UNIT 9 POST COLONIAL STATE

Structure

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit analyses the nature and development of a post-colonial state from the liberal and Marxist perspectives. After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the nature and characteristic features of the post-colonial state
- Analyse the Dependency theorists’ arguments on state and development.
- Discuss the autonomy of the post-colonial state, and
- The changing nature of the post-colonial, and the impact of the Globalisation on the post-colonial state.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881), a Swiss jurist and political theorist, described political science as a discipline or science concerned with the state.

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Writing almost a century later, Norman P. Barry (1944-2008), the British political theorist, reflected on how the “history of political theory has been mainly concerned with the state”. The concept of state was intrinsic to modern society. As the British sociologist Ralph Miliband (1924-1994) has observed: “there is nothing which is nearly as important as the state”. Similarly, the American political scientist Martin Carnoy (1984) drew attention to the growing importance of the state. In his words, “in every society, from advanced industrial to a Third World primary good exporter, and in every aspect of society, not just politics, but in economics (production, finance, distribution), in ideology (schooling, media), and law enforcement (police, military)… the state appears to hold the key to economic development, to social security, to individual liberty, and through increasing weapons sophistication to life and death itself. To understand politics in today’s world economic system, then, is to understand a society’s fundamental dynamic.” It is for this reason that the study of state occupies a prominent place in political science. Within the discipline of political science, however, the state has been subject to intense debate about its nature across different schools of thought.

The centrality of the state in all spheres of public life also makes it elusive. This explains the intense debates surrounding the way the state has been conceptualised in political theory. We begin this unit by examining the main assumptions of the liberal and Marxist perspectives of the state and then proceed to specificities of the post-colonial state bringing out their historically rooted distinct social and political features. In this process, we engage with the debate on the nature of the post-colonial state, its social formations and capacity for relative autonomy from classes.

9.2 THE STATE IN POLITICAL THEORY: LIBERAL AND MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

Sifting through the academic literature, we observe three fundamental differences in the way state and class have been conceptualised in both Liberal and Marxist traditions.

First, Liberal theorists highlight the fundamental harmony in society, whereas Marxist analysts emphasise the inherent conflict that cannot be reconciled within the given frame of state and society. In Marxist theory, the state is viewed as repressive, with its apparatuses representing ideological and coercive domination of propertied classes over the working classes, whether feudal or capitalist.

Second, class in Liberal political theory is conceptualised as a descriptive category based on occupation, income and status. Marxist political theory, however, views class as a conceptual tool to analyse how individuals are placed unequally in the process of economic production.

Third, despite the insistence that the state is neutral and beneficial for all in society, Liberal political theorists are deeply aware of the formidable power of the modern state. They believe that state power needs to be controlled through constitutional mechanisms and political activities of the citizens. Civil society is critical for restraining the uncontrolled power of the state. On the other hand,
Marxist theorists argue that the state in a capitalist society is by nature repressive as it represents the interests of the dominant propertied classes. They hold that dignity and autonomy of the individual cannot be achieved under the existing structure of capitalist society and state. Therefore, they call for the overthrow of the existing state and establishment of a socialist state whose basis of power and authority would rest with the working classes.

Marxist theory grounds the state in class conflict. As a result, the state which emerges as an abstract entity in Liberal theory is given substance and a concrete shape in Marxist theory. Marxists insist that the study of society and social classes is a prerequisite to the study of the state.

Classes have two dimensions: objective and subjective. They are defined by the possession of the means of production or/and lack of such possession. Marxist theory is not blind to the existence of the other classes but focuses on two classes – the capitalist class and the working class – that form the two fundamental classes in society.

Classes become political entities when they are conscious of their class positions, and it is the class consciousness that leads to class struggle. The existence of classes does not directly lead to class struggle as ideology plays an important role in inculcating class consciousness. Class consciousness depends on a variety of factors; many of them are historical. If dominant classes form the basis of the state, class struggle in society constantly threatens that social base. This is because Marxian theory views the state as a political organisation of the dominant classes in society. Thus, the state is a means of maintaining class hegemony. At the same time, there exists a relative autonomy thesis reflected in the writings of Marx and Engels as well as by Marxists such as Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas, among others.

