
UNIT 14 POWER AND AUTHORITY

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14.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit deals with the most significant area of fundamental research; namely, Power and Authority. It is the central theme of political ideology. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the concept of power in its varied ramifications
- Differentiate between power and related themes
- Explain the concept of authority and identify its types
- Understand the relative meaning of Power and Authority

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Recently, the idea of power has assumed an importance of its own, in the realm of political theory. This is so because the meaning of politics has changed from one of being a 'study of state and government' to that of being a 'study of power'. Power is the primary objective of foreign policy. In international relations, power is the capacity of a state to influence or control the behaviour of other states for the purpose of promoting its own vital interest. Power capacity includes skills and techniques in the use of consent and constraint, as well as the ability to persuade, threaten or coerce to gain ascendancy over other states. States vary notably in power capacity. Belgium and Switzerland are probably evenly matched, but the mismatch between Belgium and United States is apparent. Some states are characterized as 'haves' and the others as 'have-nots'. The former are well endowed with the assets of power, while the latter seek to better their position at the expense of the "haves". This situation gives power struggle its essential character.

We all know what power is, in a broader sense. Although we see it everywhere in our lives, it is hard to define. While doing social and political theory, we try, however, to make the concepts of power and authority more precise and clear. It is with these basic concepts and definitions, we can later understand the other complex concepts in the realm of national and international politics.

14.2 POWER: MEANING OF THE CONCEPT

Power is seen in different walks of life— in the structures of government administration, bureaucracy, elections, family and society. In the instances of a teacher scolding an erring student in school, to a powerful state making war against its neighbor or any terrorist organization bombing a target, power is used. So it becomes imperative to see what exactly is common in these examples and how they justify the concept.

In political theory, power is the central issue, whether it is clothed in law that qualifies it or whether authority that renders obedience to it voluntarily sustains it. Power is force, exercised by the state in the name of law. Power is central to political theory, because it is concerned about the state, which is force. This is a school of thought belonging to the Realists. On the other hand, the Jurists who regard the state as a legal association argue that the notion of imperative and superior force associated with the state is not arbitrary; but it is qualified force; to put it more simply, it is force exercised 'in the name of law'. For the state is closely associated with the notion of power exercised in accordance with definite procedures and with rules that are known. Thus, power is force expressed in terms of law; it is force qualified and expressed in a regular and uniform manner.

To further substantiate the concept of power, the jurists have refined the concept of the state by identifying it with certain essential attributes. Now according to this, the state is a political community and in any given political community, there exists a supreme power (*Summa potestas* as the Roman jurist Cicero calls it) from which the law emanates. This supreme power which John Austin describes as 'sovereignty', distinguishes the state from other associations. The conception of sovereignty implies that the final authority is the state. The important point here is that there is in the state a sovereign power which, whether held by the people or by the prince, is the source of law. It is power conditioned by law, whether from the point of view of those over whom it is exercised or from the point of view of the actual holder of power.

Another significant point which needs to be explained here is that sovereign power converts the rule of force into a rule of law. Thus, Hobbes does not consider the state a phenomenon of force; but a phenomenon of power, of which sovereignty is the highest and the most complete expression. The transition from the 'state of nature' to the 'civil state' is the transition from the rule of force where there is no security, to that of law, where human relations are secure. Also, just as the state is not pure force, so sovereignty is not arbitrary will according to Hobbes. The sovereign representative is entrusted with the power to procure safety of the people. Hence, it cannot violate the very reason for which it was entrusted with sovereign power. Thus, authorization, not habitual obedience, is what makes the sovereign, which converts force into power.

Two centuries later, Alexander Hamilton asked, 'What is power, but the ability or faculty of doing a thing?' During the mid-20th century, Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan construed exercises of power as 'acts... affecting or determining other acts'. Shortly thereafter, Robert Dahl defined power as one actor's ability to make another do something that the latter 'would not otherwise do'. At the same time, however, Hannah Arendt argued that power is not the property of lone agents or actors, but of groups or collectivities acting together.

So far as the views of different authors are concerned, it surely help us to understand the meaning of the concept in various perspectives. For Friedrich, power is ‘a certain kind of human relationship’, while for Tawney, ‘it is the capacity of an individual or a group to modify others’ conduct as one desires’. While communist leader Mao-Zedong thought of power as “flowing from the barrel of the gun”, Gandhi, an apostle of peace, regarded it as the power of love and truth. Power is ascribed to different things on different grounds. For instance, we speak of economic power, military power, power of the brain, political/ executive power and social power. The common thread in all these power manifestations means “ability” or ‘capacity’. However, we come to one common generalization that power is the sum total of those external influences and pressures which can make an individual or a body of individuals to move in a required direction.

14.2.1 Distinction Between Power and Related Themes

The precise connotation of power became difficult, when the term became interchangeable with several related themes like control, influence, authority, force, domination, coercion and the like. Keeping this in mind, that it might create confusion for students of Political Science, it is necessary to highlight the important points of distinction between power and related themes.

Power as discussed earlier is the capacity to conquer, or one’s ability to control others. In doing so, power could be based on elements like fraud, tactics, manipulation, or even be derived from legal and constitutional procedures. International politics is nothing but a manifestation of power struggle.

Force, on the other hand, is different from power. It is the most brutal manifestation of power. The techniques involved in physical force are restraint, coercion, threat, intimidation, blackmail, terrorism and military domination. So power can be called latent force, while force is manifest power.

If force stands on one extreme, **influence** stands on the other. It represents the sublimation of power. It may be due to social prestige, intellectual and spiritual eminence, high morality and the like. So, while influence is persuasive, power is coercive.

Coming to the notion of **authority**, it implies moralization and legitimization of power through legal or traditional sanctions. It is essentially the institutional code within which the use of power as a medium is organized and is made legal. An elaborate analysis of the concept of authority will be done later in this unit.

Finally, speaking of **control** as a theme related to power also has its own distinct feature, different from power. It is more comprehensive and less concentrated than power. Control could be of a different nature like legislative, executive, judicial, financial and the like. Power is more intense, when compared to control.

Thus, we see that because of this diversity in the meaning of the term ‘power’, its comprehensive study becomes necessary.

14.2.2 Implications of Power

From what has been discussed so far, certain implications may be gathered about the concept of power.

- Power cannot be merely encircled in a political or economic framework; it is broadly a social phenomenon.

- The distinctness of power with the other concepts like influence, control, authority, prestige, rights and the like, enables us to understand the concept of power more precisely and in a subtle way, which becomes useful for students of political science.
- Power is latent force, force is manifest power, and authority is institutionalized power.
- Power appears in different ways on different occasions, be it either in a formal organization, or in an informal organization or in organized/unorganized community.
- Power resides in a combination of numbers (especially majorities), social organization and resources. This is the source of power.

14.3 THE POWER THEORY

To say that the state is a sovereign power is to say that its rules, regulations and laws have final authority. There is no appeal against them to any more ultimate set of rules. In other words, within the state the rules made by other associations are subordinate to the authority of the state's rule. This power theory of sovereignty is regarded by political theorists, believing in democracy, as of no relevance to politics for which we need the concept of political sovereignty to be defined in terms of power instead of legal authority. Legal sovereignty treats the state as a final legal authority.

From the *moral* point of view, one may say that the laws of the state do not have final authority. If the conscience of the individual tells him that he ought not to obey some particular law, then from a moral point of view, he is entitled to disobey; for in most matters of morals, the final authority is conscience, when he appeals to a higher law, the natural law. For example, when the Greek tyrant, Creon, forbade Antigone to bury her dead brother, she disobeyed his order on the ground that the higher law, the natural law, required that the dead should be respected. The discussion on conscientious objection illustrates that 'power' means not only the ability to have one's will carried out, but the ability to do so by the threat of force.

In conclusion, we may say that the sovereignty of the state, for the purpose of politics, should be defined as the supremacy of coercive power rather than that of legal authority. Because, the one that is sovereign is the one that can *substantiate* its claim, and the state certainly does so because it possesses the power of armed force.

The power theory as said earlier, had its first brilliant expression in the 'Leviathan' of Thomas Hobbes. He tells us that man desires power and even greater power, which becomes the root cause of competition among individuals. But at the same time, men like to live in peace in order to enjoy the power that they possess. So they are disposed to live under a common power. After Hobbes, Hegel absolutised sovereign power of the state to the extent of discarding all ethics of international morality. Among the leading advocates of this theory in the present century, mention may be made of Prof. H. J. Morganthau, who says that politics is nothing but a struggle for power. The power theory found its concrete manifestation, when the Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini declared 'nothing against the state, nothing above it' giving birth to the ideology of Fascism.

In all the above analyses of power theory, power is spoken only in a political sense. However, power includes much more, within itself, like the power of soul, mind and the power of one's ideas. Reference in this context may be made from Buddha to Gandhi who had displayed their power of thought and ideology to the world.

Check Your Progress 1

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

1) Explain how power is conceptualised in political theory.

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2) Does power always involve coercion?

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14.3.1 Liberal Democratic Theory

In liberal democratic theory, power has been identified with developmental and extractive capacities. In other words, power means ability of use and development of human capacities. It has two aspects, extractive and developmental, which can be called ethical and empirical dimensions, respectively. Since a man’s ability to use and develop his capacities becomes the “power”, it is called man’s developmental power and it has a qualitative character. Besides, man should use his capacities in a way so that he may extract benefits from others. It leads to the idea of extractive power. Here, we see that the liberal theory of power integrates the idea of political power with the power of money. Elections, propaganda, persuasion, control- all are governed by the role of money power. This is why the destiny of millions is often controlled by a dozen families having monopoly over the money of the nation. However, the theory also emphasizes the maximization of democracy, so that values of humanism are not destroyed.

