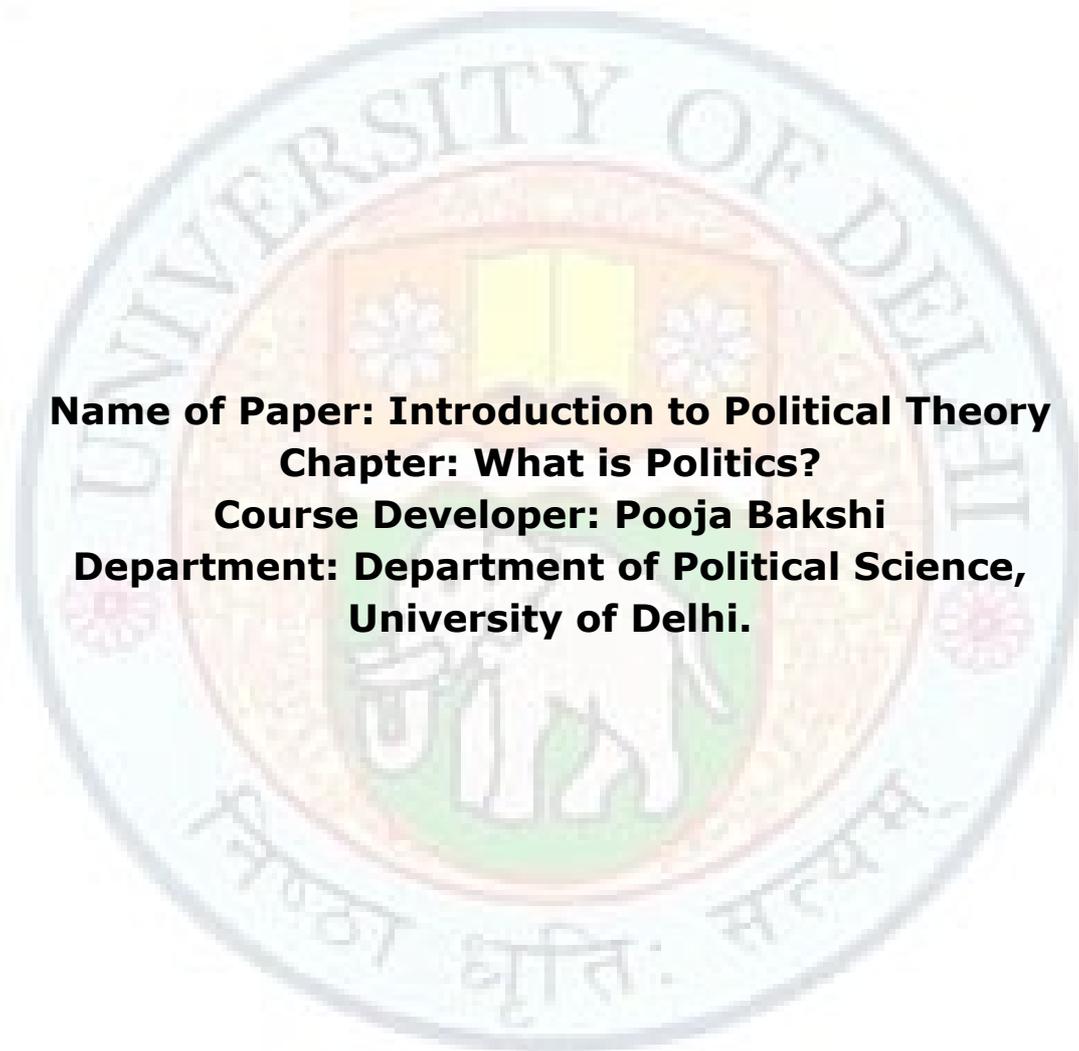


What is Politics?





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## Introduction

It is critical to begin this chapter by asserting that there is no singular definition of 'Politics'. The task of understanding, defining and engaging with politics is complex. Essentially, politics is a term used to denote aspects pertaining to relationships of power and its effects. However, the manner in which these relationships are understood and the definition of power undergoes change depending on the perspective one is examining the question from.

Politics has many competing definitions. It can also be argued that politics is an essentially contested concept<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter an attempt will be made to critically engage with the different competing conceptions of the term 'politics'.

It has been argued that politics means different things in different contexts (Leftwich, 2007, pgs. 3-5). In the United States for instance stress is placed on the functioning of political institutions and process of governance whilst studying politics. Whilst in United Kingdom relatively more stress is placed on an engagement with political philosophy.

In this chapter an attempt will be made to engage with different meanings of the term- Politics. In this first Section different definitions of Politics will be discussed. In Section 2, the political relationship between people, resources and power will be debated upon. In Section 3, the Liberal understanding of the state and politics will be elaborated upon. In section 4, the Marxist view on Politics will be discussed and in Section 5, the feminist views on Politics will be discussed. The final Section will offer some conclusions.

### Section 1: Different definitions of Politics.

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<sup>1</sup> W.B. Gallie provides the following conditions for labeling a concept as an essentially contested one- '(i) It must be appraisive in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement, (ii) this achievement must be of an internally complex character, for all that its worth is attributed to it as a whole. (iii) any explanation of its worth must therefore include reference to the respective contribution of its various parts or features; yet prior to experimentation there is nothing absurd or contradictory in any one of a number of responses...(iv) the accredited achievement must be of a kind that admits of considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances; such modification cannot be prescribed or predicted in advance (v) that each party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those of other parties, and that each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question'. From: Gallie. W. B. 1956-1956. Essentially Contested Concepts. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*. Vol. 56 (1955-1956). Pp. 167-198.

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Many people commonly think of Politics as a dirty phenomenon. Beginning from popular perception on involvement of corruption in political dealings, images of conflict and the ill effects of sectarian interests, Politics is understood as a 'loaded' term. This makes it difficult to argue for the inherent value in doing and studying Politics. Additionally, the lack of consensus about the meaning of the term amongst scholars makes its study a difficult task.

