayper also says "For life to be worth living must have a meaning, and only in the polis they (the Greeks) were sure, did it acquire meaning. There was no distinction between political, social and ethical life in ancient Greece. The society was the state as the state was with Plato and Aristotle, a government: the freeman, the master was a citizen, a legislator and a member of the society; he as the ruler ruled the individual as a member of the society, all the individuals, the whole society. The slave-owing society of ancient Greek times could hardly be expected to give a theory of state, nay a theory of society, more than that of the government, precisely, the rulers".

To Cicero's writings would go the credit of giving a notion of the state which is not a polis, but a commonwealth. Like the ancient Greeks, Cicero also regards the state submerged in the society, a part, i.e., an integral part of the society. Cicero says, "The Commonwealth, then, is the people's affairs, and the people is not every group of man, associated in any manner, but is the coming together of a considerable number of men who are united by a common agreement about law and rights, and by the desire to participate in mutual advantages." From this, Cicero's theory of state can be summed up as: (i) the state is differentiated from people's gatherings, i.e., society (ii) the people enter the state after they agree on certain rules, giving people a 'legal' status, which lead them to form 'legal community (iii) the state exists when people agree to participate in its affairs. In Cicero's theory, there is a theory of state different from the theory of society; he makes a distinction between the state and the society; his theory of state is the theory of government as well as a theory of political community.

The medieval political theory in the West was mainly concerned with Christianity where social life was more a religious life regulated by the dictates of the Roman Catholic Church headed by the Pope. Christendom ruled the universe and politics was controlled by the Church. The temporal power was regarded inferior to that of the ecclesiastical, the state acting as a footnote to the wider world. The state, in the medieval European world, was thought of as a means for reaching the *City of God* (St. Augustine), and the human law was to work under the divine law, natural law and ultimately, under the eternal law (St. Thomas). It was not the society that controlled the state, but those who controlled the society— the Pope, the Church priests, the monarchs and the feudal lords— who controlled the state i.e., the state machinery.

10.3.2 The Liberal-Individualist Tradition

With the modern age ushering in the Western World during the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, there appeared a definite theory of state. The liberal-individualist philosophers, with Hobbes (1588-1679) onward, came to make a clear distinction between the state and society by making the state a matter of mere governance. All liberals, basing their political theory on individuals, came to build political power, the state, as an instrument, some like Hobbes giving all powers to the state while others like Bentham (1748-1832) making it a non-interventionist one. All liberals argue for an autonomous individual, the degree for individual autonomy differing from philosopher to philosopher. The liberals' laurels included "individual liberties, rights as sacred as natural, property ethos, rule of law, free, competitive and market economy ... all to remain free

from the interference of the state. The early modern political theory could not make distinction between state, and government, ... All regarded state power as political power, and political power as the power of the government”.

The Machiavellian state (credit goes to Machiavelli for introducing the word ‘state’ in Political Science), whether principedom or republic, is a power state, meaning thereby that it exists for power and exists because of the power whose main interest is to maintain, enhance and enlarge its own authority. For Bodin (1530-1596), the state is “a lawful government, with sovereign powers, of different households, and their common affairs”, considering the state affairs as concerning the ‘public’. “The final cause, end, or design of men”, Hobbes says, “is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life”.

With Locke (1632-1704), the liberal theory gets impetus and the state comes to protect property, and promote a better economic life, for liberalism comes to stay as the political philosophy of the capitalist class, the democratic flavour joining it at a later stage of development. The early liberal-democratic theory restricted the role of the state to the minimal, protecting life, liberty and property of its citizens from external aggression and internal chaos on the one hand, and providing a system of justice and public works, and amenities on the other hand, with no role for the welfare of the people.

It was John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) first, and T.H. Green (1836-1882) later who expanded the positive role of the state in preparing a conducive atmosphere where the individual could enjoy a better way of life. Mill and Green introduced democratic elements in the organisation and functioning of the state, though both could hardly leave their capitalistic shackles.

To sum up, one may, therefore, conclude that the early modern political theorists such as Machiavelli and Bodin could hardly see beyond the omnipotent state. The contractualists, especially Hobbes, had thought that in order for society to come into existence, a strong state is required. The early liberals such as Locke, Smith, Bentham held the view that as the society has the capacity to reproduce and regenerate itself, the state and its power should be minimal. But the later liberals, J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, De Tocqueville felt that numerous social associations, while enhancing social ability, could become instruments through which individuals could fashion a political discourse which could limit the nature of state power. The liberal pluralistic, in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century were able to build a strong case for the numerous associations, existing in society, to control the omnipotence of the state while balancing the latter against the claims of the society.

