

**Discipline course -1**

**Semester -1**

**Paper – Understanding Political Theory**

**Lesson- Power**

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## 1. Introduction :

The use of the word 'Power' in everyday life is very common. In social and political discourse too, this term finds a central place. Which government is in power? Cold war rivalry was between the two superpowers? India is an emerging power, democracy gives power to people; these are some of the very common expressions and statements of everyday political discussion. However, when we move to understand our common expressions and statements, we feel confused. Since, this term is used so widely in English language that it evades a simple meaning. The concept of power is also central to a theoretical understanding of politics. Interestingly, sometimes the politics itself is defined as a "power game". The concept of power is also closely linked with the other central concepts of political theory. The state is also seen as an institution having monopoly over force. And scholars ask how does legitimate force connects to the notion of power. Hence any discussion about state will involve the concept of power. Another central concept of political theory is the question of Liberty. Mostly the discussion about liberty revolves around state's power to interfere in an individual's life and an individual's positive capacity to do something. Once again, an understanding about power is essential to probe the question of liberty. Similarly, the concepts of equality and justice discusses about the distribution of power in society. The concept of citizenship is meant to give power to citizens and the notion of democracy revolves around giving power to people. According to Elster, power is "the most important single idea in political theory, comparable perhaps to utility in economics". Therefore given the importance and prevalence of the use of the term power in common life and its centrality as a concept in political theory, it is important to ponder over the concept of power.

Given the confusion and the frequency of the use of the term itself, the natural question is how to study power? There are various examples of the use of this term in common life. The electrical power, the will power, the mechanical power etc., hence, we recognize the power of objects, beings, institutions and physical as well as metaphysical phenomena's. However, here our focus is on power in social situations. Therefore, we narrow down to dimensions of power in society and study this in social and political philosophy. Despite narrowing down to social power, we find that the concept of power is the most intriguing concept in social and political theory. There are numerous conceptions of power, which explain it very differently. Dahl, Arendt, Giddens, Foucault seems to be in radical disagreement over the nature, basis and definition of power. One of the major causes of this radical disagreement about the notion of power is due to power being a 'family resemblance' concept. According to Wittgenstein a family resemblance concept does not share a single essence, rather they embody a cluster of concepts with overlapping characteristics. Hence while studying power we have to acknowledge that 'Power' covers a cluster of social phenomena. And its treatment by a scholar is located within certain context.

When we are studying the concept of power, we should remember that power is an essentially 'Contested concept' (Lukes). It is essentially contested because there are hardly any value free statements or discussions about power. And everyone is describing power in view of his interest. Therefore the conceptualization of power presupposes some purpose, and that presupposition comes from the authors understanding of contemporary social, political and ethical life. According to Allan Ball the concept of power is a 'peculiarly problematic concept'. Michael, J. Oakeshot says that power is now the most abused word in our language of politics. The contestation about the concept of power is mainly because of the lack of agreement about the definition, function, dimension, basis, nature, operation and focus

of power. The Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences<sup>1</sup> mentions five major contentions about the concept of Power in social and political philosophy:

- i) What is the source of power; does it come from the actions of the individuals or is it a by-product of broader social structure?
- ii) Is power a resource or a capacity that can lie dormant, or do it only come to existence when it is exercised?
- iii) Does power refer to the ability to achieve certain desired outcomes, or is it a relationship between agents where one exercises power over another?
- iv) Does power necessarily involve domination, coercion, or constraint, or can it be based on consent?
- v) Is power exercised only where the consequences of a certain action are intended, or do unintended or unforeseen consequences also count as evidence of the exercise of power?

We will study the concept of power, keeping in view the above mentioned contentions. For the purpose of clarity of understanding we will proceed by asking several questions:

- i) What is power? We will start with a provisional definition and then move on to highlight some other definitions of power.
- ii) How to distinguish power? We will distinguish power from other related terms.
- iii) What is the relationship between power and authority? One of the most important debates in the political theory is about power and authority.
- iv) What are the important theories of power? In this section we will explain the views of various social and political thinkers.

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<sup>1</sup> edited by William Darity  
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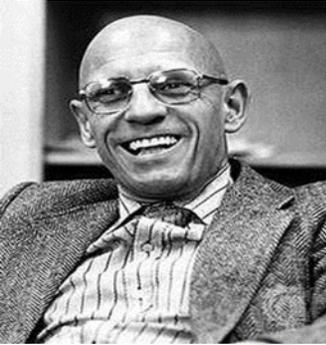
## 2. What is Power? :

Generally, **power** is understood as the ability/or a collection of abilities to influence the circumstances/events/others to achieve self/targeted interest.