### **a. Understanding Politics as an art of government.**



*Picture:* Otto Von Bismarck, (1 April 1815 – 30 July 1898), was a conservative Prussian statesman who dominated German and European affairs from the 1860s until 1890. Available online- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto\\_von\\_Bismarck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck).

Otto Von Bismarck argued that politics can be understood as an art and not a science. By saying so he meant that politics needed to be understood as the art of running the government in the context of a state and society. This is one of the most influential views about politics. According to this view politics primarily concerns itself with the affairs of the state.

Thus, for instance in the Indian context this would tantamount to studying the different aspects of the Indian government at the centre and the state level. It would mean examining the manner in which the government allocates different resources to different sections of the population. It would also require an examination of the values according to which governmental decisions about allocation of resources takes place. This would include an examination of the processes of deliberation, conciliation and compromise that take place during the process of decision making at the level of the government.

Even though this is one of the most agreed upon views pertaining to the definition of politics, it is considered to be a very narrow view. This view only takes into account the activities of the government personale, politicians, people belonging to pressure groups etc. It does not take into account the activities of other institutions, both national, civil society and international which are political in nature. Nor does it take into account the activities and power dynamics of the home which is very much a

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political space. Governance is an important aspect of politics but it is not the only aspect of doing and studying politics.

Another negative implication of examining politics as only pertaining to the activities of the state and government, is that the negative images of corruption of political leaders comes to over shadow the study of the field itself. People tend to think of politics as a 'dirty, murky and corrupt' exercise as they associate politics only with the activities of corrupt politicians. This is a stereotype that needs to be challenged by expanding the definition of politics and by contextually analyzing the behavior of politicians.

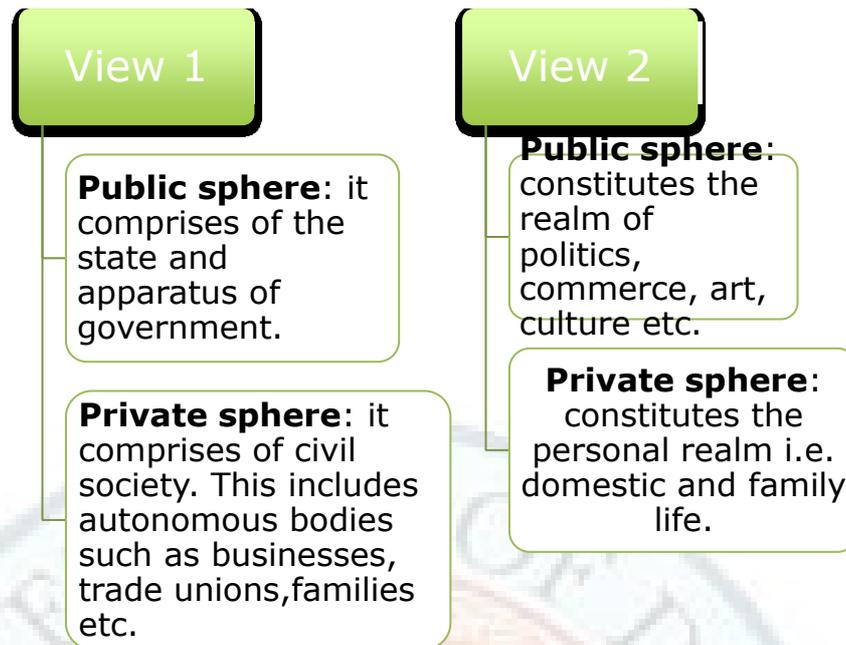
### **b. Understanding Politics in terms of public affairs.**



Picture: Aristotle" by Francesco Hayez (1791–1882). Available online- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle>.

Aristotle argued that it was only by engaging in a political community that a man could lead a good and fulfilling life. In other words from this it can be ascertained that politics has been thought of as an activity involving public affairs.

This is a broader definition than thinking of politics as merely in terms of the activities of governmental actors. Andrew Heywood has argued that the public and private realms can be understood in the following two ways.



According to this classification, the public realm broadly pertains to the state and its activities whereas the private realm broadly pertains to the civil society and its activities. Institutions such as the courts, government, army, police etc would comprise the public realm. These institutions are geared towards organizing the collective public life of people. The private realm includes kinship groups, families, businesses, trade unions, religious groups etc. In other words, politics pertains to the activities of the public institutions and the private institutions are not traditionally considered to be a part of this study.

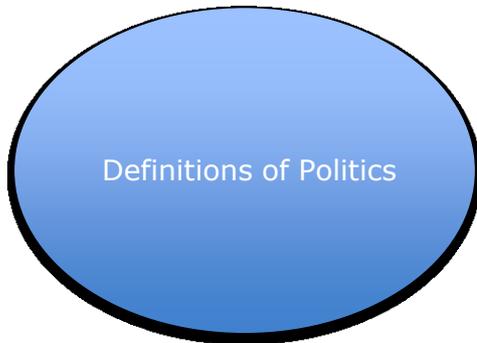
It can be argued that according to the above-mentioned distinction, a few 'public' civil society organizations can be thought of as being a part of the public sphere. For example, businesses, community groups, trade unions etc. therefore these should also be thought of as legitimate part of the study and activity of politics. The private realm, consisting of family and domestic life needs to be excluded from the purview of politics. Liberals have argued that the private realm should function on the basis of personal freedom and individual responsibility and hence should be separated from the public sphere. Feminists, who claim that the private sphere is just as political as the public sphere, have critiqued this notion. This will be discussed in more detail subsequently in this chapter.

## **Section 2: Politics understood in terms of relations between people, resources and power.**

According to this view politics needs to be thought of as all collective social activity, including formal and informal or public and private spheres of human activity. Adrian Leftwich has argued that we need to understand politics in a wholistic sense (Leftwich, A. 2004). It has been argued that we need to move

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away from a definition of politics which sees it only as an activity involving public institutions and state institutions. Towards this understanding he makes the following two arguments. Firstly, it is important to challenge the narrow understanding of politics which sees it as only an activity concerned with governmental institutions.