10.3.3 The Marxian Tradition

The Marxian theory of the state emerged, as a reaction against liberalism. For the Marxists, state and society are two distinct entities, though the state is not independent of society. The society type explains the type of state, society providing the base on which stood the superstructure. The Marxists, regarding the state as a product of a class society, believe the state to be a class institution, protecting and promoting the possessing class, and oppressing and coercing the non-possessing class. For them, the state is an engine of class rule. But it is also an instrument of social and political change, its negative function is to destroy the remains of the earlier society, while it, through its constructive functions, builds the structure and culture of the class it is manned with.

Chandhoke discerns three theoretical moments of the Marxist theory of state. The first such moment has been when Marx and Engels, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)

regard “the executive of the modern state ” as “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”. Marx also writes in the preface to *Towards a Critique of Political Economy* (1859), “the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.” This base-superstructure model of the state was a reaction to the liberal concept of the disembodied state standing apart from society as also a reaction against the Hegelian model of the all-powerful state while subordinating civil society to it. The second moment, appearing around the 1960s and with Ralph Miliband and Hansa Alvi, questions the nature of the state and its relationship with society. In it, the state emerges as a distinct theoretical object in its own right and state-centric theory emerged as the dominant stream of political theory. The third theoretical moment was made possible through the contributions of Nicos Poulantzas and Claus Off. This moment saw political theorists preoccupied with concepts and theories. Following Gramsci, who had conceptualised the state as the political consideration of civil society, the Marxist political theorists of the third theoretical moment began a spiralling interest in civil society as the sphere where meaningful practices, both hegemonic and subversive, are generalised.

10.4 CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW

The concept of civil society is associated with the Western intellectual tradition. With the epochal changes in the West, the idea of civil society has grown progressively. Many factors have gone into developing the concept of the state as it has come to stay with us. These factors, to mention a few, include the emergence of secular authority, the development of the institution of property, the decline of the absolutist state, the growth of urban culture, the rise of nationalist and democratic movements, until the end of the nineteenth century and the rule of law. As the capitalist economy with its democratising features has developed, so has the concept of civil society.

10.4.1 The Pre-Modern Tradition

If the idea of civil society contains in it the idea of what relates to public, the pre-modern times may well be regarded as opposed to the concept of civil society. The Platonic rulers alone were the administrators and a large number of those who constituted ‘the producing class’ had no role to play in public affairs. The Aristotelian notion of ‘*zoon politikon*’ (man as a political animal) was elitistic in the sense that (i) the political animal was a male, (ii) he alone was a citizen and (iii) he alone was a property holder. The rest of the population, the women, the slaves etc., constituted Oikes, i.e., the private world and that could hardly be termed as constituting the civil society. As the ‘private’ was not ‘public’, it was not political and none belonging to it had any citizenship rights. The Greek society, Chandhoke points out, did not ‘possess any notion of inalienable rights of man to individual freedom which became so prominent a feature of early version of civil society.’

By developing the concept of rights, legally ordained, and especially relating to property of the individual, there did emerge the notion of ‘civil society’ in ancient Roman thinking. Indeed the notion of ‘civil society’ did need such an atmosphere to shape itself, but the ancient Roman thought could hardly rise above that, notwithstanding the attempts at making distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ which the ancient Romans really did.

During the whole medieval period in the West when politics took the back seat, the idea of civil

society got eclipsed. What related to 'public' as 'political' was limited to a very few people called the feudal lords, barons, dukes and counts. The idea of civil society was almost unknown.

10.4.2 The Liberal-Individualist Tradition

The early modern period with Machiavelli and Bodin saw the emergence of politics, but the period itself did not witness the corresponding growth of the idea of civil society. The civil society, as a concept, rose with the idea of individuals with rights, individuals related to the state, and individuals related to others in society.

There is the clear reference to civil society both in Hobbes and Locke when the two sought to make a distinction between the 'state of nature', and the 'civil society' or the 'political society' after the contract was made. Both talk about the rights-bearing individuals; both sought the state to protect these rights. It is difficult to regard the contractualists, Hobbes and Locke, as theorists of civil society because (i) their formulations on civil society are found in an embryonic form and (ii) their attempts, despite a rational and persuasive explanation on state and society, remained arbitrary (see Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society*).