The English noun, power, derives from the Latin, 'Potere', which stresses potentiality and means 'to be able'. Most of the dictionaries of English language define power as the ability/capacity to do something/to influence others. This can provide us a provisional definition of power to start with. Generally, power is understood as the ability/or a collection of abilities to influence the circumstances/events/others to achieve self/targeted interest.

According to Dahl, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do."

According to Foucault, "power is not a thing but a relation. It is not simply repressive but it is productive. Power is exercised throughout the social body. Power operates at the most micro levels of social relations. Power is omnipresent at every level of the social body".



**Michel Foucault** (1926 –1984) was a French Philosopher, historian, social theorist and literary critic. He was one of the most influential philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His theories are concerned about issues of power and knowledge in society and social control. His major works include:

*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, The History of Sexuality.*

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Foucault5.jpg>

R.H.Tawney, "Power is the capacity of an individual or a group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner which he desires, and to prevent his own conduct being modified in the manner which he does not".

Lukes define power as, "A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests".

In social and political theory, various scholars define power according to their own conceptions/notions of power. Therefore we find a great variety. Before moving forward to analyse the concept of power we can identify certain common features from the definitions of power.

First, power is a relational concept. It means power is exercised always in relation to other. Whenever power is exercised another individual/entity must be there over which the power is to be exercised.

Second, power is always marginal. Actor X has marginal power, in comparison to actor Y in a given situation to do activity Z.

Third, power is also bilateral. According to Ramaswamy, a leader has to take into account the needs, desires, demands of those over whom he commands. Lasswell and Kaplan say that 'those whose acts are affected also participate in decision making: by conformity or disregard of the policy, they help determine whether it is or is not in fact a decision'.

Fourth, power is dynamic and specific. It means that power is not constant in all time and place. The power to do something or influence events, changes according to specific time and place. For example a police officer might be powerful in his district but not in a foreign country.

### **3. Analysis of Power :**

The exercise of power is a matter of will. Those who exercise it have a choice to exercise it. Similarly those over whom it is exercised, it must be in opposition to their interest and volition. Generally we see power in active (manifest) and inactive (latent) forms. The agent having power in any of these forms can get the change in activity of the other agent. Power can take different forms but it is certainly not to be confused with its forms. Ellen Grigsby highlights four different forms of power. According to him, in actual political relationships one type of power is rarely found in isolation from other types. In practice, power generally possesses a blended quality, with one type of power blending into and being used simultaneously with another.

'Force is exercise of power by physical means'. Here the agent who exercises power creates obstacles for other agent or agents. This can involve physical violence, boycotts, riots, revolution, rape, terrorist activities, stopping the movement etc. Essentially, it restricts the freedom of other agents in an attempt to achieve the interest of the agent exercising force. Force can be both violent and non-violent. Although, we find frequent examples of violent

use of force, but there are major examples of non-violent use of force. Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent struggle against British was an example of non-violent force. American civil right leader Martin Luther king had also championed a non-violent use of force.

"Persuasion is nonphysical power in which the agent using power makes its use of power clear and known to the agent over whom power is exercised". Here the agent A will argue with the agent B about right or wrong and convince the agent B to do otherwise as he would have do without the persuasion. Persuasion is always non - violent. Persuasion is prevalent in politics and especially in democratic politics. It involves, 'Lobbying, speechmaking, debating, writing letters, issuing position papers, and making proclamations in the form of court decisions, executive orders, laws, and policies'. The most important point in persuasion is that the agent who is exercising power makes his intentions clear to the agent over whom the power is exercised. The work of the early nationalists of Indian national movement was an example of persuasion.

Unlike persuasion, Manipulation involves 'concealment of intent' on the part of the agent exercising power. Like persuasion it is the non-physical use of power. The agent over whom the power is exercised is unaware about the exercise of power. Essentially, manipulation is difficult to resist, because how can one resist something which he is not aware about. This type of power is also very frequently used in politics. However it is difficult to verify the use of manipulation.