Andrew Heywood (1994, pg.52) has argued that the following features define Politics. Firstly, politics can be understood as a social activity. This social activity results out of the interaction in between different people. Secondly, as people have different opinions about issues of common interest, diversity is another defining feature of the activity of politics. This diversity of opinions leads to situations of conflicts. Thus, the third defining feature of politics is its identification with dealing with conflicts of interest. Lastly, it is important to point out that politics is about decision making in situations where there is conflict of interest.

Rather it needs to be stressed that politics is a universal feature of human behavior impacting all kinds of human collective activity. Even if two humans engage with one another over certain matters, the engagement can be marked as apolitical engagement; and the same can be true of human engagement in between multiple people.

The second argument made by Leftwich (2004) is that since politics is such a central component of human interaction, whenever we engage with any kind of human behavior we must also work at understanding it politically. The formal definition of politics proposed here is as follows.

"Politics comprises all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby people go about organizing the use, production or distribution of human, natural and other resources in the course of the production and reproduction of their biological and social life", (Leftwich, 2004, pg. 103).

The defining features of this understanding of politics are people, resources and power. By resources we mean both material (land, labour, etc) and non-material (forests, minerals, etc) resources. Education, opportunity to work, freedom to move at night for women, also need to be thought of as resources. Thus, we need to have an expansive definition of resources. Human beings are social in nature and collective activity is a defining aspect of human life. It is only because of the

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ability to engage in collective productive activity that humans have been able to construct such complex societies and states. Industrial production and distribution in the age of neo liberal state and concurrent globalization is made possible by human ability to engage in collective activity.

In the study of human life, there exists a relationship between the manner in which people use and produce resources, this lies at the heart of the study of politics. Power is defined differently by different scholars. Some define power as an ability to get things done, whilst others look at power as force or coercion. The dynamic of power exists in all kinds of human interactions whether it is a relationship between two people, relationship between members of a family, relationships between people of a community or relationships at the level of government or state.

A study of power enables one to understand who and influence whom to do what. Power may be used constructively, for example use of financial resources of the state to provide social security to economically weaker sections of the population. Power may also be used destructively, for instance use of terror tactics by state and non-state actors. There has been a lot of debate in politics on defining what constitutes as constructive and what counts as destructive use of power. Power can accrue to social actors based on their standing in prevalent social hierarchies of gender, class, caste, race, nationality etc. No matter what the definition of power, it cannot be denied that the manner in which, power is used by social actors forms a critical element in the study of politics.

In other words, Leftwich (2004) has tried to elucidate that in all areas of human interaction regarding use, control, and distribution of different resources there exists a social dynamics of cooperation, conflict and negotiation. The use of power is central to this dynamics. All this comprises a study of politics. This approach has also been termed as the political approach to human behavior.

This approach draws from central tenants of the rational choice theory. However there are differences between the rational choice theory and the political approach to human behavior.

## Rational Choice Theory

- The main argument of the Rational Choice Theory is that human beings are rational actors. This implies that in different contexts human make choices in order to maximize their benefits and minimize their losses. These choices are made by individual actors by comparing the outcomes of the choices available to them. This school of thought draws from the work of Utilitarians who argue that individuals make decisions with the aim of maximizing the utility in a given context.
- For example, in a market a consumer who has a choice between two products of the same quality but different prices, the consumer is more likely to buy the product which is good in quality but cheaper than the product which is good in quality but more expensive.

As compared to the above-mentioned model of rational choice theory, the political approach to human behavior espouses that humans rationally seek to advance their interests not just individually but also collectively. Most of the decisions made by humans impact not only their individual lives but lives of people they live with, work with etc. This is so because humans are inevitably involved in collective activities within the family as well as at their workplaces, where decisions about the use and distribution of resources need to be constantly looked into. The study of political approach to human behavior takes all this into account.

### **Section 3: Liberal Understanding of State and Politics.**

An account of a liberal understanding of state would have to start from a narration of the manner in which early social contract theorists conceptualized the necessity for a state. Thomas Hobbes wrote in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century England against a backdrop of an ensuing fight between the hereditary monarchy and the rising bourgeoisie, a civil war between Oliver Cromwell and Charles 1<sup>st</sup>, and a war between England and Spain. Some of the central questions, which his work sought to engage with were; what could be the basis of the legitimacy of the state, could it be possible to resist the monarch legitimately, could the ruler command complete obedience from the people and could there be any limits to the power of the state. To gauge potential answers to these questions, Hobbes argued that it was imperative to study the nature of human society and its constituents i.e. human beings.

By the use of materialist psychology and scientific method, Hobbes argued that a human individual was constituted by physical drives initiating him to move from

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pain to pleasure (Hampton, J. 1986. Pp. 5-27). Broadly all humans were equal in terms of their strength and ability, additionally they all equally had expectations and wanted to work towards satisfying them. Reason was not an inborn quality but had to be cultivated as passions were stronger than reason in men. The human individual was a self-interested being working towards self-preservation or the security of the self. In the state of nature, was construed to be a hypothetical pre-contract situation wherein the state or any other collective authority over men, did not exist. Such a situation resulted in a state of war because each individual was geared towards competition seeking glory, and felt threatened by all other individuals who were potentially seeking the same. In the state of nature all individuals had access to liberty and liberty here implied absence of all restraints. This was a situation in which there also existed law of nature, i.e. precepts, which were found through reason. According to the law of nature, the individual man was forbidden to do anything, which was self-destructive and work towards peace and preservation. Broadly two kinds of rights existed in the state of nature- the right to equality implying that all men were equal and the right to self-preservation. It is also important to point out that for Hobbes, the state of nature was pre political as well as pre social, implying that it was only with the establishment of the social contract that society and the polity would come into being.