In the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Volume 1*, Marx and Engels refer to the state as an executive committee of the bourgeoisie. In other historical political writings such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire, The Peasants War in Germany, The Class Struggle in France, The Constitutional Question in Germany, The Prussian Constitution*, they argue that coercive and ideological apparatuses of the state attain relative autonomy from the dominant classes under certain circumstances. When contending propertied classes balance each other’s power in a particular social formation; or when the generation of social classes is weak as a result of the characteristic development of a particular mode of production, or because of the military conquest.

Thus, in Marxian theory, what forms the state will take –its subservience to the dominant social class or its relative autonomy in relation to the social classes– does not follow a unilinear path, as is commonly accepted. The Marxian analysis of the state and its relationship with social classes is multi-dimensional and dialectical. It is based on a concrete study of a social formation and the social classes that originate from it, their strengths and weaknesses, and their struggle to capture the state and its apparatuses for their own class interests. This aspect is reflected in the later Marxist and neo-Marxist theorisations that have come up, especially those dealing with the historically and economically distinct post-colonial societies. We will examine this in the following sections.
9.3 HISTORICAL SPECIFICITIES OF POST-COLONIAL SOCIETIES

All states are products of historical trajectories. The political domain is historically constituted, and therefore a historical enquiry is a theoretical prerequisite for a deeper analysis of the nature of the state. For Marx and Engels, the advanced capitalist societies like Britain and Germany, provided the actual empirical material that they sifted for their theorisation of the nature of the state. The concept of relative autonomy elaborated by subsequent Marxists also mainly refers to the nature and role of the state in the advanced capitalist societies situated in the west. The natural question that emerges is whether the classical formulation about the nature of state in capitalist societies as articulated in the writings of Marx and Engels and developed further by the Marxists can be applicable or relevant for historically different states of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The question becomes relevant as the social structure as well as economies of these states were distorted by colonial capital exploitation.

As is well known, the actual process of class formation and restructuring in Asia, Africa and Latin America as a consequence of the impact of long-term colonial domination has been historically distinct from the capitalist countries of the west. There is a broad agreement among state theorists that the theorisation of the nature of the post-colonial state has to be adapted to the very different circumstances that prevail in the Latin American, Asian and African societies. In the words of Ralph Miliband (1978) ‘Marxism primarily fashioned in and for a bourgeois/capitalist context has, to say the least, to be adapted to the very different circumstances subsumed under the notion of under-development.’

The historical specificity of the post-colonial state has also been underlined by the neo-Marxists as they argue that the colonial domination for centuries impacted the social, economic and political structure of the society, imparting them with uniqueness. Colonialism signified the exploitation of the entire society with its complexities, class divisions, internal relations of power, domination, cultural ambiguities by another society, spatially rooted elsewhere. Thus, differences related to the nature of pre-capitalist social formations, mode of capitalist intervention and experience of colonisation have been among the factors which make the transposition of the categories of analysis used for the state in the western societies by the Marxist theorists to these different economic, social, political post-colonial formations problematic.

9.4: POST-COLONIAL STATE: LIBERAL AND NEO-MARXIST THEORY

At the time of decolonisation, few doubts were expressed about the capacity of the state, the intentions of the state elites or the pre-arranged knowledge of the state in knowing what it meant to do or the direction in which it meant to go. The ability of the nationalist elites, which had led the nationalist movements to rise over and above the narrow sectarian interests, was well accepted. These elite also enjoyed wider legitimacy and acceptance among the masses due to their role in
the nationalist movement. Bringing about the social and economic changes was the main political agenda of the nascent democracies in post-colonial societies. This notion of the activist states in line with the colonial statist tradition allowed the post-colonial state to enjoy enormous power over the personal and collective lives of its social classes.

Anti-colonial struggles were defined as aspiring for state power. The mass struggle in most of the colonies was political in nature. This fact alone gave the post-colonial state a certain degree of legitimacy and authority.