14.3.2 Marxian Theory

The Marxian view, links politics and economics through the instrument of power. Karl Marx viewed political power as being possessed by those who control the means of production as compared to the labour force which has little or no control over such means of production. This “relation of production”, therefore, determines the distribution of political power. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels state that political power, so called, is merely the organized form of one class oppressing another, and that political power is the general and pervasive power which a dominant class exercises in order to maintain and defend its predominance in a civil society.

Further, class power “does tend to be taken over by the state itself, and gladly surrenders to it; even in normal circumstance of advanced capitalism, the state takes over more and more functions performed by the dominant class having a greater share in the performance of these functions”.

Thus, Marx sees a close integration between political power and the prevailing socio-economic system and regards it as transient — it shall disappear with the rise of the stateless and classless society.

14.3.3 Michael Foucault on Power

There are many misconceptions and confusions about ‘power’ as a discourse and a practice. In this connection, Michael Foucault’s path-breaking analysis of power needs to be invoked to illuminate the deeper implications of power as a flow, manifested in relations at multiple locations.

Foucault’s approach to the social phenomenon of ‘power’ is clearly revealed in the following quotation:

“Let us not ask why certain people want to dominate, what they seek, what is their overall strategy. Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc. In other words, rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc.”

Foucault, thus, moves away from the sovereignty-centric (Hobbesian) conception of power toward what he calls “disciplinary power” or the micro mechanisms of power—the techniques and tactics of domination—that, as a closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions, keeps the social body in a steady state (**a society of normalization**).

The state in this situation, becomes a superstructural meta power, rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations, and as Foucault argues, “The state consists in the codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible...”.

Foucault’s analysis has opened up new ways of looking at power in society, not so much as a juridical concept as a socially networked relations of domination and subjugation.

According to Foucault, in common parlance, power has been viewed in reductionist term. It is the top-down vision that has always looked at power as a striking force and a visible and effective meat-power. Those who hold power at the top are favourably stationed to take advantage of a number of apparatuses and devices—particular techniques, knowledge, modalities of political power. In other words, they have the means of power to which they have access because of the strategic positions they occupy. A senior bureaucrat, because of his position, can easily accord sanction to a project or stop it when things are not working out to his satisfaction.

In Foucault’s analysis, to ascribe all phenomena of power to the prevailing power apparatuses is a form of unrealistic reductionism. Power, in this view, is not what and where people think it is. In reality, it is the expression of hundreds of micro-processes defining various currents coming from a multitude of different sources. The reductionist view ignores that “the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further... the state can only operate, on the basis of other, already existing power relations.”

To understand the real nature of power, one has to move away from the juridical edifice of sovereignty, the state apparatuses and the accompanying ideologies. Instead attention should be paid to domination and the material operators of power. One should focus on the form of subjection and the inflection and utilizations of their localized systems and on the strategic apparatuses.

Foucault calls this power 'non-sovereign power, lying outside the form of sovereignty. It is disciplinary power taking the shape of closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions intended to assure the cohesion of the social body. As Foucault exhorted : "we must eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of power. We must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and state institutions and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination...."

14.4 WHAT IS AUTHORITY?

To understand political realities, we should be knowing the three aspects of state—force, power and authority. The notion of state recalls to our mind, power, which is exercised in accordance with definite procedures and known rules. The state is force exercised in the name of law. Force become power, when the element of arbitrariness is removed from its exercise by definite procedures laid down by the laws of the state. The recognition of this power exercised as per definite rules implies the recognition of an obligation to submit to these rules. The word 'state' in this sense provides a term of reference for these obligations. It refers not merely to a force which exists in actual fact, or to power which makes itself felt in accordance with certain rules, but to an authority which is recognized as warranted and justified in practice.

14.5 CLASSIFICATION OF AUTHORITY

The German sociologist Max Weber suggested a three fold classification of the sources of authority in a modern state. They are rational-legal, traditional and charismatic authority.

Rational-legal authority is explicit and has the right to give orders and to have them obeyed by virtue of an office held within a system of deliberately framed rules which set out rights and duties. Bureaucracy is the best example of rational-legal authority. When a citizen accepts the authority of a bureaucrat, he does so not because of anything else but due to the powers allocated to the official by a legal system. The office, the individual holds, is important and not the individual himself or herself.

Traditional authority exists where a person, such as a king or a tribal chief, holds a superior position of command in accordance with long tradition and is obeyed, because everyone accepts the sanctity of the tradition. Religious authority is of this kind.

Charismatic authority rests on the possession of exceptional personal qualities that cause a person to be accepted as a leader. There may be qualities of saintly virtue giving their possessor religious authority or qualities of outstanding heroism, intellect, oratory that bring a following of loyal devotion in politics, in wars and other kinds of enterprise. The charismatic leader has the gift of divine grace and extraordinary qualities. Lenin or Mahatma Gandhi got their position on account of their charisma and qualities. Of the three sources, the first two belong to one group – where the agent and the source of authority are different. Here, the source can be criticised without criticising the agent and the agent, therefore, enjoys a relatively stable position. But in the case of charismatic authority, the source and the agent of authority are the same. Hence, any criticism against the source can be directed against the agent

as well. So the agent does not enjoy a stable position. A charismatic authority tends to be institutionalised. This is what Weber calls ‘routinization of charisma’.

Weber, however, recognised that none of these categories existed in pure form. The British system is a mixture of traditional and rational-legal sources of authority. India, according to Weber was a combination of rational-legal and charismatic authority.

Check Your Progress 2

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

1) What are the different types of authority?

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2) How do the Liberal and Marxist views of the power theory differ?

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14.6 DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

The concepts of “power” and “authority” are related ones. But a distinction between them is necessary. Both the terms refer to different properties. But because of their logical grammar being commonly misconstrued, unnecessary difficulty has arisen. However, they are the names of not different, but related entities of which one somehow depends on the other.

When we speak of an act giving a minister the power to do this or that, we mean giving him authority. Jean Bodin in his work, *The Six Books of Republic* says, “Sovereignty is the absolute and perpetual power of a state, that is to say, the supreme power to command”. His discussion gives the impression that sovereignty means power in the ordinary sense of the word. If by absolute power, Bodin means the ability to issue effective commands, it would be **power**, properly speaking. If he means the entitlement or the right to issue commands and have them obeyed, it would be **authority**. His account of sovereignty makes it clear that he means authority, whereas his use of the expression, “absolute power” suggests the first.

Prof. Raphael in his *Problems of Political Philosophy* distinguishes three meanings of the term “power”. First, the most general meaning of power is simply **ability**. We use the same word for the power of a dynamo, political power or will power. Secondly, we speak of power in a social context, when we think of power as a specific kind of ability i.e. **the ability to make other people do what one wants them to do**. A man may be able to get others to do what he wants, because he holds a special office, or because he has the strength to make things difficult for them, if they refuse. The two examples illustrate the exercise of political power and the second is prominent in situations of conflict. Thirdly, there is **coercive power** which is using the threat of superior force to make others do what one wants them to do when they are unwilling. Because coercive power is so prominent in political conflict, the word “power” which at first meant ability of any kind, has come to be associated with enforcement.

Thus, the term power has three meanings mentioned above, and it can be used either with or without association of empowerment. Power is often used to mean authority when we speak of giving someone legal powers. A person with power holds a special office (e.g. a minister or a President); this means that he has authority and is able by virtue of that position to get others to do what he tells them to do; his power is the exercise of authority. That is why the word power can be used to mean authority.

14.6.1 Implications of Authority

Authority is the right to do a thing. The two meanings of right are a) the right here of action and b) the right of recipience. The right of action is the right to do something; for instance, the right of the worker to strike and the right of the employer to lock out. In this sense, a right is a freedom. The right of recipience is a claim to do something; for example, if A has the right to fifty rupees that B owes him, it is A’s right to receive fifty rupees from B. It is A’s right against B and it corresponds to B’s obligations to pay up.

Now, the authority to give orders is the right of recipience. For example, when a minister is authorized (or empowered) by a statute to make regulations, this not only allows him to do something (i.e. he has the right of action) but also imposes an obligation on citizens to conform to the regulations that he may make. Thus, his authority gives him a right to issue them.

In both senses - the right to something and the right to receive obedience – a right of being authorized is a facility and so, a power. The power to make other people do what a person requires may depend on the fact that he holds a special office. By virtue of holding that office, that person has the authority to ask certain requirements of other people, and they do what he requires, because they acknowledge his authority. His authority and others’ acceptance of it are what he requires. We can, therefore, think of authority as a specific kind of ability or power to make other people do what one wants them to do. This specific ability or power is coordinate with coercive power. The possession of coercive force is one way of getting people to do what a person requires; it is one specific form of power. The possession of authority, provided it is acknowledged, is another.

Check Your Progress 3

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

1) What is the implication of authority in politics?

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2) Are the terms power and authority related? Explain their relationship and highlight the distinction between the two.

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14.7 LET US SUM UP

Power is thus, one of the key concepts in political theory. It is the ability to control others and make them do what one wants. It is both normative and empirical; i.e. it is also a fact as well as a value to be pursued. It is a very comprehensive term, identified with related themes like authority, influence, control and the like. It is integrally connected with the case of political legitimacy. Legitimate power is authority. On the other hand, influence is a wider term where sanctions may not be used. Power is then a special case of influence.

14.8 KEY WORDS

- Empirical** : based on facts and on activities of everyday life.
- Sublimation** : to change, having noble qualities.
- Arbitrary** : exercise of power over the others without considering their opinion.
- Coercive** : compelling, forcing.