Since the state of nature was riddled with uncertainty and fear, men within the state of nature would decide to enter a contract in order to formulate better circumstances for living. The decision to enter into the social contract included that each individual would give up his rights in to the sovereign (the ruler and the state) and the sovereign would in turn protect and safe guard the lives of men providing them security of life and living. What accorded legitimacy to the contract, the state instituted by it and the power accorded to the ruler, was the consent given to the contract by the individuals who constituted it. The basis of political obligation, in other words was this consent, which was to form the basis of the state. The state formation or the constitution of the sovereign could happen in one of two ways: by some man or body of men conquering and subduing the inhabitants (sovereignty by acquisition) or by men agreeing by contract with each other to transfer all their natural powers to some man or body of men (sovereignty by institution).

In this process, Hobbes argued that all men would give up their rights except for one right; the right of self-preservation. In case the sovereign was unable to safeguard their rights, the individuals would have the right to revolt against it. Thus, the main reason that the state was formed was for the protection of the rights of individuals who consented to its formation. The state formed was an absolute state committed to providing security to its inhabitants.

Before critically engaging with Hobbes's conceptualization, it would be helpful to examine another formulation of the social contract, which comes from the liberal tradition, that of John Locke. The period in which Locke wrote, i.e. the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was marked by important economic and political changes, which were taking place in the European society. It was an era in which emergent mercantile groups sought to strengthen, their status in society, through seeking political representation in the government. Additionally, as the nexus between the

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Catholic Church and State authorities weakened, Protestantism emerged as an alternative religious paradigm, which sought to remove the institutions of the Church and clergy as intermediaries between God and man (Hampsher-Monk, I. 1992, Pp. 69-116).

Locke was of the view that individuals (property owning men) were obliged to obey 'a' government only in so far as it was established to defend and protect their life, liberty and property. Locke's main aim was to formulate a theoretical justification to defend possession of private property by individuals, against the threat of being appropriated by royal authorities, and establish the legitimacy of dissident religious practice, i.e. Protestantism.

In order to explicate the rationale for the formulation of the social contract, Locke also started from the description of what human life would be in a hypothetical pre-political though not pre-social, state of nature. According to Locke's account individuals were equal in the state of nature as they all belonged to the same species and yet in the state of nature humans, their property and rights, were imperfectly protected. Iain Hampsher-Monk (1992) suggests what distinguishes Locke's conceptualization of state of nature from that of Hobbes is its moral status,

'for Locke, the state of nature is not descriptive of a pattern of behavior at all; it refers to the rules which men are morally obliged to obey when they have not contracted or promised to modify their behavior in any way. Thus, the status of Locke's state of nature is essentially moral, whilst the status of Hobbes's is essentially behavioural (Hampsher-Monk, I. 1992. Pg. 84)'.

The state of nature was not one that could ensure security of men as they were still prone to violence and selfishness. The law of nature, for Locke, imposed limitations on man's natural freedom, this was also a moral law or rather a moral duty. Since men could disobey the law of nature, in order to better protect their right to life, liberty and property; they would decide to enter into a social contract, which would constitute the state. Liberty is also a property right for Locke, because to have property in one's person implies the right to think, speak, and act freely. Locke defended personal independence and freedom as fundamental human rights. None had a right to coerce or dominate another in the state of nature. Everyone had an equal right to one's natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man. Locke, argued that it was human labour which distinguished what was privately owned from what could be commonly held. Labour was the unquestioned property of the labourer, and by mixing his labour with a piece of land, an individual acquired the right to whatever he had made of that material. Locke argued that the right to private property arises because by labor a man extends, his own personality into the objects produced. Human beings have property in their persons and hence a right to life, it follows that they have property in those possessions that they have labored to obtain. Yet an individual was required to leave as much as he claimed in terms of his property for another.

The social contract was formulated on the basis of consent. While 'express' consent implied, that once consent was given to a certain form of government by a man, he was bound to obey the orders of the government till it ceased to exist;

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'tacit' consent meant, simply the enjoyment of the benefits of society or absence of dissent. Locke suggested that the social contract should result in the formation of a constitutional monarchy preferably. The purposes for which the state and government was formed included protection of rights of men, and the conduct of government with accordance with the laws of nature.

The state, which resulted from the social contract of early liberals; Hobbes as well as that of Locke was to be committed to maintaining the security of rights, liberties and lives of men who consented to form it. The state was not affiliated to the interests of any particular group of men, but was supposed to function towards the security of all men. In that sense it was to be a neutral state. Locke argued that the state should be a minimal state so as to ensure that the rights of men do not get infringed upon.

The social contract theorists have been criticized for not having acknowledged that the state they sought to create was one, which was only geared towards protecting the lives and interests of men belonging to the mercantile and early bourgeoisie class. This state did not seem to be cognizant of rights and interests of women, slaves, men and women of different races, or men and women of different classes. C. B. Macpherson has argued that both Hobbes and Locke through their theorizations sought to justify and create grounds for a possessive market society. Such a society was to be marked by no authoritative allocation of work, man's labour was to be a commodity and most importantly market relations were to permeate all other social relations (Macpherson, C.B. 1962). Whilst Hobbes aimed at formulating a theory about men who had been socialized/civilized into being participants of a market society, Locke sought to justify accumulation of private property, which was an essential part of the capitalist market economy. By taking this reading of Hobbes and Locke into account it can further be argued that they sought to justify the establishment of a state committed to the interests and security of only a select section of the population under its ambit; men who were members of the emerging capitalist market economy.

Expanding the ambit of liberalism and bringing in democratic values and norms into the frame, it has been argued that utilitarian theorists in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jeremy Bentham and James Mill). David Held has argued that for these thinkers,

'liberal democracy was associated with a political apparatus that would ensure the accountability of the governors to the governed. Only through democratic government would there be a satisfactory means for choosing, authorizing and controlling political decisions commensurate with public interest...Democratic government is required to protect citizens from despotic use of political power whether it be by a monarch or other groups' (Held. D. 1989. Pg. 42).