Moreover, any discussion of the limits of state power was precluded as the need was widely felt for a strong post-colonial state to reverse the colonial legacy, bring about nation-building, resist ethnic fragmentation and carry out industrialisation.

There was a strong belief among the elites who came to power after the departure of colonial rulers that post-colonial societies needed to be guided in the channels of reforms as they were incapable of regulating themselves. This belief gave the post-colonial state a certain degree of legitimacy in its attempt to bring in social and economic reforms. As Hamza Alavi has observed: ‘the post-colonial state is thought of an entity that stands outside and above society, an autonomous agency that is invested (potentially) with an independent source of rationality...and the capability to initiate and pursue programmes of development for the benefit of the whole society.’

9.5 THE MODERNIZATION PERSPECTIVE: DEVELOPING STATES

In the liberal tradition, rich and diverse formulations about political development and modernisation began to take shape in the American universities in the 1950s and 1960s. According to these theories, the political elites in post-colonial states had the enormous task of achieving modernisation by using state as an instrument of change. They believed that the political elite in post-colonial states were capable of rising over and above the sectional interest. The political elite it was believed were endowed with a prescience about what was for the general good and that their actions would be ultimately in the national interest.

Such a view of the state by modernisation/political development theorists was certainly simplistic, grouping together a whole range of possible and actual arrangements. It was also teleological in the sense of assuming a certain end-point for development namely, a pluralistic, liberal democratic state. For the modernisation/political development theorists, the post-colonial state was clearly to be liberal and democratic in nature. However, for the purpose of bringing about modernisation, the post-colonial state must take sides in favour of the modern sector and against the traditional, even if this meant favouring a minority. Thus, those people dependent upon the traditional sectors or whose culture and society were traditional were not to be supported by the post-colonial state by this set of argument. The claim that this was in the national interest was highly questionable as there was considerable evidence that those who run the state
apparatus—the elites—derived a great deal of personal gains from that involvement, often in ways that could not be seen as to the general interest.

9.6 THE DEPENDENCY PERSPECTIVE: UNDERDEVELOPED STATES

In the 1960s and 1970s, a strong critique of the modernisation/political development perspective emerged with the onset of third world nationalism, on the one hand, and the rise of Neo-Marxism, on the other. The criticism was both on methodological and ideological grounds. It led to a paradigm shift in thinking about the nature of post-colonial state. The shift was visible in the writings of the Marxist theorists from Asia, Africa and Latin America. One factor that led to the shift was the failure of the post-colonial state to deliver even the most fundamentals at a time when the state was the focal point of hopes and aspirations of the people. For the dependency theorists, the underdevelopment of the post-colonial states was a product of the encounter between the capitalist West and the colonised people of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Colonialism gave birth to underdevelopment, and even after the grant of independence, continuing ties of economic dependency served to maintain neo-colonialism in the form of development of underdevelopment. As Atul Kohli and Vivienne Shue (1994) have pointed out, the dependency theorists differed from the modernisation/political development theorists and found them ahistorical and excessively formal. They contested the modernisation perspective that the states in Asia, Africa and Latin America were in ‘the early stages of development’. They also criticised the modernisation/political development theorists for having an ethno-centric bias in the sense that they sought to provide intellectual cloaks to cover the continued Western agenda for continuing to dominate and exploit the post-colonial states covertly. In any case, by the Sixties, the post-colonial state as an agent of either social transformation or economic reforms or political change was greatly delegitimised. The de-legitimation was very much a product of the peoples’ dismal experiences of the role of the state and state elite.

In the neo-Marxist theorisation on the post-colonial state, external determinants were given much more importance, and one aspect was particularly stressed, namely, the history of the relationship of the post-colonial state to colonialism and imperialism. The dependency theorists, by highlighting neo-colonialism, chose to advocate resistance against both capitalism and imperialism.