14.9 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

Ball, A. R., *Modern Politics and Government*, 1978 (London: Macmillan)

Dahl, Robert A, *Modern Political Analysis*, 1976, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall)

Friedrich, Carl J, *Authority*, 1958, (Camb., Mass: Harvard Univ. Press)

Ray and Bhattacharya, *Political Theory: Ideas and Institutions*, 1968 (Calcutta: World Press)

Verma S. P., *Modern Political Theory*, 1975 (Delhi: Vikas)

14.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Power in political theory is a comprehensive term. Power may be physical, political, economic, spiritual, moral or intellectual. Broadly speaking, it is one's ability to control others.
- 2) Power can be called latent force, while force is manifest power.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Traditional, Rational-Legal, and Charismatic.
- 2) The liberal view presupposes the state as an institution serving all the sections of the people. It also grants equality to all citizens; in law, in voting and rights. It considers the state to be an impartial institution. The Marxist theory of state believes in historical evolution of the state, which is a product of the society in which it exists. It reflects the class character of the rulers. It also believes in class division of the society. The state for them is not an impartial arbiter of disputes, as it is partial to the ruling class.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Authority is the right to do a thing. The two meanings of right are:
 - i) the right of action and ii) the right of recipience.
- 2) Power and Authority are the names of two different, but related entities of which one somehow depends on the other. "Power" is often used to mean "authority" when we speak of giving someone legal powers.

UNIT 15 LEGITIMACY

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
 - 15.1.1 Reference to the Nature of Public and Political Authority
 - 15.1.2 Authority is Legitimate Power
 - 15.1.3 Authority and Legitimacy: Both Descriptive and Normative
 - 15.1.4 The Problem of Political Obligation
- 15.2 Towards a Historical Understanding
 - 15.2.1 Divine Conception of Political Authority
 - 15.2.2 17th Century: Challenges to the Divine Conception
 - 15.2.3 Social Contract Theories
 - 15.2.4 Montesquieu's Alternative Views on Legitimacy
 - 15.2.5 Rousseau: Going beyond Montesquieu
 - 15.2.6 Karl Marx's Views
- 15.3 Max Weber and his Typology of Authority Systems
 - 15.3.1 Weber and the Belief in Legitimacy
 - 15.3.2 Weber's Ideal Types
 - 15.3.3 David Beetham's Critique of Max Weber
- 15.4 Habermas and the Legitimation Crisis
 - 15.4.1 Crisis Tendencies
 - 15.4.2 State Action During Crisis
- 15.5 Let Us Sum up
- 15.6 Keywords
- 15.7 Some Useful References
- 15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

15.0 OBJECTIVES

The ideas of authority and legitimacy are integral to the understanding of state, politics and civil society. We must bear in mind that authority and legitimacy are reflective of the manner in which the political community is organized. All human organizations are based on a set of rules. Authority and legitimacy refer to how and why these rules are acknowledged by members of the community as being worthy of obedience and having a binding character. In the sections which follow, we shall explore the manner in which these concepts have been understood in various strands of political thought and how they serve as tools for understanding modern state and society. The sections are followed by questions to enable you to check your progress. A list of further readings is given at the end of the lesson.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Authority and legitimacy have been among the most basic and enduring issues in political analysis. Political philosophers, political scientists and sociologists have for long occupied themselves with exploring these concepts as useful tools for understanding public authority and government. These concepts must, however, be seen as having evolved over the last few centuries, constituted and reconstituted at particular historical conjectures. They can, thus be, seen as reflecting the various strands, which have historically contributed to their evolution.

15.1.1 Reference to the Nature of Public and Political Authority

Before we examine these various strands, let us first bear in mind that both authority and legitimacy refer to the nature of public and political authority. All human societies, as mentioned earlier, live by rules, which give them cohesion and a distinctive identity. These rules are seen as authoritative and legitimate, if they are willingly accepted by people as binding. While obedience to rules can be elicited by governments through fear and coercion, forcible extraction of compliance is not regarded as legitimate (See 'Introduction', *Legitimacy/Legitimite*, edited by Athanasios Moulakis, p.4).

15.1.2 Authority is Legitimate Power

Let us first try to understand what these concepts mean in simple terms. Simply put, authority is understood as a form of power. While power denotes the capacity or the ability to affect and change one's environment, authority refers to both the capacity to change as well as the right to change. Authority may, therefore, be seen as a modified form of power, where power is acknowledged as rightful. This means that authority does not depend on any form of coercion or manipulation, and invokes instead, a duty of obedience and compliance. In order to elicit voluntary or willing obedience, essential to effect changes, authority has to lay claims to being right. Legitimacy provides to authority, the quality of correctness and justness, invoking thereby, obedience and compliance as a matter of duty rather than as an outcome of coercion and force. Thus, authority when associated with legitimacy, may be thought of as "legitimate power".

15.1.3 Authority and Legitimacy: Both Descriptive and Normative

This general explanation of the meanings of authority and legitimacy, should make it clear to us, that the concepts may be used as both descriptive and normative categories. As descriptive categories, they illustrate or describe the nature of political organisation and rule. As normative categories, they provide the moral standard to evaluate claims to a 'right to rule'. At the same time, we must remember that the two ideas do not have a fixed meaning. Their meanings have changed and developed historically. At any given historical moment, moreover, the concepts have been interpreted and defined in contesting ways. Thus, while Liberals would see legitimacy as having a positive connotation, Marxists would be less inclined to see legitimacy as providing any valid moral claims or 'right to rule'. Liberals and Socialists view authority as rational, purposeful and limited; a view reflected in a preference for legal-rational authority and public accountability. Conservatives, by contrast, see authority as arising from natural necessity, being exercised 'from above' by virtue of unequal distribution of experiences, social position and wisdom. The justification for authority is centered around the argument that it is essential for the maintenance of order, and the only means of escape from the barbarity and injustice of the 'state of nature', a society without political rule (See Heywood, *Politics*, p. 193).

15.1.4 The Problem of Political Obligation

The issue of legitimacy, or the rightfulness of a regime or system of rule, is linked ultimately to one of the most fundamental of political debates, the problem of political obligation. It addresses the following questions: why citizens feel obliged to acknowledge the authority of government, and whether they have a duty to respect the state and obey its laws. In modern political debate, however, legitimacy is also understood in terms of political behaviors and beliefs. In other words, it addresses not only the question of why people should obey the state in an abstract sense, but also the question of why they obey a particular state or a system of rule and not others. In other words, it explores the problem of the conditions or processes, which encourage people to obey, or, in other words, to see authority as rightful. These concerns reflect

Power, Authority and Legitimacy

a shift in focus towards the empirical or practical aspects of the concept, i.e., the legal and constitutional contexts within which power is exercised (see Paschalis Kitromolders, 'Enlightenment and Legitimacy' in Athanasios Moulakis, *Legitimacy/Legitimite*, 1986, p.60)

In the sections which follow, we shall look at the manner in which authority and legitimacy figure in various philosophical traditions, and the various meanings which have been attributed to them in the course of their historical evolution. We will also take up for study, two prominent and mutually conflicting formulations, put forward by the sociologist Max Weber, and the political philosopher Jurgen Habermas. In order to understand the distinction between the two, we must remember the relationship between legitimacy and authority; that legitimacy transforms power into authority. Political philosophers treat legitimacy as a rational principle, as indicative of the grounds on which governments demand obedience from citizens. An exploration of these claims to legitimacy are more important than the actual fact or obedience. Sociologists, however, see legitimacy in sociological terms focussing attention on the manner in which obedience to rules unfolds. Let us now see how the ideas have developed historically and the attributes they assumed at specific historical conjectures.

Check Your Progress 1

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

1) Explain the relationship between authority and legitimacy.

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2) What is political obligation?

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15.2 TOWARDS A HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

15.2.1 Divine Conception of Political Authority

The idea of legitimacy remained marginal to the understanding of political authority, until the advent of the modern age. Before the seventeenth century, it was widely assumed that political authority was divinely ordained and natural, and therefore, reasonable. Those who upheld this view believed in the unquestioned domination of one set of people over the other. This domination was sustained by the belief that the rulers represented divine will and authority, and they alone knew what was good for the people, and the appropriate ways to pursue, this good. From the seventeenth century, however, legitimacy, which had so far remained submerged in the notion of divine authority, started taking shape and developing the characteristics, which we associate with it today.

15.2.2 17th Century: Challenges to the Divine Conception

Seventeenth century thinkers like Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) challenged the assumption of the divine right of kings to rule, by advocating the view that human beings are, by nature and before God, free and equal. Since all human beings were free and equal, no human could possess, naturally or divinely ordained, authority to rule over fellow human beings. The notion of natural freedom and equality of all human beings was used to contest and erode the claims to rule by absolutist monarchies in England and France.

15.2.3 Social Contract Theories

The postulates of natural equality, were fitted into contract theories which flourished in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, in a way so as to provide a theoretical and logical basis for legitimate government. Contract theorists like Hobbes and John Locke started from the basic premise that all human beings were and are equal, had authority over their own selves, and had, therefore, the capacity as well as the right to take decisions affecting themselves. These free and equal human beings, in order to create suitable conditions in which they could exercise economic freedom, take the decision to transfer some of their self-determination rights to others, authorizing the latter to rule them on their behalf. When this transfer takes place on a large scale, i.e., a large number of people transfer their natural right to self-government, political authority takes form. This political authority or government, which ensues as a result of renunciation of certain rights and freedoms, is said to possess legitimacy. The legitimate power of the government to rule, is demonstrated by the consent of the governed, which is expressed and renewed periodically.