According to Ellen Grigsby, 'Exchange is a type of power involving incentives, in which one agent gives another agent an item in return for another item. One agent can obtain an objective or exercise power over another agent by giving the second agent the incentive to concur with the first agent's will; if the second agent knows he/she will be rewarded, the

second agent has an incentive to concur. Power has been exercised, insofar as the second agent concurred with the first agent's wishes as a result of having been influenced by the incentive'. In politics, exchange is a very common medium to exercise power. Especially, powerful countries provide economic assistance to poor countries, to get something out from them. Exchange is little difficult to analyse. The agent over whom power is exercised is aware, but since he is also gaining something he might not recognize the extent of the impact.

#### **4. Power and Authority :**

Power and Authority are two terms which are very often used interchangeably and even confused as meaning the same thing. The reason behind this confusion is that despite their difference, there is an 'indissoluble link' between these two terms. Generally they are never found apart. We have seen in the definition of power that power is the capacity to influence. The element of influence remains in authority also but it is the right to influence. It means those who are influencing others, do they have a right/entitlement to do so? This entitlement defines authority. This right can come from various sources. If we take example of political authority, in a democratic society the entitlement comes from the constitution. In a theocratic polity the entitlement might come from a holy book (like the Koran). Such sources provide legitimacy to the power and graduate it to authority. Legitimacy is the exercise of 'political power in a community in a way that is voluntarily accepted by the members of that community'. At many times we find that a group of people gain political power through violent means but they lack legitimacy or try to create legitimacy by invoking myriad sources of legitimacy. But if the people do not accept the authority of the new rulers, the new ruler either relinquish power or repress the widespread opposition. The important point here is that, over whom the

power is exercised, should find it the 'right' of the actor to exercise such power. If power implies, constraint, force, subordination and dependence. The authority implies consent, morality, will and autonomy.

**Authority** is the exercise of power, which is believed as legitimate. The legitimacy comes from the rightful entitlement of the power wielder.

Noted German Sociologist, Max Weber have tried to explain, why people accept exercise of power as rightful. Weber identifies three kinds of authority, where the authority is derived from different sources. Weber argued that authority is simply people's faith in the rightfulness. Therefore it is immaterial from where that right is derived. Weber finds that authority is simply the legitimate power. Weber constructed three ideal types of authority to understand the political rule.



**Max Weber** (1864 –1920) was a German sociologist and philosopher. Weber is credited with Marx and Durkheim as the builder of the discipline of sociology. His major works include: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Max\\_Weber\\_1894.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Max_Weber_1894.jpg)

The first ideal type of authority is the Traditional Authority. Traditional authority claims legitimacy because of historical, cultural, religious and customary laws and norms. Theoretically, the traditional authority had

existed unbroken and had been accepted by earlier generations too. Examples of traditional authority are found in tribal societies and religious communities.

The second Ideal type of authority is Charismatic Authority. This type of authority is a result of personal qualities. The personal quality of an individual entitles him the compliance and obedience of others. 'Charismatic authority should not be thought simply as a gift or natural propensity. Political leaders often try to 'manufacture' charisma, either by cultivating their media image and sharpening their oratorical skills or, in orchestrating an elaborate 'cult of personality' through the control of a propaganda machine'. Krishna, Jesus, Mohammed, Hitler, Martin Luther King, Gandhi are important examples of charismatic authority.

The third Ideal type of authority is rational-legal authority. This type of authority is the characteristic feature of modern industrial-bureaucratic society. There are clearly defined set of rules which create organizations and offices. And authority is derived from these offices. Here, obedience is secured due to the impersonal 'rule of law'. The authorities in modern societies are examples of rational-legal authority.

According to Nivedita Menon, the 'ideal type' of authorities presented by Weber is merely theoretical devices to help in social analysis. They are not exact descriptions of empirical reality. So, not one institution or individual in authority exemplifies one type entirely – charismatic authority often draws on tradition, ration-legal authority and charismatic authority may go together and so on.

## **5. Power: Views and Theories :**

Thucydides, a Greek historian, recounts the 5th century BC war between Sparta and Athens to the year 411 BC. In his book named History of the