Arguments for external determinants were derived from underdevelopment and dependency theorists led by Andre Gunder Frank, a Latin American political economist, and the subsequent revisions by Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Arghiri Emmanuel and Cardoso, among others. They believed that the world was an integrated world economic system in which advanced capitalist countries constituted the core and developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America constituted peripheries. Subsequently, the world economic systems theorists added another category of semi-periphery consisting of the newly industrialised countries (NICs) of Asia (known as ‘Asian Tigers’ i.e., Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Taiwan, among others). These dependency theorists argued that capitalism is an international system characterised by the exchange...
between technically advanced developed states and primary product producing underdeveloped states through an integrated world market. The technical and military superiority of developed states (also referred to as metropolitan states) results in the domination, exploitation, and distortion of post-colonial states (also referred to peripheral states). Through the process of unequal exchange, the economic surplus is extracted from the periphery through plunder, repatriation of super profits, deteriorating terms of trade, and monopoly rents for the utilisation of the metropolis technologies, as well as trade and traffic policies that deny the periphery control over internal markets.

The most significant aspect of this dominance in the world economic systems is surplus extraction by the metropolitan countries. Unequal exchange denies the economic surplus to peripheral states which is necessary for their autonomous national development. The economic surplus is appropriated by and invested in the advanced capitalist state. According to the under-development/dependency, the rapid economic development of the metropolitan states has happened at the cost of the underdevelopment of the dependent states of Asia and Africa.

For the neo-Marxists, decolonisation brought no substantive change to the economy of post-colonial states and the indirect political dominance of the metropolitan bourgeoisie from the former imperial countries has continued unabated. Thus, the post-colonial state, according to the neo-Marxist theorists, was simply a new form; political freedom for the local classes was merely a new cloak under which the basic mechanisms of imperialist hegemony continued to sustain. The post-colonial state remained a dependent political apparatus. The governing class/bureaucracy in the post-colonial dependent state formulated policies that coincide with the long-term interests of the metropolitan/neoisimperialist states. Governing class in the dependency theory literature is regarded as a comprador class, a client group, an auxiliary bourgeoisie. In the words of A.G. Frank: ‘the exigencies of the process of capital accumulation and the international division of labour, worldwide and in the underdeveloped countries themselves thus become the principal determinants of the role and the form of the state in the third world’. Dependency theorists further argue that the post-colonial state may be strong and autonomous in relation to its local bourgeoisie but it remains largely an instrument of the metropolitan bourgeoisie.

Thus, the dependency theorists were of the view that the dominant class alliance in the post-colonial states remained the same as they were in the colonial period. The only difference was that the peripheral bourgeoisie now replaced the old feudal and comprador elements as the subordinate ally. This class, according to Samir Amin, remains in collusion with imperialist forces.

In due course, dependency theorists’ argument about the nature of post-colonial state was subjected to the following criticism leading to its decline.

First, independence as many neo-Marxists conceded, did constitute a significant change in power relations in the sense that it made possible the diversion of policy away from the immediate interests of metropolitan capital. Second, even when metropolitan capital was assumed to retain economic dominance, independence allowed some leverage to the indigenous classes in the post-colonial states. Arguably, within limits placed by the overwhelming presence of
metropolitan capital on the ‘free choice’ of policy, the actions of the state were taken independently. Third, as the post-colonial states were located in the context of indigenous class struggles, they could not be mere agents for transfer of surplus. It would be too simplistic to argue that. Fourth, with the dependency theorists’ emphasis on unequal exchange relations between the core and the periphery, social classes become synonymous with geographical entities and problems of inequality and deprivation become confined to these entities. It thus makes the prospect of any practical class analysis in a general way extremely unlikely. Fifth, it was pointed out by later dependency theorists that contrary to the early dependency theorists’ position that integration into the world capitalist economic system always produce negative development of the post-colonial state, dependent development was possible within the constraints of a world economy as in case of the South East Asian states. Sixth, of late, there was a greater understanding that the political regimes in the post-colonial states also were culpable for the underdevelopment due to their faulty policies.

Despite these criticisms, the dependency theorists have advanced our understanding of the nature of the post-colonial state and the cause for their lack of development. They drew out attention to the important historical distinctions between the developed states in the West and the post-colonial states of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Second, the world economic theorists underlined how the prevailing world economic conditions place constraints on the newly liberated developing states. Third, the dependency theorists highlighted the importance of analysing the interaction of political and economic variables in the study of development.