From the seventeenth century thus, we can see the idea of legitimacy develop in liberal and republican traditions, in the form of a criticism or a challenge to the authority of the existing absolutist regimes. In both the English (1688) and the French revolutions (1789), the issue of legitimacy may in fact be seen as having become fundamental to the questions concerning the form of government that could reasonably and lawfully be obeyed. Within liberalism, legitimacy of authority was made contingent upon an individualist social contract and the consent of the governed.

15.2.4 Montesquieu's Alternative Views on Legitimacy

Rejecting the individualist framework of legitimation espoused by the contractualists, Montesquieu (1689-1775), in his work *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), counterpoised alternative forms of legitimacy. This alternative form intended to curtail the arbitrariness of an individualist free will placing the exercise of authority within the social context.

Montesquieu included in his framework a socially responsible role for the state by including elements of social reform, constitutionalism, and the safeguard of basic civil liberties. All of these were seen as contributing towards or constituting the essence of legitimate authority.

15.2.5 Rousseau: Going beyond Montesquieu

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) represented the republican challenge to the legitimacy envisaged within the liberal-individualistic framework. In his theory of false contract in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau attempted to build where Montesquieu had left. Pointing to the limits of a liberal individualist theory of society and politics, Rousseau, like Montesquieu attempted to cover and thus included in his formulation, the broader sphere of social issues. Going beyond Montesquieu's formulation however, Rousseau sought to include within this social sphere, the aspirations of those sections of society, that did not find an expression within the liberal framework. The social contract, Rousseau felt was a deception, through which the rich compelled the poor into submitting to their dominance. For Rousseau therefore, legitimacy, could be achieved only through the democratisation of political authority. Democratisation was to be achieved through the active participation of people, and the recognition of their social and political needs. In Rousseau's scheme, the legitimacy of government, and of the exercise of power, hinged on the active participation of citizens. The importance of this alternative thinking to legitimacy lies in the connection between the self, public commitment and collective goals, all of which were seen necessary for the survival of a republican polity (Paschalis Kitromildes, 1986, pp. 62-64).

15.2.6 Karl Marx's Views

Karl Marx (1818-1883), however, did not share Rousseau's optimism about the relationship between active participatory citizenship and political authority. For Marx, the modern state represented the interests of the bourgeoisie and was not therefore, representative of the common will of the people. The people could at best only 'imagine' themselves as citizens as their participation in 'politics' was dependent upon and constrained by their subordinate position in a class differentiated society. Marx felt that in the framework of general will, one was distracted from the real issues i.e., the evils of society and the inegalitarian structures of capitalism, which produced them. Thus, a capitalist state could never be legitimate and the 'locus of public will'; because it was inherently exploitative. In Marx's framework, therefore, legitimacy of political authority in a capitalist society was a myth. This conception was based as we have seen, on the premise that the capitalist state was inherently exploitative and could never therefore, embody popular will. Legitimacy was also irrelevant to Marx to the extent that he anticipated a future human condition in which people would take control over their own fate and not be dependent on 'mystification's' to sustain themselves (See William Connolly, *Legitimacy and the State*, pp 7-8).

For Marx, thus, the overriding concern was not legitimacy. He focused on capitalist societies as an exploitative economic system, based on conflicting economic interests between the owners of the means of production and the wage earning working class. In Marxist analysis, the problem was one of analysing the conditions under which the working class would organize itself into a collective force to transform the capitalist system. Max Weber's (1864-1920) formulation may be seen as a counter-perspective. Starting from the opposite end, Weber concerned himself with analysing the nature of authority and the problems of securing obedience. It is this concern with authority and the means of securing obedience (legitimacy) for the capitalist state which is reflected in Weber's theoretical formulation on authority systems in the modern world (See James Petras, '*Class Politics, State Power and Legitimacy*', pp. 1955).

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Under what circumstances did the concept of legitimacy become significant for understanding political authority?

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2) How do Montesquieu and Rousseau modify the liberal individualist understanding of legitimacy?

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3) How does the liberal individualist position on legitimacy differ from the marxist position?

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15.3 MAX WEBER AND HIS TYPOLOGY OF AUTHORITY SYSTEMS

Our discussion of authority and legitimacy so far has focussed on understanding historical evolution of the concepts. We concerned ourselves, especially, with exploring authority, the grounds on which legitimacy is claimed, and the rightfulness of such claim as tested against the accepted; among others, by political philosophers like Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Marx. Sociologists like Max Weber, however, did not concern themselves with claims to power that are made. They concerned themselves with practical questions pertaining to the manner in which legitimacy unfolds, its effectiveness for occupation of positions of power, the conditions under which legitimacy is realised or eroded, and what happens if it fails. Legitimacy as a subject of political sociology, thus, looks at issues such as what are the social agencies through which legitimacy becomes effective, i.e. how do people acknowledge the legitimacy of a political authority, how do they express this acknowledgement, and the medium or resources through which political regimes garner legitimacy (David Beetham, 'Political Legitimacy' in *Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, p. 107-108).

15.3.1 Weber and the Belief in Legitimacy

Weber's study of legitimacy is considered useful for understanding the complexities of political rule. Weber considered legitimacy as fundamental to a systematic study of power relations. Weber pointed out, 'custom, personal advantage, purely effectual or ideal motives of solidarity', were not the sufficient basis for its sustenance. In order to sustain a given system of domination, there was normally a further element i.e. 'the belief in legitimacy'. In other words, where there is a general recognition of the legitimacy of authority, its commands were bound to be followed. There would, consequently, be no widespread use of coercion, or the constant fear of subversion or disobedience {Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1978 (1922), p.213}. Weber's study of the systems of domination led him to the conclusion that there are different ideas or principles of legitimacy. Based on the specific kind or principle of legitimacy claimed, there were differences in the type of obedience which was elicited, the kind of administrative machinery developed to guarantee it, and the kind of authority which exercised it.

15.3.2 Weber's Ideal Types

Weber identified different types or 'systems of domination' based on the kind of claims to legitimacy claimed by each (See David Beetham, 'Political Legitimacy', p.109) Accordingly, Weber constructed three 'ideal types' or 'conceptual models', which he hoped would help make sense of the highly complex nature of political rule, viz., traditional authority, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. Each of these models represented a distinct source of political legitimacy and corresponding to these, the different reasons why people obeyed a particular regime.

In the first model i. e. traditional authority, long-standing customs and traditions formed the source of political legitimacy. The sanctity of this legitimacy derived from the fact that such systems of authority had been acknowledged and obeyed by earlier generations. Examples of traditional systems of authority are patriarchy (the rule of father over the family) or gerontocracy (the rule of the 'elders'). Such systems of traditional authority can still be seen in societies where hereditary and dynastic systems of power and privilege have survived e.g., as in Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Kuwait and its constitutional forms such as in England, Netherlands, and Spain.

The second form, i.e., charismatic authority, derived legitimacy from an individual's charismatic or appealing personality. The basis of this appeal did not rest in a person's caste, class or other ascriptive attributes. It depended solely on the personal magnetism of the person making him/her acceptable as a leader, alluring people into obedience. Examples of charismatic authority are Mussolini, Hitler, and Napoleon, whose leadership and popularity, unlike that of other popular leaders like John F. Kennedy, depended less on the authority they derived from their political office, and more on their personal charm.

Weber's third kind of legitimacy, legal-rational, links authority to precise and legally defined set of rules. Legal-rational form of authority, for Weber, is the typical form of authority found in most modern states. In such authority systems, unlike charismatic and traditional forms, political power is derived from, dependent upon, and limited by formal, legal, constitutional rules. It is these rules, which determine the nature and scope of the office holder's power (Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, pp. 195).

15.3.3 David Beetham's Critique of Max Weber

Weber's categorisation of authority systems is considered a significant contribution to understanding legitimacy of political systems and patterns of rule in modern times, especially the manner in which modern forms of authority are different from the traditional. Political Scientists like David Beetham point out, however, that Weber's three legitimating ideas, while helping us understand what is distinctive about modern as opposed to the pre-modern systems of authority, are inadequate for characterising the different regime types which have existed in the course of the twentieth century (See David Beetham, 'Political Legitimacy', p.110).

Unlike Weber who would try and fit regimes into the three typologies, or alternatively, see regimes as mixtures of two types, Beetham prefers a broad framework for understanding the processes and grounds of obedience. His framework consists of three levels or standards for understanding political authority. Political authority is legitimate, says Beetham, to the extent that: (a) it is acquired and exercised according to established rules (legality); (b) the rules are justified according to socially accepted beliefs about (i) the rightful source of authority, and (ii) the proper ends and standards of government (normative justifiability) and (c) the position of authority is confirmed by express consent or the affirmation of appropriate subordinates, and by recognition from other legitimate authorities (legitimation).

These three levels are not alternative forms or models, but together they provide the people with moral grounds for compliance or cooperation with authority. Such a framework, feels Beetham, also provides an understanding of the reasons why power may lack legitimacy. If there is a breach of rules, the term 'illegitimacy' is used; if rules are only weakly supported by societal beliefs, or are deeply contested, one can talk of a 'legitimacy deficit' and if consent or recognition is publicly withdrawn or withheld, one can speak of 'delegitimation'.

Beetham feels that such a framework fills in another inadequacy of Weber's analysis. It enables us to understand why people resist, or the circumstances in which political change occurs through challenges to political authority by popular protest and unrest. Seeing legitimacy, as Weber did, as nothing more than a 'belief in legitimacy' focuses attention only on the determination of legitimacy from the vantage point of those in power. Beetham's framework on the other hand, highlights the processes through which the ruled give or withhold recognition and obedience.