The concept of civil society has emerged clearly between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century, especially with the classical political economy theorists such as Adam Smith. Classical political economy, echoing individual rights like laissez faire, freedom, equality, made the institution of state as simply irrelevant, devaluing it, and that of civil society as what Marx had said 'theatre of history'. This helped "the civil society", Chandhoke writes, "as a historically evolved area of individual rights and freedoms, where individuals in competition with each other pursued their respective private concern."

The advent of the idea of civil society, coming from the writings of political economy theorists, was to have its shape vis-à-vis the state. J.S. Mill and De Tocqueville who thought that the state had become much more powerful than desired, sought to limit the power of the state through the mechanism devised in the ever developing concept of civil society. Chandhoke sums up this phase of liberalism, saying: "... Civil society was used as a concept primarily for organizing state-society relations. The expansion of the state, it was perceptively recognized, would contribute to the shrinkage of the civil arena. State power could be limited only with the expansion of civil society."

The process of democratisation in the west made it possible for civil society to expand itself, and in the process, restricted the area of the state. But elsewhere, the concept of the state gained prominence restricting thus, the arena of civil society. The views of Hegel, and therefore, of Marx and Gramsci should be of some interest.

10.4.3 The Hegelian, Marxian and Gramscian Traditions

There is a definite relationship between the state and civil society in the writings of Hegel (1770-1831). He views the state as the latest link growing out of the development of various institutions. Describing the state as the synthesis, representing universality, of the thesis of families and the anti-thesis of civil society, Hegel recognises the state as higher in kind than civil society. Hegel regards the state as the highest, the latest, and even the final form of social institutions. For him, civil society, as the anti-thesis of the thesis of family is "an expression for the individualist and atomistic atmosphere of middle class commercial society in which relationships are external, governed by the 'unseen' hand of the economic laws rather than by the self-conscious will of

persons.” So, civil society, a negative institution as it is for Hegel, belongs to the “realm of mechanical necessity, a resultant of the irrational forces of individual desires”, governed, as Sabine says for Hegel, “by non-moral casual laws and hence, ethically anarchical.” The thesis (the family) and the anti-thesis (the civil, the bourgeois society) merge into what Hegel calls the state (the synthesis). Thus, the state comes to have the universality of civil society and the specificity and the individuality of the family.

Thus, while the political economy and the liberal-democratic theorists had given primacy to civil society, and had given the state a back seat, Hegel reverses the position and puts the state in the position of civil society. According to Hegel, ultimately civil society is subordinated to the state, and the individual, to the whole. “Consequently, in Hegelian formulation”, Chandhoke says, “there can be no interrogation of the state, of its designs for universality, or of its rationale. The resolution of the contradiction of civil society is the state, and therefore, between the people and the state, there is no dichotomy, only legitimacy and acceptance.”

Marx, unlike Hegel who had made the civil society a hostage and who had idealised the state, seeks to restore the civil society to the position of making it the theatre of history. But the civil society, Marx argues, has failed to live up to its promises, had failed to create a situation where the individual could find freedom and democratic transformation, had to seek ways and means through which individuals could integrate into the society and the state.

Gramsci (1891-1937) following Marx and developing his theory of state takes into account the reality of civil society. His main proposition is that one cannot understand the state without understanding the civil society. He says that the ‘state’ should be understood as not only the apparatus of government, but also the ‘private’ apparatus of hegemony or civil society. Building on the Marxian notion of the state, Gramsci makes a distinction between the state as a political organisation (the integral state, the visible political constitution of civil society) and the state as government. The integral state keeps reproducing itself in the practices of everyday life through activities situated in civil society. It is hegemony which provides moral and intellectual leadership to practices in civil society. Hegemony, for Gramsci, works for both, for the dominant as well as the subaltern class in civil society. Each class must, Gramsci says, before seizing power, hegemonise social relations in society.

To sum up, it may be said that for both the liberals and the Marxists, civil society is primary. While the liberals argue for the separation of civil society from the autonomy of the state, the Marxists, on the other hand, create an alternative tradition of civil society, in which, the civil society, with its all potentialities, has to keep itself always reorganised and transformed.

10.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The relationship between state and civil society is important in so far as it suggests the comparative position of each in relation to the other. In some analyses, this relationship is depicted as a zero-sum game: the stronger the state, the weaker the civil society; the weaker the state, the stronger the civil society. Obviously, the expansion of the area of state activity would help minimise the role of civil society; the expansion of the area of civil society would help, on the other hand, minimise the role of the state. In modern liberal societies of our time, the civil society ‘sphere’ is larger than that of the state, while in dictatorial regimes of any sort, the state’s ‘sphere’ is larger than that of civil society.