As the preceding discussion shows, if the post-colonial state was endowed with extraordinary autonomy by modernisation analysts, it was kept on a tight leash by the dependency/underdevelopment theorists. If the class was conspicuous by its absence in writings on modernisation, control by an external class was taken for granted in the dependency perspective. Thus, with the demise of the development theory model of the state and the eclipse of earlier dependency theory as a paradigm of explanation, an adequate opportunity emerged for examining the relationship between class and state in post-colonial societies.

9.7 THE STATE AND CLASS IN THE POST-COLONIAL SOCIETIES: RELATIVE AUTONOMY THESIS

The concept of the post-colonial state that emerged in the Seventies was epitomised in the seminal work of Hamza Alavi (1972). Alavi provided an early starting point for the analysis of the state in post-colonial societies. He premised his arguments on the historical specificity of post-colonial societies. This specificity, he argued, arose from structural changes brought about by 1) the colonial experiences and alignment of classes and, by the superstructure of political and administrative institutions which were established in that context and, 2) the realignment of class forces which have been brought about in in the context of post-colonial situation.
Alavi argued that the post-colonial state dispenses with the mediation of politics because the state is ‘over-developed’, a superstructure capable of dominating all indigenous social forces. This allows aspects of the state itself (the military and/bureaucracy) to play the dominant part in the state and among social classes. Alavi ascribed the genesis of the overdeveloped superstructure or state apparatus to the colonial past of the post-colonial societies, where the task of carrying out the bourgeois revolution was exercised by the metropolitan capital in the process of imposition of colonial rule. In that process, it was necessary for the colonial regime to create a state apparatus that was sufficiently powerful to subordinate the indigenous social classes. It was this overdeveloped state apparatus that the post-colonial state inherited after decolonisation. Alavi refers to this syndrome thus: ‘the excessive enlargement of powers of control and regulation that the state acquires extends far beyond the logic of what is necessary in the interests of the orderly functioning of the peripheral capitalist economies over which the state presides and specific needs of each of the dominant classes. The centrality of the state in the post-colonial society can be explained with the help of the following three factors.

First, the continued dominance of the state apparatus in the post-colonial societies was due to the matrix of class society. At the time of independence, no single class had exclusive command over the state. Alavi argued that ‘the special role of the military-bureaucratic oligarchy has become all too common a phenomenon in post-colonial societies. This role now needs to be interpreted in terms of a new alignment of the respective interests of the three propertied exploiting classes, namely the indigenous bourgeoisie, the metropolitan neo-colonialist bourgeoisie, and the landed classes, under metropolitan patronage...If a colony had a weak and underdeveloped indigenous bourgeoisie, it would be unable to subordinate the relatively highly developed colonial state apparatus through which the metropolitan power had exercised domination over it. However, a new convergence of interests of the three competing propertied classes, under metropolitan patronage, allows a bureaucratic-military oligarchy to mediate their competing but no longer contradictory interests and demands’.

It follows that in the writings of the underdevelopment/dependency theorists, the state managers, politicians constituting overdeveloped state apparatus mediate into the interests of the propertied classes. For this purpose, the state needs relative autonomy because competing interests have to be reconciled within the peripheral structure. The post-colonial state is thus not an instrument of a single class. It is relatively autonomous and mediates between the competing interests of three dominant propertied classes and preserves the social order based on peripheral capitalist order.

Second, a complementary point that can be drawn from the writings of Alavi is that the state in post-colonial societies directly appropriates a very large part of the economic surplus and deploys it in bureaucratically directed economic activities under peripheral capitalism.

Third, according to Alavi and John Saul, yet another factor that underlines the crucial significance of the state in post-colonial societies is the particular ideological function of the state. In the words of Saul: ‘state’s function of
providing ideological cement for the capitalist system is one which has gradually evolved in the core countries in step with their economic transformation. However, in post-colonial societies, this hegemonic position has to be created; and created within territorial boundaries, which often appears quite artificial. once the powerful force of direct colonial fiat has been removed.’ Like advanced capitalism, even peripheral capitalism requires territorial unity and legitimacy, which has to be created by the post-colonial state.