This brings us to another important contribution towards the understanding of the processes of legitimation in modern political systems; that of Jurgen Habermas which we shall take up in the following section.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.
- 1) How does Max Weber understand authority systems? What modifications does David Beetham make in Weber’s formulation?

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15.4 HABERMAS AND THE LEGITIMATION CRISIS

Jurgen Habermas has developed an alternative to the Weberian approach to legitimacy. In order to do this, however, Habermas did not adopt an orthodox marxist position which saw legitimacy as nothing more than a bourgeois myth, something which could not be achieved in conditions of inequality and exploitation which existed in modern capitalist societies. Habermas admitted that modern capitalist societies or liberal democracies do have a system of drawing out consent and support of the people. He, therefore, focused not merely on the inequalities, which prevailed in capitalist societies, but concentrated also on the machinery through which legitimacy was maintained viz., the democratic system, the party system, social and welfare reforms etc. At the same time, however, Habermas pointed out the difficulties of legitimation, which would invariably be faced in a political process that produced and sustained unequal class power.

15.4.1 Crisis Tendencies

In his work, *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), Habermas identified these difficulties as ‘crisis tendencies’ within capitalist societies. These crisis tendencies emerged as a result of a fundamental contradiction between the logic of capitalist accumulation and popular pressures unleashed by democratic politics.

Capitalist societies, based on the pursuit of profit and producing class inequalities, have to sustain political stability by invoking a normal claim to rule. In such a system, legitimacy is secured by democratic processes, which lead to further demands for social welfare provisions, increased popular participation and social equality. This in turn puts pressures on the state to expand its social responsibilities, and raises demands for state intervention for removing inequalities, forcing it to increase expenditure on welfare (non-profit) measures. These pressures lead to increase in taxation and public spending, and constrain capitalist accumulation by restricting profit levels and discouraging enterprise. Forced either to resist popular pressures or risk economic collapse, such societies find it increasingly difficult and eventually impossible, to maintain legitimacy.

Thus, a capitalist society is constantly in the grip of crisis tendencies, which test its ability to sustain itself through the legitimacy that it can elicit through various democratic institutions. While investing in such legitimation measures, the capitalist system has to be also on a constant alert to see that these processes are not stretched to the limit where they dismantle the defining principles of the capitalist system i.e. a class exploitative system geared to the extraction of profit or capital accumulation.

According to Habermas, capitalist democracies cannot permanently satisfy both popular demands for social equality and welfare rights and requirements of a market economy based on private profit. The implication of such ‘crises’ involves a disturbance of integration or cohesion of society and the regulatory structures of the capitalist system.

15.4.2 State Action during Crisis

In such scenarios of legitimation crisis, the modern state, according to Habermas, takes recourse simultaneously to ‘system steering’ and ideological measures to legitimize and stabilize the existing structures. This involves an ‘uncoupling’ or dissociation of the economic (wage labour and capital relations) and the political spheres (institutions of governance). This means that the exploitative relationship between wage labour and capital is no longer part of the political sphere. The political sphere in turn becomes less participatory and more impersonal, bureaucratized, and distanced from the ruled. Such a system would, however, be held together ideologically by legitimizing ‘universalist’ discourses of rights, justice and citizenship which give the rulers the moral claim to rule.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) In what ways Jurgen Habermas tries to understand the crisis of legitimacy in liberal capitalist societies?

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15.5 LET US SUM UP

Authority refers to a modified form of power in that it is not simply a manifestation of the capacity to change, but also a right to change. The element, which gives authority this distinctive character, is legitimacy. It is legitimacy, which makes obedience to authority willing and binding. Until the advent of modernity, the idea of delegitimate authority had remained marginal to the understanding of political authority. With modernity and the intellectual ferment created by Enlightenment thought, the idea that authority was something divinely ordained came to be questioned.

In the seventeenth century, philosophers like Thomas Hobbes challenged the idea of divine right as the claim to rule. He advocated the view that all human beings were free and equal and had the power and capacity towards self-determination. The idea of the social contract developed by Hobbes and Locke brought about the notion that legitimate authority was dependent ultimately upon a voluntary renunciation by individuals of their right to rule their own selves, in order to create conditions conducive to broader economic freedoms.

Philosophers like Montesquieu counterposed the liberal-individualist notion of legitimacy enunciated by the Contractualists, to locate legitimization of authority in a social context by including elements of social reform and constitutionalism. Rousseau, representing a republican attack on the individualist notion of legitimate authority, proposed that the social contract was in effect, a false contract and represented a deceptive liberal solution to political instability. He advocated the democratisation of polity based on the idea of active citizenship and the realization of collective goals through popular participation.

Karl Marx, however, was skeptical of any such solution to the question of political legitimacy. For him, the idea of legitimacy itself constituted a bourgeois myth, which could not be achieved in a capitalist society founded on the principles of exploitation and domination. Max Weber, a sociologist, looked at the problems of authority and of securing obedience in capitalist societies. Exploring the basis and social agencies through which legitimacy made itself effective, Weber proposed a three fold typology of authority systems to understand the mechanisms of legitimation.

Jurgen Habermas, while underlining the class-exploitative basis of modern societies, pointed out that liberal democracies possess the means of drawing support from the people through democratic mechanisms. These, however, while aiming at legitimisation, also stir up popular pressures for increased state intervention in social sectors. The contradictory pulls between pressures for democratisation (legitimation) and capitalist accumulation, make liberal (capitalist) democracies ridden by the legitimisation crisis. Liberal democracies try to overcome these crisis tendencies by taking recourse to 'steering measures' i.e., decoupling the economy from the political sphere, making the political sphere less participatory and more impersonal and bureaucratic, and holding the system together ideologically through 'universalist' discourses of rights, citizenship and justice.

15.6 KEYWORDS

- Absolutism** : Absolutism was a dominant political form in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. It was linked to the claim that sovereignty, representing unchallengeable and indivisible legal authority rested with the sovereign. In general use today, one calls a government absolute in the sense that it possesses unfettered power.
- Social Contract** : Philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, who associated with the idea of social contract, see the contract as a voluntary agreement among individuals as a result of which an organised society or political authority is formed. The social contract is not a historical fact. It is an analytical tool for studying social and political organisations.
- Descriptive** : These concepts refer to facts which are supposed to have an objective existence and are seen as illustrations of what is, or what actually exists.

- Normative** : These concepts are often seen as values. They refer to moral principles or ideals, which should, ought, or must be brought about.
- Political Obligation** : An obligation is a requirement or duty to act in a particular way. Political Obligation is the duty of the citizen to acknowledge the authority of the state and obey its laws.
- Republication** : The term republic suggests the absence of a monarch and implies also a distinctively public arena and popular rule. As a school of political theory, it advocates certain institutional structures and moral principles including public participation, civic virtue, public spiritedness, honour and patriotism.

15.7 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 15.1
- 2) See sub-section 15.4.1

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 15.2
- 2) See sub-section 15.2.4 and 15.2.5
- 3) See sub-section 15.2.6

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 15.3

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Section 15.4

UNIT 16 POLITICAL OBLIGATION AND REVOLUTION

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Political Obligation and Revolution: The Inter-relatedness of these Complementary Terms
- 16.3 Origin and Nature of the Concept of Political Obligation
- 16.4 Characteristics of Political Obligation
 - 16.4.1 Management of Public Affairs
 - 16.4.2 Political Legitimacy
 - 16.4.3 Resistance to Authority
- 16.5 Different Theories of Political Obligation
 - 16.5.1 Divine Theory: Sanction in Faith
 - 16.5.2 Consent/Contract Theory: Sanction in Will of the People
 - 16.5.3 Prescriptive Theory: Sanction in Reverence to the Established Conventions and Traditions
 - 16.5.4 Idealistic Theory: Sanction in the Rationality of Man
 - 16.5.5 Marxian Theory: Eventual Conversion of Political Obligation into Social Obligation
- 16.6 Concluding Appraisal of Political Obligation
- 16.7 Revolution: Nature and Implication
- 16.8 Characteristics of Revolution
 - 16.8.1 Beginning of a Process
 - 16.8.2 Implies a Change
 - 16.8.3 Signifies a Coherent Programme
 - 16.8.4 Mythical Status to Political Leadership
- 16.9 Revolution: A Mere Event or a Series of Events
- 16.10 Different Theories of Revolution
 - 16.10.1 Liberal Theory
 - 16.10.2 Marxian Theory
 - 16.10.3 Neo-Liberal Theory
 - 16.10.4 Idealistic-Liberal Theory
- 16.11 Theorising Revolution in Recent Social Science Literature
 - 16.11.1 Comparative Approach
 - 16.11.2 Psychological Approach
 - 16.11.3 Sociological Approach
 - 16.11.4 Political Approach
 - 16.11.5 Philosophical Approach
- 16.12 Concluding Appraisal of Revolution
- 16.13 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.14 Some Useful References
- 16.15 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept and the inter-relationship between political obligation and revolution
- Point out the various theories developed to explain the concept of political obligation and revolution
- Examine the advantages and limitations of political obligation and revolution with regard to state authority

16.1 INTRODUCTION

The concern of a political scientist is not only confined to the study of authority, but also extends to the problem of power being acceptable to the people over whom it is exercised. A study of the concept of political obligation necessarily leads to an investigation of related terms—political legitimacy and revolution. While the concept of political obligation constitutes an important touchstone of political philosophy, it finds a significant place in association with the notions of legitimacy and effectiveness. After this, we pass on to the study of the idea of revolution. In this unit, we propose to examine the relationship between a legitimate political order and an enlightened citizenship, which would make clear the concepts of political obligation and revolution.