Held suggests that the liberal understanding of state was premised upon the following central tenets- conceptualizing the individual as the main unit of analysis and theorizing, creating a distinction between state and society in order to delimit the functions of the state, restriction of the role of the state to the bare minimum Laissez faire functions (ensuring that the state would not interfere

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with the functioning of the market), respecting each individual's rights and liberties.

C.B. Macpherson has argued that in the western world, as a result of various conflicts, liberalism transformed into liberal democracy (Macpherson, C. B. 1966). He argued that liberal democracy could imply, a form of organizing political life taking into account principles of capitalist market relations or it could also mean the equal access to freedom for all to utilize and develop their abilities. Liberal democracy has attempted at combining these two meanings, which in essence are opposed to each other leading to conflicts and difficulties. Macpherson has suggested that liberal democracy started when by the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal theorists came to believe that franchise would not be a threat to the right to property. In other words, what distinguishes these theorists beginning from Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, from their democratic predecessors is that they formulated their understanding of democracy keeping a class divided society in mind.

The point one is then trying to make is that from the liberal perspective the state has been thought to be committed to principles of neutrality i.e. not favoring any particular set of interest groups in society, liberty and equality. With the movement for universal citizenship accompanied with social movements for gender justice, removal of racial discrimination, abolition of slavery; the contours of the ambit over which the state was to protect life, liberty, rights and provide equal treatment; has expanded. The liberal state also metamorphosed into the welfare state in Britain around 1840's-1850's onwards, in United States of America and parts of Europe in 1930's onwards and in other parts of the world, post the second world war, post 1945. The welfare state was committed to providing an economic security net (translating into employment security, health service benefits, cheaper educational services, better insurance policies, regulation of market) for especially the economically weaker sections of the population during periods of economic turmoil. It aimed at mitigating the effects of economic recession induced by the activities of the free market. However, towards the 1970's there has been a return to the neo-liberal state committed to the reduction in the expenditure of the state. This has also implied removing state restrictions on the market to provide more incentive to individual entrepreneurship.

Some scholars such as Held (central perspectives on the modern state) have argued that Max Weber provided a political sociology perspective of the state. Weber argued that,

'ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific means peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely, the use of force' (Weber. M. 1970, pg. 111).

The argument went further to assert that the use of force was something essential to the state without which it could not function. The state had been able to claim monopoly over use of coercive force. This implied that the state could legitimately use force for its purposes and sanction the extent to which organizations and individuals other than the state were permitted to use/not use force. Additionally, the bureaucracy was also indispensable for the modern state.

Bureaucratic organization, combined secrecy, legitimacy and legal rationality, making it effective and efficient. The state was a centrally, bureaucratically organized administrative and legal order.

## **Section 4: Marxist views on Politics.**

The main argument of the Marxists is that politics cannot be understood in isolation from economics and social structures operating in the world. The relationship between Capitalism and political formations needs to be analyzed. It was Karl Marx who took this task upon himself. Marx can be thought of as a dissident thinker to the extent that he challenged the dominant world view of his times. Most theorizations preceding Marx conceptualized capitalism and the corresponding socio-political arrangements based on liberal or liberal democratic principles, as a progressive one. This glosses over the fact that democratic rights had to be fought for within the liberal capitalist framework of State and Society and there existed no natural corollary between liberal States transforming into liberal-democratic States. A liberal State is one which performs minimal functions of governance and maintaining law and order and safeguards the right to property in order to enable capitalism, in the economic sphere to grow and flourish.

A liberal democratic state on the other hand accords rights of political participation to all citizens and consequently its decision making responds to pressures from different locations in society such as from the property owners as well as the non property owners. On the contrary Marx argued that a society and polity based capitalism as a mode of production was essentially flawed and would eventually have to give way to a relatively more perfect form i.e. to communist society.

Capitalism, for Marx was characterized by the prevalence of private ownership of means of production (consisting primarily of land and capital). Since only a select section of the population had control over the means of production, the rest of the population had no other alternative but to sell their labour power.

There existed an exploitative relationship between the owners of means of production and the labour class based on a system of wage labour. This implied that the value generated by the labourer in the production process was appropriated by the owners of means of production (or capitalist/bourgeois class) and the labourer in turn was minimally remunerated enough to enable his survival as a labourer.

Additionally, Marx also pointed out that the dominant assumption of the liberal democrats about the State being a neutral arbiter among competing interests prevailing in political and social life; was flawed. Unequal access to economic resources implied unequal access to power towards influencing the processes of the State. Scholars (including Hal Draper) have pointed out that Marx had two differing conceptions of the State in his work. One regarding the Special theory of the State wherein the State was thought to be 'an instrument in the hands of the

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bourgeois class'. Whilst under the General theory of State, it was considered to have exercised 'relative autonomy' from the direct interests of the bourgeois class in order to maintain the long term advance of the capitalist system itself. Whilst the Special theory of State was applicable to societies marked by the domination of a particular class i.e. the bourgeois, the general theory of State was applicable to societies which were under rapid transition (for example during times of English and French revolutions) where no 'one' class was able to singularly establish dominance over the State.

Following from both these accounts, Marx argued that 'rights' could only be realized in a limited manner in a bourgeois democracy because political equality was meaningless without creating economic equality. A bourgeois democracy on the other hand was marked by private ownership of means of production which would lead to private accumulation on account of exploiting the labour class, resulting in wide spread economic inequality.

This exploitative relationship based on surplus extraction, division of labour and specialization of work led to the alienation of labouring class from the production process, from the product being produced and eventually from their inherent creative essence as human beings (the view of man being a homo-faber or capable of creative activity). Marx pointed out that gradually the means of production would become concentrated in fewer hands and the miseries of the labouring class became more pronounced. As the labouring class became aware and mobilized itself to overthrow the system, a dialectical engagement between prevailing the contradictions of a capitalist system would eventually lead to its collapse much in the same way in which historically previous imperfect forms of economic and social order (such as primitive communism, slavery, and feudalism) had given way to capitalism. The alternative form of economic order in the communism was to be based on common ownership of means of production and distribution.