The above three factors taken together illuminate the centrality of the state to the post-colonial social formations, as the neo-Marxists have argued. In such a situation of high relative autonomy, the bureaucracy figures as an essential component in its own right to determine the state policies. The focus of the neo-Marxist theorisations on the post-colonial state has been on the special role of the bureaucracy/bureaucratic oligarchy in post-colonial societies as state power belongs to the bureaucratic class. This segment was an extension of the colonial state’s military bureaucratic apparatus as it maintained and even extended its dominant power in society. John Saul has argued that due to the weak character of the indigenous bourgeoisie, it finds itself enmeshed in bureaucratic control. In fact, in some countries like East Africa, the indigenous bourgeoisie is not even fully developed and cannot formulate its class interests. Thus, given the apparent inability of indigenous capital to constitute a dominant class, state bureaucracy plays a dominant role. Ziemann and Lanzendorfer refer to the central role of bureaucracy in the determination of policy in the post-colonial states. State bureaucracy is all the more likely to govern as a class when formal political institutions are suppressed as it then plays the role of an intermediary between transnational capital and interest groups. The very extent of post-colonial state intervention in a peripheral economy thrusts the state personnel to centre stage. Moreover, being linked to the distributive mechanisms of a state surplus, they appear to have a particular facility for ensuring their relative advantage.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

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

1) Briefly describe Hamza Alavi’s views on the post-colonial state.

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9.8 THE POST-COLONIAL STATE IN INDIA

Having established some general theoretical premises with reference to the nature and dynamics of state in the post-colonial societies, let us move to the nature of the state in India to see how the above formulation about relatively autonomy thesis applies in the Indian context.
One of the most significant efforts in this direction has been undertaken by Pranab Bardhan. Bardhan argues that the post-colonial Indian state is an autonomous actor playing a far more important role in shaping and moulding class power than vice versa. In the early decades after political independence, the personnel of the state elite in India enjoyed an independent authority and prestige that made them the main actors in the process of the socio-economic development of India. ‘It redirected and restructured the economy, and in the process exerted great pressure on the proprietary classes’ on the pretext of using state intervention to promote national economic development. With the gradual strengthening of the main proprietary classes i.e., the industrial capitalist class and the rich peasantry, the autonomous behaviour of the post-colonial state in India has been confined more and more to its regulatory rather than its developmental functions. Also, in comparison to African and Latin American countries, foreign capital has far lesser importance. The indigenous industrial capitalist class in India is far more autonomous and sheltered from foreign capital in the domestic market, even after implementing the policies of pro-market economic reforms in 1991. Interestingly Bardhan refers to the third proprietary class in India, namely the ‘professionals in public sectors’, which comprises the public bureaucracy and white-collar employees in the state sectors. The three proprietary classes belonging roughly to the top twenty per cent of the Indian population have a significant conflict of interest though they all have been beneficiaries of state economic policies under the development planning model. As none of the three proprietary classes dominates the others, it increases the autonomous power of the post-colonial state in India, which performs the vital task of mediation among the three competing classes under a democratic system. One finds a similar argument in favour of the state enjoying a relatively autonomous role due to the presence of more than one dominant class and the role of state bureaucracy under the development planning model (See for instance, Sudipta Kaviraj, 1986).

9.9 POST-COLONIAL STATES IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

The accelerated pace of globalisation since the early 1990s has raised question about the state’s continued centrality. The argument is that state is no longer the prime economic actor as neo-liberal economic reforms have minimised the state’s role and the market economy has become self-governing. Also, the concept of good governance imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in conditions over the lending underdeveloped states. The World Bank and the IMF demand the rolling back of the state from the social and economic sectors. Also in the political arena, decentralisation is recommended at the local level and the range and significance of decisions made at intergovernmental or supranational levels has increased in the post-Soviet world. The economic transitions that have happened from the centralised planned economy model to market economy across the states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has brought the global corporate sector to the fore as relatively autonomous of the nation states and has crucial impact world economic system. Since these transnational companies are based and owned by the capitalist class
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in the advanced capitalist countries, so the influence of these states over the developing states remains unmistakable (Heywood, 2013)

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

**Note:**

i) Use the space given below for your answer.