16.2 POLITICAL OBLIGATION AND REVOLUTION: THE INTER-RELATEDNESS OF THESE COMPLEMENTARY TERMS

Why do people obey the state as authority? Under what circumstances should they register their disobedience? An answer to these questions has been given by a good number of thinkers in different ways and they have sought its solution in the inherently good nature of man to the emphatic affirmation of the Pragmatists. The relation between authority and obligation is inseparable, since one of the essential features of authority is the right to receive obedience. We shall examine whether there exists a right or a duty to resist the state.

It is a well-established fact that people obey only a legitimate authority; otherwise, they may overthrow it. Thus, figures the issue of revolution, which may be a peaceful event like the Glorious Revolution of England of 1688 or a violent outburst like the French Revolution of 1789. A study of the idea of revolution, thus becomes an important subject in the realm of contemporary political theory. This is so because politics is described as a study of the struggle for power, whether by peaceful or violent means, where political obligation and revolution have important ramifications

16.3 ORIGIN AND NATURE OF THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

The term 'obligation' originates from a Latin word 'obligate' implying something that binds men to perform what is enjoined upon them. This has various connotations. In the realm of ethics, it informs a man to discharge his duties, which he accepts on the basis of his rational understanding. In the field of jurisprudence, the social life of men is regulated by law. And in the world of politics, man is bound to live under some authority and obey his command. This is based on the maxim of common prudence.

It follows that the case of political obligation rests upon issues relating to the nature of authority that involves within its fold the whole world of existing rights, laws, and political organization generally.

16.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

Political obligation is, thus, a frame through which people accept the commands of the “men in authority”. This means that it has certain distinct characteristics. They are:

- Management of public affairs
- Political Legitimacy
- Resistance to authority

A study of these characteristics would enable us to understand the nature of political obligation more clearly.

16.4.1 Management of Public Affairs

The art of running any government is not easy. It is a difficult and extensive task and any wrong move or incorrect policy decision would entail serious consequences. On the contrary, a positive and right step taken by the government for the people would bring good results for the development of a nation. Thus, it becomes a duty of every conscientious person to take serious interest in the management of public affairs, government policies and political questions. This interaction would be for the general good. Political obligation, thus, calls for honesty, integrity and public spirit, both on the part of the government and the people.

16.4.2 Political Legitimacy

A study of the concept of political obligation necessarily leads to the investigation of the related theme of political legitimacy and effectiveness. The stability of a democratic political system not only depends upon economic development, but also upon its legitimacy. Legitimacy includes the capacity to produce and maintain a belief that the existing political institutions or forms are the most appropriate for society and is said to rest on the general will. Effectiveness, on the other hand, is judged on how well a system performs the basic functions of government, measured by the reaction of the masses.

16.4.3 Resistance to Authority

The idea of political obligation not only tells people to obey authority, but also desires them to be critical about the way authority is exercised. The people should scrutinize the action of their rulers and resist an invasion on their liberties. Thus, the idea of political obligation also involves the idea of resistance to authority. But of course, the right to protest against the state must be founded on a relation to social well-being in terms intelligible to the masses and the consequences of disobedience should not lead to a total breakdown of the state system.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Define Political Obligation. What are its distinctive characteristics?

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16.5 DIFFERENT THEORIES OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

Various theories have been enunciated on political obligation. These theories explain the kind of sanctions behind the concept of political obligation.

16.5.1 Divine Theory: Sanction in Faith

This theory is one of the oldest, explaining the reasons of obedience to a state's ruler. It implied that the ruler has derived his authority directly from God. As such, the people had no right to rebel even against a wicked ruler. In this way, people are bound by religious injunction to obey the authority of the king. This idea of 'divine rights of kings' was prevalent through out the Middle Ages. However, with the advent of new learning in the modern age, it lost its significance.

Criticism of the Divine Theory of Political Obligation

The Divine Theory of political obligation received scathing criticism at the hands of eminent thinkers like Grotius, Hobbes, Locke who rejected its metaphysical premises and traced the source of political obligation in consent of the individuals. When the state and the church got separated due to the growth of secularism, temporal powers became supreme to spiritual powers. However, the growth of democracy doomed this theory. Even the other metaphysical bases of obligation, like Fascism or Communism, based on the historic mission of a leader, class or party, received no support from science. They are of the same religious order as the divine rights theory. Thus, the theory lost all its appeal in the modern age.

16.5.2 Consent/Contract Theory: Sanction in Will of the People

Though the idea of contract or consent as a basis of obligation is quite ancient and is found in ancient Hindu thought too, it was mainly in the 16th and the 17th century in Europe that sophisticated theories of contract were developed to explain political obligation. The explicit expression of this theory is found in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. They opine, that men who lived in the state of nature entered into a contract whereby political authority came into being, which again was based on the consent of the people. The idea of social contract, however, took a highly philosophical form at the hands of Rousseau, who reposed the fact of political obligation in the "General Will". This meant that man no longer remains a slave to his impulses of appetite after entering into a civil society, but he becomes bound to obey the law of the general good. (Called General Will).

Thus, the social contract theory justifies the conception that the ruling authority, if he has to be legitimate, must rest ultimately on the consent of the governed. If the government violates the terms of the contract, the people have the right to resist. The implications of this theory have been in the direction of safeguarding the rights and liberties of the people and checking the arbitrariness of rulers.

Criticism of the Consent Theory of Political Obligation

Though the consent theory had its field day in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and even now, has its own significance on account of constituting the moral basis of a democratic order, its suffers from certain weaknesses. The theory makes the state an artificial organization. Also, the element of consent as enshrined in some contract made in a hypothetical state of nature is nothing else than a fiction, not at all legally binding on the existing generation. Thus, the people may go to the extent of staging a rebellion on the plea that they withdraw their consent in as much as the government has committed such an action in violation of the “general will”. The result is that the theory of political obligation is converted into a theory of rebellion.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the limitations of the Divine Theory of political obligation?

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2) What is the key feature of the Social Contract Theory?

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16.5.3 Prescriptive Theory: Sanction in Reverence to the Established Conventions and Traditions

According to this theory, political authority and reverence to it are based on the principle of “customary rights”. Authority is legitimate, if it is sanctioned by long standing custom or tradition. The people obey their rulers because the fact of obedience has become like a well-established convention. The traditionalists view the state as a delicate structure built over the years and which represents a balance of conflicting interest. Institutions like the state evolve gradually and adapt slowly to change; hence, it is a matter of duty to accept state authority and obey it while working only for

gradual peaceful change. This conservative theory of political obligation has its affirmation in the writings of Hegel, who believes that the ideas of morality evolve concretely in the customs and institutions of the state. And since the latest stage in this process is the present established order, it is entitled to receive our obedience. Further, since the state is the embodiment of a long evolved and customary morality, it becomes the duty of everyone to do what the state expects of one.

Burke is one of the best known exponents of conservatism who opines that it is unwise for man to totally disregard custom and tradition. The fact of political obligation is contained in paying unflinching respect to tradition, which is a sacrosanct affair. Thus, he supported the revolt of American colonialists, which was in favour of traditional rights of Englishmen, but opposed the French Revolution because it was inspired by the abstract rights of man “divorced from national traditions”.

Prof. M. Oakeshott is a contemporary upholder of the traditionalist view of obligation. According to him, political actions can never be anything but traditional, because political reflection cannot exist in advance of political activity. Politics is a skill, which is learned by practice rather than through theoretical maxims or systems. Hence, even when we attempt to comprehend other people’s politics, it is always within our own framework.

Criticism of the Prescriptive Theory of Political Obligation

Like other theories, the prescriptive theory has its own weaknesses. The source of political obligation lies not only in paying reverence to well-established practices, but also in doing away with them. People desire change and in case, their hopes are frustrated, they take to the path of revolution. Oakeshott has been particularly criticised on the ground that he treats even a revolution as an experience connected with the past and thereby, makes it a purely conservative affair. This means that the exponents of this theory would even advise the Negroes of African countries to accept racial discrimination laws as ‘legitimate’ for they are based on the ‘well-established traditions of the realm.’ However, this is far from the truth. In-fact, people only observe their traditions, in so far as they have their utility and do away with them when their usefulness does not exist.

16.5.4 Idealistic Theory: Sanction in the Rationality of Man

The Idealists trace the source of political obligation in the innate rationality of man. Man is regarded as a ‘political and rational creature’ and the state as a ‘self - sufficing community’ identical with the whole society. As such, there can be no anti-thesis between the individual and the state. As a consequence, an individual can seek his best possible development in society alone by obeying the command of the state.

In other words, the source of political obligation is contained in obedience to the state. Both Plato and Aristotle affirmed that the state and the individuals comprising it ‘form an organic whole’. Such an affirmation finds its best manifestation in the hands of Hegel who identifies ‘liberty’ of the individual with his perfect obedience to state. Green too says, that the idea of political obligation is connected with the case of moral obligation. He suggests that only those actions should be made obligations, which are made to serve a certain moral end.

Criticism of the Idealistic Theory of Political Obligation

The idealistic theories have been criticized on the ground of being too abstract. It places ordinary things in a highly philosophical or metaphysical form that cannot be understood by a man of average understanding. Also, the idea of political obligation is not only concerned with man’s obedience to state, but is also integrally connected with his right to resist abuse of political authority. The idealists are reluctant to

accommodate the right to resistance in their doctrine of political obligation. Even if Green and Bosanquet did recognize the right in certain exceptional situations, their treatment is vague and uncertain and failed to shake off the weight of English liberalism. Trietschke even goes to the extent of saying to fall down and worship the state. Thus, the idea of political obligation is converted into the injunction of blind worship of authority.