The formation of the Soviet Union, States subscribing to communism in Eastern Europe and the People's Republic of China, sought to establish and run States on the basis of socialist tenets. Even though socialism offered an alternative to the class exploitative nature of capitalism, it seems to have failed to grasp the importance of allowing and nurturing internal dissent whether within a socialist party or in a socialist state. Internal democratic centralism in socialist parties clearly has been more of a failure than a success and more troublingly the prescribed illegitimacy of alternative social groups who did not owe their allegiance to the party has limited spaces for articulation of dissent.

In order to critically engage with the state, it is important to examine the marxist theorizations of the state. The marxist theorizations of state have questioned the liberal understanding of the state as being a neutral arbiter of interest. It has been argued that though the state was one among Karl Marx's areas of interest, he didn't write a systematic body of literature on the subject<sup>2</sup>. Karl Marx himself

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Miliband writes; 'Marx himself never attempted a systematic analysis of the state. But his first lengthy piece of writing after his doctoral dissertation, namely *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State* (1843), is in large part concerned with the state; and the

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has broadly taken two positions on the nature of the state. One of the positions can best be described by the oft quoted statement;

'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx, K and Engels, F. 1848).

This has also been termed as the special theory of the state, which provides an instrumentalist understanding of the manner in which the state becomes an instrument of the bourgeoisie towards realizing their goals. It is important to outline that this understanding takes into account the fact that the bourgeoisie is an internally differentiated group (differing for instance on the nature of work they do, scale of production etc), which has broadly similar interests (such as commitment to capitalist growth) but might have different short term interests. Then, perhaps the interpretation changes a little, what Marx is implying is that the state executive is not under sway of the bourgeoisie but the functioning of the state executive is constrained by the 'common affairs' of the 'whole bourgeoisie'. The task of the state then includes bringing together the whole bourgeoisie inspite of their differences and ensuring impetus towards further capitalist advancement.

Miliband (1983) further suggests that Marx critiqued Hegal's understanding of the state as representing general interests of the society. Instead of Hegal's understanding, Marx argued in, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State* (1843), that the state was committed to interests associated with the defenders of private property and that full emancipation could only be achieved through abolishing private property.

As per the other understanding developed by Marx, Pranab Bardhan has argued that in *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* (1852) and some other articles, Marx suggested;

'the bourgeoisie voluntarily abdicate from power (as in the contemporary Bonapartist regime in France) or abstain from taking it (as in England under the Whigs) because they perceive that their interests may be better served by remaining outside politics. This is the origin of the neo-marxist idea of the state being 'relatively autonomous' of the dominant economic class even though it acts on behalf of the latter and safeguards its interests. To secure the general and long-run interests of the dominant classes, and its hegemony over the dominated classes, it may be necessary for the state to acquire freedom of action or functional autonomy with regard to the particular and short-run interests of individual parts of the dominant class' (Bardhan, P. 1984).

Bonapartism crystalized as a situation wherein the ruling class in capitalist society would no longer be in a position to maintain its rule through constitutional means. Herein the executive branch of the state came under the rule of one individual, who attained dictatorial powers over all other parts of the State and society. It

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subject occupies an important place in many of his works, notably in his historical writings, for instance in *Class Struggles* (1850), *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* (1852) and *Civil War in France* (1871). Engels too deals with the state in many of his writings, for instance in *Anti-Duhring* (1878) and in *Origin of the Family* (1894)'. In: Miliband, R. 1983. *State*. In: Bottomore, T. et al. eds. 1983,1991. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought: Second edition*. United States of America: Blackwell Publishers. p. 520.

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emerged out of a society in transition where the bourgeoisie has lost in a way and the proletariat had not been able to capture power. Miliband (1983) further adds that according to this reading of the state, it has been understood as an institution which is not just relatively autonomous but is almost independent of society. Such a state has also been characterized by an advanced and developed bureaucracy and military; as the state uses force for the attainment of its goals and the threat to use force to maintain its continuance and legitimacy.

Louis Althusser has further nuanced the Marxist understanding of the state (Althusser, L. 1971). Althusser has summarized the Marxist position on the state as follows; the state is understood as the repressive state apparatus, secondly it is important to differentiate between the state apparatus and state power, as the main aim of class struggle is to be able to capture state power and in order to be able to do so the class struggle has to capture the state apparatus, this needs to be done to ensure that the proletariat are able to destroy the bourgeoisie state apparatus, consequently replace it and eventually move towards the demolition of the state apparatus.

The main aim of the state power under capitalism continues to be to ensure the perpetuation of existing unequal relations of production and to ensure the conditions favourable for the reproduction of the productive forces. Further, Althusser suggests that this is only a descriptive understanding of the state and in order to sufficiently nuance it, the state apparatus needs to be broken down into two components i.e. the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus. The former i.e. the repressive state apparatus comprises the administration, the government, the police, the army, the courts of law, the prisons etc. These function in unity and primarily operate through violent repressive mechanisms, Althusser clarifies that this includes administrative repression and that it may take a physically violent, as well as a non-physical form. The repressive state apparatus secondarily function through ideology, this means that the repressive state apparatus also through ideology in order to ensure their own cohesion and to promulgate their values externally but they primarily operate through direct repression. The main aim of the repressive state apparatus is to ensure the political circumstances necessary for the reproduction of the exploitative relations of production. This also ensures the political conditions necessary for the working of the ideological state apparatuses.

In contrast to this, the ideological state apparatus consists of the religious institutions such as the church, the educational system including schools and colleges etc, the family, the political system including political parties, the trade unions, modes of mass communication such as the press, radio, television and the cultural ideological state apparatus including literature, the arts and sports. The ideological state apparatus, even though diverse, function primarily through ideology i.e. the ideology of the ruling class. This apparatus allows for the existence of space for the expression of the contradictions between the capitalist class and the proletariat, yet this apparatus is unified by the ruling ideology or the ideology of the ruling class. Further, Althusser clarifies that in this context, ideology needs to be thought of as the depiction of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. In other words it is the function of

ideology to camouflage the exploitative relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in between the ruling classes and the classes being ruled.