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

1) What do you mean by Relative Autonomy Thesis?

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**9.10 LET US SUM UP**

The states in Asia, Africa and Latin America were lacking in terms of political cohesion and economic dynamism, which enabled the imperial states of the west to colonise them. While colonial exploitation did explain the lack of development in these states, as the dependency theorists argue, it was also ‘historically rooted in their distinctive social and political traits… brittle state structures that were overcentralised or fragmented, and control of economic resources by non-productive groups’ (Kohli 1986). During colonial dominance, states in Asia, Africa and Latin America witnessed the consolidation of non-productive dominant classes and a centralised state structure to appropriate economic surplus and maintain order. The surplus was used by the imperial states for non-developmental purposes to maintain law and order, further their imperial interests and direct appropriation. All these factors contributed to the economic underdevelopment of the colonies. As Kohli observes: ‘colonialism bequeathed a twin historical legacy: the absence of socio-structural dynamism on the one hand, and on the other hand the consequent emergence of political forces aimed not only at the creation of sovereign states but also at remedying the absence of this dynamism’ (Kohli, 1986).

Asian, African and Latin American countries inherited the overdeveloped colonial state apparatus and its institutionalised practices, through which the operations of the indigenous social classes in these dependent/peripheral states were regulated and controlled by the imperial states. This allowed aspects of the state itself to play the dominant role in the state. Arguably, no indigenous propertied class in the post-colonial society i.e., the indigenous capitalist class or the landed rich peasantry, was sufficiently strong to assume political dominance within the post-colonial societies. As for the metropolitan bourgeoisie based in the imperialist states, it enjoyed relative economic dominance within the peripheral states. However, the fact of independence precluded it from occupying the role of ruling class as it was formally excluded from party politics. In such a situation, weak social classes found themselves trapped in bureaucratic controls. The running argument in the neo-Marxist literature on the nature of the post-colonial state has been that the state enjoys autonomy mainly due to the weak indigenous propertied classes.
The need felt in civil society to bring about social and economic change and achieve modernisation or development allows the authorities in the post-colonial state to play a central role in all spheres of society. The liberal perspective, as discussed at the outset, also viewed the post-colonial state as playing a central role as modernising state. Being led by the western educated, modern political elite, they were entrusted with the task of following the growth trajectory of the developed western countries. However, the processes of globalisation have led to qualitative changes in the role and significance of the post-colonial state, bringing them under the influence of the transnational capital once again in an incremental manner.

9.11 REFERENCES


Check Your Progress Exercise-1

1) In his path-breaking work, The State in a Post-Colonial Societies, Hamza Alavi explains that the base of the post-colonial state apparatus lies in the classes existing in the colonial era. The colonial state machinery was to subordinate all the original classes like an indigenous bourgeois, the Metropolitan neo-colonist bourgeoisie and the landed class. It did not rest on any of these classes, and on the contrary, the colonial power established a sophisticated, powerful system with strong armed forces and a robust bureaucratic system. He argues that bureaucracy plays a significant role in addressing the day-to-day issues of society.

Check Your Progress Exercise-2

1) The Relative Autonomy theory of the state is based on the Marxist understanding of the state. It believes that the state plays a limited autonomous role in maintaining and stabilising capitalist society. Nicos Poulantzas argued that the state, though relatively autonomous from the capitalist class, nevertheless functions to protect the interests of the capitalist class. Poulantzas explains that the capitalist state directly serves the interests of the capitalist class and the conditions of domination and exploitation. Based on Gramsci’s concept of Cultural Hegemony, Poulantzas argues that suppression and domination are not the only functions of the state; it also obtains the consent of the oppressed.