10.5.1 State and Civil Society: Integrative Relationship

State and civil society are not two opposite concepts. One does not stand in conflict with another. Neither is one the anti-thesis of the other. The two should not be regarded as usurping the area of each other. It is not a zero-sum game relationship between the two. Indeed, the relatively stronger state would put a premium on the role of civil society, but this, in no way, diminishes the effectiveness of civil society. The libertarian view, expressed in the writings of Hayek or Nozick, that the state is likely to oppress civil society is, more or less, ill-founded. The fact of the matter is that the relationships between state and civil society are reciprocal; the relationships are of an integrative nature, each strengthening the cause of the other. It is, in fact, difficult to conceive of civil society functioning successfully without the state. We see the citizen simultaneously constrained by the state and protected by it. It is the state which provides the integrative framework within which the civil society operates; civil society cannot function properly without the state. The integrative framework, as expressed in laws and rules, is accepted as valid by all, the framework needs to be administered neutrally and in a manner consistent with the shared culture of society. We cannot imagine life without this integrative framework, which creates a degree of coherence and without which civil society is likely to become uncivil. Civil society has to open up, in the face of the all-powerful state, to challenge the bureaucratic devices lest it ends up in rigidity. It is, thus, the reciprocity between state and civil society that is significant or at least, should be considered significant. State power is to be exercised within the larger and wider sphere of civil society, and civil society has to keep state power on its toes so that it does not degenerate into absolutism.

10.5.2 State, Civil Society and Democracy

The two concepts, state and civil society, are not in conflict with each other. Democracy integrates the two. The claims of the state get strengthened by civil society and civil society is made more stable through the state. The two have to work in a democratic frame: the democratic state within the framework of democratic civil society. In a democratic system, state and civil society can collaborate for effective functioning of each. The state has to be constituted democratically, wherein its powers are decentralised and its functions are performed within the rules and procedures already laid. Such a state has to respond to the ever-growing demands of civil society. Its role, more or less, is to coordinate, it has to interfere least in the social and economic life of the people; it has to be regulative in character.

Civil society has to be more open and diversified. It has to keep the dialogue continuous and constant with the state and within all the constituents making it. Its area has to be ordained freely and openly, devices making up public opinion and public discourse state-free.

In liberal-democratic states, there is a constant interplay of forces belonging to the state and civil society, each putting an imprint on the other. In dictatorial regimes, state power is used to control civil society and civil society gets integrated into the state: the state speaks for the civil society. Democracy alone unites the state with civil society. The state cannot exist for long if it is not democracy laden; civil society cannot exist unless it is democratically structured and functions democratically.

A democratic state cannot exist if it is restrictive, coercive, prohibitive, and imposing; it cannot exist if it does not provide the civil society frame in perfect order; it cannot exist if it does not guarantee rights and freedoms to individuals. Likewise, a democratic civil society cannot exist if it does not allow every individual to act in the public sphere, it cannot exist if each and every citizen does not have equal claim on the state, if each citizen is not respected as a human being.

10.6 SUMMARY

State is not mere governance; it is a political community as well. It is, what Gramsci says, the visible political constitution of civil society, consisting of the entire complex of activities with which a ruling class maintains its dominance, and the ways in which it manages to win the consent of those over which it rules. It is, in other words, a complex of institutions and practices resting upon the nodal points of power in civil society. It is a social relation and as such, it is the codified power of social formation.

Civil society consists of the entire range of assumptions, values and institutions such as political, social and civil rights, the rule of law, representative institutions, a public sphere and above all, a plurality of associations.

The two concepts, state and civil society, have grown over time and along with them, their characteristics also developed. They have stood in relation to each other, each giving another a corresponding value. With the emergence of political economy and liberalism, civil society got a definite connotation, especially in relation to the state.

State and civil society are closely related to each other. The state cannot be imagined without civil society, and civil society cannot be thought of without the state. The two exist in integrative relationships. The state, in democratic systems, protects civil society and civil society strengthens the state. In dictatorial regimes, the state controls the civil society.

10.7 EXERCISES

1. How did the term 'state' come to be used in the West?
2. Explain briefly the characteristic features of the State.
3. State briefly the ancient Greek view of the State.
4. Why do Marxists regard the state as the committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie?
5. Explain the early modern view of the state.
6. What is civil society?
7. Explain Hegel's view of civil society.
8. Explain the relationship between state and civil society.
9. How does democracy ensure an integrative relationship between the state and the civil society?