16.5.5 Marxian Theory: Eventual Conversion of Political Obligation into Social Obligation

The Marxian theory of political obligation is basically different from other theories on the subject. It sanctions the case of political non-obligation in the pre-revolutionary stage, total political obligation in the revolutionary stage and its eventual conversion into social obligation in the post-revolutionary stage. In other words, the case of political obligation is integrally connected with the character of authority. In Marxian theory of politics, state is decried as a 'bourgeois institution' in capitalist society. It means, after a successful revolution, the working class has the instruments of power in their hands to consolidate the socialist order in a way preparing its 'withering away' in the final stage of socialism. According to Marxism, the idea of political obligation cover the cases of 'discredited state' in the era of capitalism, the 'new state' in the period of 'dictatorship of the proletariat', and the 'state proper' when the 'classless' society finds its culmination in the 'stateless' pattern of social existence.

The starting point of Marxian theory of politics and with it of political obligation 'is its categorical rejection of this view of the state as the trustee, instrument, or agent of society as a whole'. The case of political obligation arises when the 'new state' comes into being after the revolution. The noticeable point in this theory is that what is forbidden in capitalist society is ordained in the socialist order. Not merely this, fundamental changes take place that prohibit any opposition to the state at all. The task of the Marxists is to subordinate the idea of political obligation to the dictates of permanent revolution. In other words, the idea of political obligation ceases to exist with the withering away of the state in the last stage of socialism (called communism) and finds its final conversion into the injunction of social obligation. Thus, society will be composed of the associations of free and equal producers, consciously acting upon a common and rational plan.

Criticism of the Marxian Theory of Political Obligation

A critical study of Marxian theory shows that it treats the question of political obligation in a way far away from the real perspective. What is emphatically advocated in the phase of capitalism is firmly denied in the next stage of social development. People who are exhorted to disobey the 'bourgeoisie state' are commanded not to disobey the state at all after the inauguration of the new social system. Thus, Marx is accused of building up a theory of political obligation on the basis of expediency alone, and he ignores the independent individual whose experience only counts in the determination of his obedience to the laws of state.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is the Idealistic Theory of political obligation?

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2) What are the limitations of the Marxian Theory of political obligation?

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16.6 CONCLUDING APPRAISAL OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

In a strict sense, the idea of political obligation is not a political, but a moral affair. However, the norm of morality differs from time to time, place to place and people to people. The dimensions of political obligation too vary and similarly, the injunctions of popular resistance also differ. The state is a necessary means to the ends of justice and if it does this on the basis of a broad consensus, then there is a kind of contractual understanding that in return for what the state does to promote justice and good, we undertake to obey it.

16.7 REVOLUTION: NATURE AND IMPLICATION

The idea of revolution covers not only the political, but also the economic, the social and the cultural dimensions of human life. A precise definition of the term involves different ramifications ranging on the implications of change, whether peaceful or violent, total or partial, minor or major. In political theory, it has a typical connotation signifying alteration in government alongwith changes in related associations and structures. In its core meaning, it ‘constitutes a challenge to the established political and the eventual establishment of a new order radically different from the preceding one’.

A possible line of difference between a revolt and a revolution may, however, be drawn in the affirmation that while both hint at a sudden, jolting and significant change in the existing system, the former does not imply the idea of ‘profound change’ as does the latter. The means employed to bring about a sudden, major and profound change may vary from purely constitutional or non-violent to those thoroughly violent and extremist. There also prevails the concept of “counter revolution” when a revolution takes place to undo the results of a revolution; for instance, the Communist Party of China, staged a revolution in 1927 and its suppression by the ‘Nationalists’ under Chiang Kai-Shek was dubbed as a ‘counter revolution’. Thus, a revolution certainly aims to alter the structure of subordination.

16.8 CHARACTERISTICS OF REVOLUTION

It is true that numerous revolutions have taken place in different part of the world, yet it is impossible to establish an objective and general pattern of revolution or even an adequate definition applicable to all periods. We should, thus, confine our attention to the implication and general characteristics of revolution, to gain a better understanding of the concept. They are:

- Beginning of a process
- Implies a change
- Signifies a coherent programme
- Myth to Political leadership

16.8.1 Beginning of a Process

Revolution denotes a process in which political direction taken by a state becomes increasingly discredited in the eyes of either the population as a whole or a certain key section of it. Such a process may culminate in a revolutionary event or other activities like an outburst, upheaval, agitation or a change of government by more peaceful means.

16.8.2 Implies a Change

After the process has begun, revolution implies a change of established order, or government at a clearly defined point in time by the use of armed forces or the credible threat of its use. Moreover, the change should be sudden and not gradual. Here, mere repudiation of authority is not enough. Existing authority on account of being devoid of 'legitimacy' should be replaced by a new one that is 'righteous'. As such, it is different from an activity like disorder, revolt or rebellion.

16.8.3 Signifies a Coherent Programme

Revolution also signifies a more or less coherent programme of change in either political or social instructions of a state or both, induced by the political leadership after a revolutionary event, the transition of power has occurred. In any variety of revolution whether it is liberal, communist, quasi-revolutionary, limited or unlimited, proper or sub- revolution, with negative or positive aspects — all follow a well- knit code of action and program to get desired results to the maximum extent possible.

16.8.4 Mythical Status to Political Leadership

Revolution also hints at giving a mythical status to political leadership resulting from a revolutionary transition, short-term status as legitimate government of the state. For instance, the inauguration of Fascism in Italy in 1922 and Nazism in Germany in 1933 were hailed as revolutions though they entailed the doom of liberal democracy. The heroes of these nations were worshipped as 'prophets' and people opted for a dictatorship without showing enthusiasm for replacing a despotic system with a constitutional government.

16.9 REVOLUTION: A MERE EVENT OR A SERIES OF EVENTS

Revolution is not merely concerned with the overthrow of the established order. It is equally concerned with the establishment of a new one. Thus, it is not merely an event, but a series of events. It begins with a challenge to the existing system and

continues until a new order is installed. What happens in between the two is said to constitute the stages of revolution. The different stages or the series of events are enumerated below:

- A revolution begins when the expectations of the people are very high and the great leaders are engaged in much perfectionist rhetoric. The result is the replacement of the 'old' with the 'new'.
- The second stage begins when power is captured and revolutionary leaders are confronted with the realities of governance. There prevail differences of opinion, which mark the category of moderates and extremists. However, victory rests with the radicals who concentrate power in their hands.
- Desperate efforts are made to realise revolutionary ideals and goals at all costs. This engenders a reaction that entails a period of convalescence.
- Then follows a state of lull. An era of dissensions and resignations comes to prevail that creates a very fertile ground for the coming up of a dictator.
- The last stage is one in which gradually revolutionary symbols lose their hold and dictatorship appears as a naked power. Then, occurs a trend towards restoration with reconciliation between what was overthrown and what was brought about.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What do you understand by revolution? How is it different from a revolt?

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2) Enumerate and describe the major characteristics of revolution.

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16.10 DIFFERENT THEORIES OF REVOLUTION

Different theories have come up to highlight the meaning, nature and causes of revolution. We could examine four theories that attempt to explain the concept of revolution.

16.10.1 Liberal Theory

The Liberal theory of revolution emphasises preserving the status quo in the process of change. That is to say that the notion of change is made coincidental with the preservation of the existing state of social, economic and political life. Such a notion is well reflected in the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. By revolution, Plato meant the establishment of an ideal state. To Aristotle revolution implied a change in the form of government by another or even a change in the type of rulers, which may amount to a revolution.

The trend of approaching revolution with a sense of apprehension and thus, an attempt at making the idea of change in consonance with the existing order, continued. Further, John Milton linked up the case of revolution with the maintenance of freedom and went to the extent of choosing a new government in case the existing rulers deprived the people of their liberty. However, liberal interpretation of the meaning and nature of revolution takes an important turn at the hands of John Locke. The fact remains that the keynote of making change in consonance with the defence of status-quo to any possible extent remains altogether undiscarded. Thus, the English Revolution of 1688 and the French Revolution of 1789 have been accused of being reactionary.

Criticism of the Liberal Theory

This theory has been criticized on the ground that thinkers have sought to justify a return to the past as an act of revolution. As a result, the liberal theory of revolution has been accused of being reactionary, anti-change and even counter-revolutionary. Here, the revolutionaries announced themselves as the protagonists of the 'rights of man'. But any analysis of measures by which they gave effect to their principles, shows clearly that by the 'rights of man', they meant in actual the rights of a limited class of men who owned the instrument's of production in society. Thus, the liberal tradition was an intellectual revolution primarily made in the interest of property owners in the new industrial field.

16.10.2 Marxian Theory

The Marxian theory basically emphasised the idea of 'Permanent Revolution'. The Marxists opined that a social revolution takes place when the existing relations of production begin to act as a fetter on the future development of forces of production. Thus, for Marx, the major political revolutions of the modern age up to this time are to be explained as the result of long-term social and economic developments in which new forms of economic exploitation come up. For him, 'a political revolution is a social revolution when it involves the conflict of social classes.'

Thus, Marx hails the 'bourgeoisie revolution' whereby the 'feudal state is overthrown by the middle class that has grown up inside it and a new state created as the instrument of the bourgeoisie rule.' He hoped that in a democratically advanced country (like England, Holland, France and America) a socialist revolution might take place through the battle of the ballot box. In the main, however, the burden of Marxian theory is on the use of violent means. Not merely this, it also envisages that the ideas, beliefs, convictions, customs and the ways of life of the people are changed so as to make them in tune with the norms of the socialist system. In this way, a 'Cultural Revolution' is launched to brainwash the people.