Peloponnesian War; he discusses the importance and the use of power. In earlier thinking about power, one of the major questions about power was: why men seek power? There were generally two types of views: one it is in the human nature and second the humans are driven by the circumstances. But such questions faded away and thinkers started discussing about, functions, mechanisms, dimensions, context of power. In political theory the question of power was most of the time intermixed with the question of legitimacy, authority, action, justice, citizenship etc. The great philosopher Aristotle tried to classify various types of regimes on the basis of distribution of political power. Hobbes and Machiavelli are said to be the forerunners of the modern thinking about power. In his book 'The Prince', Machiavelli, presents a strategic and decentralized thinking about power and organization. On the other hand in 'Leviathan', Thomas Hobbes proposes a centralized view of power, that power is centralized in the hands of sovereign. So he thinks power as hegemony. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Marx and Engels presented the class view of power. They saw power as a means of exploitation. In the post-World War II, period, Max Weber emerges as a prominent thinker on Power. His views on power were organizational and he believed in the probability principle of power. It means studying the 'probability that a social actor within a social relationship would be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance to it'. Weber is famous for distinguishing between three types of authority on the basis of sources of power. In the post Weber social and political thinking we find a number of scholars explicitly theorizing about power. Some of the well-known social and political theorists of power are: Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, Steven Lukes, Nicos Poulantaz, Hannah Arendt, Anthony Giddens, Michele Foucault, Morriss and Haugaard.

The diverse views about power can also be classified according to ideological leanings: Elitist view of Power (Burnham, Mills), the pluralist view of power

(Dahl), the neo-pluralist view of power (Lindbolm), the Marxist view (Marx, Gramsci, Poulantaz, Althusser, Lukes), Feminist View (Okin, Mitchell) and alternative traditions (Nietzsche, Foucault, Arendt).

There is another type of distinction of political thoughts on power. A majority of thinkers see power as a concept riddled with conflict, while there are some thinkers who see power as consensual. Those who see power in conflicting terms, explain power as domination. This view is represented by, Weber, Marx, Pluralists, Hobbes, Realists and others. The consensual view of power does not see power as domination rather they see power in cooperative group action. Here the power is based on consent. Hannah Arendt, Barry Barnes and Parsons are the major proponents of this view. However there are other thinkers who treat power both as conflictual and consensual: Giddens, Clegg and Haugaard.

Now, we will study the views of some selected thinkers on power.

#### **5. i) Dahl, Bachrach and Baratz: views on power :**

In "The concept of Power" (1957), Robert Dahl provides a detailed analysis of power. Dahl developed his concept of power, while he was responding to the criticisms of American Democracy by the community power theorists (like Hunter) and Elite theorists (like C. Wright. Mills). Dahl's definition of power remains influential till now. Dahl's definition of power was influenced by the Weber's definition. However, Weber was discussing power within organizational structure and Dahl's discussion of power pertains to democratic community. Dahl defines power as "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not do otherwise". Simply saying it is the ability to make somebody do something that otherwise he or she would not have done. Here it is important to highlight that it applies to both positive and negative actions. It's positive when a

preferred outcome is brought but its negative when there is resistance to a non- preferred outcome. This approach to power is focused on observable decision making behaviour. Therefore some scholars also call this approach power as decision making approach to power. Haugaard (Power: A Reader) explains that Dahl's view of power is about prevailing in decision making and not to be equated with power resource, which is only potential power. Importantly for Dahl, resource may or may not be mobilized in decision making. Robert Dahl uses this conception of power to analyse the working of democracy and distribution of power at community level political system.

**Elite theory** claims to explain the existing power relationship in society. According to Elite theorists, a small minority of people control the decision making in society. The elites hold on power is beyond the control of democratic process. Various elite theorists have pointed towards various types of elites. Some of the important elite theorists are: Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels, C. Wright Mills, James Burnham and Robert D. Putnam.

Elite theorist, Mills believed that there is a nexus between power elites in America. And power is concentrated in the hands of some elites. Dahl criticizes such an approach and through a study of power relationship in New Haven, Connecticut, USA, shows that power was distributed unequally and widely in New Haven. Dahl shows that power is dispersed amongst various groups and not monopolized by small ruling elite. Dahl says that there are a number of groups competing in an open an inclusive political system in America. He calls such a competitive system between groups, Polyarchy. Dahl uses the term polyarchy (rule by many) instead of democracy. According to Dahl, democracy is an ideal system, and there are institutional arrangements which try to achieve the ideal. But, Polyarchy is not direct democracy and it is based on the principles of representation.