## Section 5: Feminist understanding of Politics.

Feminists have argued that the earlier conceptualizations of politics did not take into account the experiences of women. It is a well-established fact that there isn't any singular 'feminism' but there exist multiple feminisms and there isn't any one overarching women's movement but there have been many. Alison Jagger has contended that contemporary feminists (according to her account these include- liberal feminists, radical feminists and socialist feminists) form a collective in so far as they oppose women's oppression, however there exists disagreement about the nature of this oppression, the forms it can take as well as the methods/strategies which can be used to combat it (Jagger, A. M. 1983, pg. 353). Perhaps this would require some elaboration. Feminism has also been a strand of thinking and action, which is committed to a critical engagement with patriarchal power and a corresponding quest to understand and challenge the subordination of women in all spheres of life. Patriarchy can be defined as;

"Rule by the father'. A doctrine especially associated with Filmer: (who argued that) political authority was divine authority, descended from Adam through the kings of Israel to modern kings. Thus it justified the divine right of kings. The word is also used by feminists to decry the practice, whether principled or unthinking, of giving primacy to fathers, sons, and/or men over mothers, daughters, and/or women. Patriarchal practices of all sorts are wide spread even in societies, which claim to practice equal opportunities' (Jagger, A. M. 1983, pg. 353).

In the rest of this section, an analysis would ensue regarding the basic tenets of liberal, radical and socialist feminist scholarship and their conceptualization of state and patriarchy.

One of the most significant liberal value is the belief in the intrinsic dignity and worth of every human individual; a worth which is based on the individual's capacity for reason. Rationality is considered to be a mental capacity, and is distinguished from needs and desires of the body per say. Abstract individualism implies that each human individual has desires/ interests, which in principle can be fulfilled in separation from similar desires and interests of others. The argument is that individuals are driven by a fundamental desire to acquire the maximum access to resources to fulfill their desires, as much as possible. Since every individual is worthy and is *equally* capable of reason, all individuals are considered equal. However, the resources required to meet individual desires are limited leading to a situation of competition. The primary emphasis of the liberals is to devise social institutions, which could protect the individual and allow for the right to maximum access to resources to fulfill desires. Liberals suggest that since the individual is capable of maximizing 'his' self-interest, the state's role in society should be limited essentially to maintenance of law and order, peace and securing the boundaries of the state itself. Further, liberals argue that human nature essentially remains the same, hence vouch for their understanding of human nature to be universal and unchanging (Jagger, A. M. 1983, pp. 27-50).

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Given the brief history of colonialism and capitalist expansion discussed in this chapter, it can be concluded that liberals understood human nature in their societies i.e. in the west quite differently than what they understood human nature in the rest of the world which they sought to control and exploit. It would be worthwhile to examine the manner in which the tenets of liberalism's understanding of human nature only applied to western men and not to western women. Jagger has argued that early liberal feminists in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century saw their task as fairly straightforward; since liberal theorists had ascribed rights to men on the basis of their capacity to reason, all liberal feminists had to prove was that women were equally capable of reason (Jagger, A. M. 1983, pp. 173-206).

Liberal feminists argued that women and men are equal in their mental capacity to reason, but due to socialization and lack of adequate educational opportunities, women have been unable to develop their capacity to reason to the extent that men have succeeded in doing so. Women have been confined to the home, care-taking of children, old people, maintenance of the house, cooking etc; leaving them no time or resources to realize their rational potential and individual desires. The sexual division of labour between men and women whereby men were supposed to work outside the confines of the home/private, and where women were ascribed certain roles in the home and were not to move out into the public domain; was unjust as it was not freely chosen but imposed. This imposition came from a male order, which sought to create a hierarchy between men and women, ensuring that women would be denied social-political-economic rights, education and resources for self-fulfillment. Men were also able to control women sexually as access to methods of contraception, was not readily available. Later, feminists argued that even if women worked outside of their homes, they were paid less than their male counterparts.

Whilst arguing for reforms, liberal feminists suggested that the state intervene to ensure that women get educational opportunities, equal pay for equal work, access to contraception, right for political participation. The state was thought to be a neutral arbiter of individual interests and hence capable of protecting women's interests. Liberal feminists visualized the role of the state to be more expansive than what traditionally liberals accept or argue for. They also fought for legal reforms for the above-mentioned concerns. The limitations of liberal feminists were quite far reaching. The disdain they had for physical work disabled them from acknowledging and understanding the relationship women have with their bodies which is not only inhibiting but could potentially be fulfilling. The distinction they made between household work and official work/ work in the public domain, further strengthened the stereotype that women who did household work were in some ways inferior to the women who worked outside the home. Liberal feminists were not able to appreciate and evaluate the significance of manual work. Liberal feminists were not able to truly understand the nexus between patriarchy, capitalism and the state, nor were they able to truly engage with concerns of women outside of their own context, namely women in the colonies.

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In contrast to this, socialist feminism offers a vastly different account of human nature, subordination of women and possibilities of change. Socialist feminism emerged in 1970's with the backdrop of the rise of the New Left, movement for civil rights, and student movements in the west (Jagger, A. M. 1983, pp. 123-167). The main aim that socialist feminists set for themselves was to integrate the insights of radical feminism and insights of Marxist analysis in order to structurally understand reasons for women's subordination and challenge the same. Taking on from historical materialist method of traditional Marxism, socialist feminists argue that capitalism, male dominance, racism and imperialism are intertwined and mutually reinforce each other. Women's inner lives as well as their bodies and behavior are structured by gender, this structuring is not innate but socially imposed and engineered. Specific characteristics imposed on women and men are related in a systematic manner to the historically existing system of organizing social production.