The course of revolution does not stop even here. It is a permanent affair, which calls for the final stage of a 'stateless society'. This also implies 'export of revolution', which means establishment of international socialism. The **Communist Manifesto** ends with these words of exhortation: 'Workers of all countries unite. You have nothing to lose but chains. You have a world to win.'

Criticism of the Marxian Theory

A major criticism leveled against this theory is that, it stops after the occurrence of the 'Socialist Revolution.' Revolution basically means a change for the better. But in a socialist state, any change is a taboo. Opposition is suppressed and the people are forced to change themselves, which may not necessarily amount to a change for the better. Thus, Marx's vision can be termed as limited.

Another weakness in this theory is that the precise relationship between revolutionary political action and Marx's general theory of socio-economic development is optimistically vague. It stands on the elaboration of class war. The theory is problematic as we find controversy among the thinkers. While Trotsky desired 'export of revolution', Stalin cried for 'Socialism in One Country'. Khrushchev, on the other hand, reiterated the principle of peaceful coexistence with the capitalist state.

16.10.3 Neo-Liberal Theory

According to Neo-liberal thinkers, the meaning of revolution has a different connotation and so its causes may not be discovered in the sphere of economics alone. Several viewpoints have sprung up in this context, all pinpointing that revolutions are violent civil disturbances that cause the displacement of one ruling group by another that has a broader popular basis of support. Historical evidence shows that people having nothing like "class consciousness" rise in revolt to change their destiny. As such, a revolution would seem to be the result of deep-rooted and slowly evolving political and social malformations rather than a sudden outbreak. However, in the last phase, they are sudden and violent.

The cause of revolution has been discussed from the stand point of psychology. David C. Schwartz explained people's apathy as a factor, which is known as 'alienation'. On this basis, he constructs a 'plausible theory', which has its beginning in 'ambivalence'; then moves on to 'conflict', thereon to 'cognitive consistency' and finally to 'adjustment'. Withdrawal from politics is a dangerous symptom, as it cultivates feelings of apathy for the system and the result is an outburst of mass anger.

Criticism of the Neo-Liberal Theory

The new liberal thinkers of the present century have in a way tried to follow Marx in so far as he emphasises the use of force in the capture of power and also rejected him in so far as he confines his attention only to the parameters of class war. This has led to the meaning of revolution, having different connotations.

A revolution is not only an event, as said by the liberal thinkers, in which one class dislodges another and captures power. The fact, however, is that it also relates to a particular phase of history extending over a considerable phase of time, but certainly marked by major 'social and ideological change.'

16.10.4 Idealistic-Liberal Theory

The idealistic-liberal theory lays emphasis on a moral, spiritual and cultural upheaval through which a group of persons seeks to establish a new basis for existence. If so, a revolution is not merely a political process, but a part of the unfolding of human potentiality. A major event of historical significance directed towards a higher moral end is a revolution, according to this interpretation.

Power, Authority and Legitimacy

Such an orientation finds its impressive manifestation at the hands of Hegel. To him, it is the 'reason' that plays a decisive part in evolution. An object is a thesis, an element of contradiction develops within it that may be taken as its 'antithesis.' The struggle between the two leads to the emergence of the 'synthesis', which has a mixture of both thesis and anti-thesis and represents a higher stage of development – a stage which will lead to another higher one and thus, the process of change will continue. A revolution, therefore, takes place on account of the operation of the law of dialectics in which the decisive role is played by the geist (spirit). Thus, it becomes something central to the process in which the ideally rational could become actual.

This idealistic-cum liberal interpretation of the idea of revolution is traceable in the political philosophy of M.N. Roy, who said that revolution means awakening the urge of freedom in man. As such, revolution is based on human nature and nothing like violence is needed. It means reorganizing society on the basis of freedom and equality remains a necessity.

Criticism of the Idealistic Liberal Theory

The theory is criticised on the ground of being too abstract to be understood by a man of average comprehension. The purely philosophical version take the subject of revolution far away from the world of reality. Revolution as a matter of fact, is an important event that changes the pattern of social, economic and political development. This means, it is purely a practical affair. It calls for an empirical study. The value free study of revolution is, however, a logical impossibility.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) On what grounds has the Liberal Theory of revolution been criticised?

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2) How do the Marxists approach the question of revolution?

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16.11 THEORISING REVOLUTION IN RECENT SOCIAL SCIENCE LITERATURE

Revolution, which has remained one of the key concepts in social science, has naturally attracted intellectual attention of scholars and academics in recent years. A few such explanations are discussed below.

16.11.1 Comparative Approach

The most influential exercise in comparative approach as applied to social revolutions is the work of Theda Skocpol in her book *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), which was based on a comparative analysis of French, Russian and Chinese Revolutions. By following this approach, she tried to find out the 'generalizable logic' behind the revolutions she studied. Her departure from all previous interpretations of revolution is on her dismissal of any notion of conscious purpose. She concluded that social revolutions are simply the unplanned product of competing forces. Different groups enter the fray and the outcome is determined by which of them ultimately wins. Neither individuals, nor groups, nor even classes act throughout revolutions with the logic and consistency which traditional views would demand. Skocpol has, however, been criticised by people like Michael Taylor, Mancur Olson and others who challenge Skocpol's argument that revolution is irrational and seek to demonstrate through their writings that rational-choice theory can be applied to revolutionary coalition-building.

16.11.2 Psychological Approach

Ever since the French Revolution, people have sought psychological explanations of why revolutionaries act as they do. All the earlier explanations of revolutions following the psychological approach like that of Le Bon (1960), Dean Martin (1920) revolve around the apparently amoral behaviour of crowds, who act in strange and unusual ways, which in turn, lead to rapid and far-reaching changes in a way that in normal conditions would be impossible. All these explanations, however assume that in a revolutionary situation everyone acts in the same way and that there is a psychological cause of revolution.

But modern psychological theories of revolution under the influence of Freud focused attention on the interaction of the individual with others. There have been some landmark publications like *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et. al. 1964), *The Revolutionary Personality* (Wolfenstaur, 1967), or *Why Men Rebel* (Ted Gurr, 1970). Ted Gurr's work, in particular, is a highly formal exercise in psychological approach, although, it principally deals with the notion of political violence. The impulse towards the use of violence is found by Gurr in a social-psychological concept called 'relative deprivation', which is used to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the "ought" and the "is" of collective value satisfaction. The psychological approach has certain inherent limitations, for which perhaps, Gurr moves away from the psychological toward the sociological while trying to explain the outcomes of revolution.

16.11.3 Sociological Approach

The most popular sociological explanations of revolutions are functionalist explanations. The basic premise of this approach is as follows: The stability of society depends on social order continuing to fulfil the requirements of its citizens. If it fails to do so, the underlying consensus on the values of society, which enables the government to function is lost, and with the failure of consensus the way is open for a mass rejection of the existing order. There have been notable works following this approach like *Revolution and the Social System* (C. Johnson, 1964), *The Natural History of*

Revolution (L.P. Edwards, 1970) etc. The problem with these types of explanation is that they do not explain why revolutions occur in certain situations, and more importantly, why they do not, inspite of a congenial situation.

16.11.4 Political Approach

The political approach to the study of revolution is basically interpreting revolution by trying to find out the factors behind revolution, interpreting the course of revolution and analysing the consequences of revolution. The best known work in this category is perhaps *From Mobilisation to Revolution* (Charles Tilly, 1978). Tilly’s principal focus is on the process of alienation and regrouping that precedes a revolution, the causes of a revolutionary situation and on revolutionary outcomes.

16.11.5 Philosophical Approach

Modern philosophical explanations of revolution are dominated by Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution* (1963). For Arendt, revolution is one of the most recent of political phenomena. Revolution is the search for freedom and revolutionaries are those who fight for freedom in the face of tyranny. Freedom, according to Arendt, is a distinctive quality; a good in itself which is the highest achievement of human society to attain. The problem of revolution is that its spirit has failed to find appropriate institutions in which to express itself. She, therefore, concludes with the practical consequences for trying to realise this objective: not party government which she believes to be a government by an elite chose by the people, but self-government by deputies of elementary republics.

16.12 CONCLUDING APPRAISAL OF REVOLUTION

After discussing the meaning nature and various theories on the subject, the subject of revolution becomes clear. That is, in a revolution the old established sense of rights fades away and a new state of affair comes into being. It involves extreme ideas of violence and bloodshed for bringing in the element of ‘change’. They contain the potential of self-renewal. It may bring in the change of failure or success, which may signalise the passing away of a political order. Thus, revolution means a combination of rather far-reaching change intended to erase the real illness of a society that has reached an impasse.

Check Your Progress 6

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are Theda Skocpol’s views on revolution?

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2) Discuss the psychological approach to revolution.

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16.13 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have dealt at length with the complementary terms of political obligation and revolution and its importance and relevance in political philosophy. At the outset, every conscientious person obeys the laws of the state, because of legal, religious, traditional, moral and consent basis. That is to say, the concept of political obligation leads to the investigation of related themes of political legitimacy and revolution. We have already discussed that people obey the state if authority is legitimate, otherwise they may over throw it. Thus, follows the issue of revolution. If a revolution succeeds, it introduces a new principle of legitimacy that supercedes the ‘rightness’ of the former system. Thus, the concepts of obligation and revolution are important touchstones of political philosophy.

16.14 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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16.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sections 16.1 - 16.4

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See sub-section 16.5.1
- 2) See sub-section 16.5.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See sub-section 16.5.4
- 2) See sub-section 16.5.5

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sections 16.7 - 16.8
- 2) See Section 16.8

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) See sub-section 16.10.1
- 2) See sub-section 16.10.2

Check Your Progress 6

- 1) See sub-section 16.11.1
- 2) See sub-section 16.11.2