Gender structuring and ascription of gender specific roles for women happens in childhood itself and is reinforced through the education system, family, media, work place etc. an obvious manifestation of sexual division of labour is visible in the manner in which women have always been associated with/ defined by their sexual and procreative labour, inspite of the fact that historically women have performed different kinds of labour. Taking on from radical feminists, socialist feminists agree that sexual activity, child bearing, child rearing are forms of social practices which embody power relations and thus need to be analyzed as variable categories within the mode of production.

Juliet Mitchell has offered the following account of the differences between radical feminists and socialist feminists (Mitchell, J. 1971). Radical feminist analysis emerged in 1960's predominantly in United States. They argued that men were the oppressors of women and all societies had been male supremacist. Male domination came out of a psychological power struggle, which men won. The only way to change this situation was if all women were to unite against male dominated society. They suggested that women needed to start respecting their own bodies, their ability to procreate, their ability to emote and feel etc. rather than forcefully attempting to become more rational. Since the category of being a 'woman' was a social construct, it could only be changed by allowing women to assert their own agency and choice in all spheres of life. Socialist feminist on the other hand acknowledged that it was not men but the capitalist system in collaboration with efforts to strengthen patriarchy, which needed to be analyzed as a causative agent in women's subordination. Women's oppression starts when their domestic labour goes unaccounted for and when they are not given any share in the private property.

Socialist feminists have also argued extending the Marxist theory of alienation, that women in patriarchal capitalist societies get reduced to instruments for men's sexual pleasure within the family leading to an alienation from their bodies itself (Jagger, 1983). Additionally, they suffer alienation from their work as they are not able to associate with the finished products, which they participate in creating. Women's work is also considered inferior to that of men. Thus, the ruling group in production of children, material production, and sexual and emotional satisfaction has predominantly been men and the laboring group has

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been women. Men as a class group have exploited women as a class group. The consolidation of the nuclear family which has been a by product of capitalist growth, has increased women's responsibilities at home and at the work place and has reduced social and collective mechanisms of sharing responsibilities in both contexts. They critique the public-private distinction by arguing that this enabled a fake separation of women from the mode of production, threw a veil on the role women performed as mothers in child bearing and child rearing, making the connection between women's public and private subordination invisible.

Mitchell (1971) suggested that in order to change the position of women in society their roles in production relations would have to be acknowledged as in equal pay for equal work. Women's role in reproduction and child rearing would have to be accounted for and facilitated, and men's control over women's sexuality would have to be removed. To accomplish these goals, socialist feminists urge women to participate in activities of collective women's organizations, which could put pressure on the capitalist system, as well as on the state to bring about reforms. Socialist feminists have argued for further democratization. Thus the state's role in production relations is acknowledged but state intervention was still thought to be one of the primary tools.

Thus, the above-mentioned discussion on the work of western feminist scholars helps in the process of understanding the acutely ambivalent relationship, which the women's movement has had with the modern nation state. On the one hand feminist scholarship has exposed the sexist and patriarchal nature of the state whilst on the other hand it has been pointed out that in the bid to transform unequal relations between men and women in society, women's movements has had to rely severely on state intervention, inspite of the various inadequacies and caveats thereof. Since the state forms a locus of all forms of social power (Mohanty, M. 1982), in order to engage with patriarchy, an engagement with the state is quintessential. Hope has been that the state has the potential for being a neutral arbiter of interests, or atleast that some parts of the state can be approached for the same. This is an extremely significant insight and would influence the manner in which the relationship between the state and the conceptualization of security would be examined from a post-colonial feminist lens.

Feminist scholarship on/from post-colonial and third world contexts has tread a difficult course towards distinguishing itself from western/first world feminist scholarship, whilst at the same time ensuring the existence of a painstaking and There has been a need to do this in order to critically engage with an essentializing image of the third world women accruing to the writings of many western/first world feminists. Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued that the scholarship of western/first world feminist produces a certain kind of image of 'third world women',

'This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern,

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as having control over their bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions' (Mohanty, C. T. 2003, pg. 22).

Third world feminists have argued against such an essentializing image of women in the third world. Instead the specific and differential contexts of the first world and the third world have been examined in third world feminist studies in order to contextualize the differences and similarities between first world and third world women, and to dismantle stereotypes of third world and first world women. This argument would be developed in the following section. However before embarking on this journey, it is essential to outline the broad concerns of post-colonial feminists.

Sara Mills suggests that post-colonial feminists though are not a unified group; they have reacted against lack of address of issues pertaining to gender in the work of post-colonial theorists, whilst at the same time they have criticized universalizing tendencies prevalent in the work of western feminists (Mills, S. 1998, pg. 98). Mills (1998) suggests that post-colonial feminist scholarship has been committed to the 'worlding' of feminist theory, this implies shifting the concern of feminist theory from a central concern with middle-class, white English speaking women, towards developing a focus on women belonging to different cultural and national contexts.

### **Section 6: Conclusion.**

Each theory about 'politics', claims credentials as the ultimate word on the subject. The theories and stories cover a wide range of aspects. The range of theories include, the liberal perspective, the marxist perspective, the feminist perspective, etc. which are either in the process of establishing their credibility as formidable perspectives, or have not succeeded in doing so. Each of these claim that their interpretation provides 'the' panoptic view about politics. In other words each of these perspectives claim that only through the pursuit of their specific method of examination of the processes associated with the state, can the 'correct' and overarching 'panoptic' understanding of the 'politics' be developed. However, it needs to be pointed out that each of these theories adds critical components to the manner in which politics needs to be understood. Only in learning from each of these perspectives together can we arrive at a holistic understanding of politics.

## Exercise

1. Write an essay substantiating the claim that Politics is an essentially contested concept.
2. What is the Liberal understanding of state and politics?
3. What is the Marxist view of Politics?
4. What is the Feminist view of Politics?
5. What are the different definitions of Politics?
6. Write an essay on the view that Politics is all about the relationship between people, resources and power.

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