Since Dahl's view only focuses on the overt decision making process and fails to recognize the hidden face of power, Steven Luke calls it 'one dimensional view' of power. Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz developed their model of power as a response to Dahl's conception on 'one dimensional view of power'. They say that it is not only important to study, how decisions are made (overt face of power) but also to study the ability to prevent the decision-making (covert face of power). Bachrach and Baratz believe that not only does A exercises power over B in overt decision making (as in Dahl) but A may equally well exercise power over B by limiting the scope of the political process to issues which are relatively innocuous. Mark Haugaard (Power: a Reader) says that the most obvious instance of this is the process of agenda setting whereby an issue of importance to B is deliberately left off the agenda by A, so B lacks relevant resources, which enables A to exercise power in the way of preventing a range of issues from being raised. This second face of power is also called the power of 'non-decision-making'. Bachrach and Baratz define non decision as a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interest of the decision makers. The non-decision making ensures what will be at stake in a power conflict domain. So, by keeping many things out of the power conflict the non-decision making power ensures that personal interests remain out of public debate.

#### **5. ii) Lukes on Power :**

Lukes starts with a generic definition of power. "A exercises power over B, when A affect B in a manner contrary to B's interest". From this definition he moves to analyse the existing contemporary views on power given by pluralist and critics of pluralists. Through this exercise he expands the understanding of power beyond the observable behaviour. Lukes characterizes Dahl's concept of power (the pluralist) as one dimensional

view. He characterizes Bachrach and Baratz's (Dahl's critic) view of power as two dimensional views. Against this backdrop, Lukes enunciates his conception of power by adding a third dimension of power. Lukes summarizes the distinctive features of these three views of Power.

The One Dimensional view of power focuses on:

- a) Behaviour;
- b) Decision making;
- c) (Key) issues;
- d) Observable (overt) conflict;
- e) (Subjective) interests, seen as policy preferences revealed by political participation

The Two Dimensional view of power focuses on:

- a) Decision-making and control over the political agenda (not necessarily through decisions);
- b) Issues and potential issues;
- c) Observable (overt and covert) conflicts;
- d) (Subjective) interests seen as policy preferences and grievances.

The Three Dimensional view of power focuses on:

- a) Decision making and control over the political agenda (not necessarily through decisions);
- b) Issues and potential issues;
- c) Observable (overt and covert) and latent conflict;

d) Subjective and real interests.

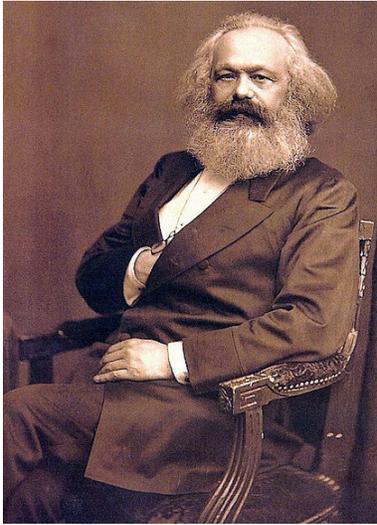
Commenting on Lukes, Lorenzi explains that the third dimension of power is the power to prevent the formation of grievances by shaping perception, cognition and preferences in such a way as to ensure the acceptance of a certain role in the existing order. There are two aspects of the third dimension of power. First, Lukes argues that the power relations are shaped by structurally constituted social relations. Second, Luke says that power distorts the knowledge. It means power creates a false consciousness, where people's real interest remains hidden from them and what they consider as their own interest is essentially the interest of those who are in power. The three dimensional view is much closer to Marxist analysis of power in social relations. The three dimensional view shows that there is a latent conflict in society. There is a contradiction between the interest of A (those exercising power) and the real interest of B (which are excluded). Due to the exclusion of such issues many issues of interest of B do not enter in the domain of overt conflict of power. Therefore Lukes argue that a full critique of power should include both subjective interests and the 'real' interests that might be held by those excluded by the political process. Essentially, Lukes was concerned about the problem – why people act in a way that appears contrary to their interests? To answer this he introduces the third dimension of power, where the powerful creates a false consciousness. In his later works, Lukes also calls this phenomenon, power as domination. Luke says that domination can occur through open, coercive means but it can also occur through unconscious mechanisms.

### **5. iii) Marxist view of power:**

Marxists see power in terms of class. Power is always class power, and for example power in the capitalist society lies with bourgeois. The source of power is the ownership of means of production. Power remains centralised

and concentrated in the hands of owners of the means of production. The other class, have no power and they are exploited. So the use of power is exploitation. Marx says that throughout history the society was divided in to two classes: master and slave, lord and serf, bourgeois and proletariat. One class owns the means of production and other class provides the labour power. So in modern times bourgeois are the powerful, as they are the owners. In the modern capitalist system, the surplus value created by the labour power is extracted from the proletariat. This appropriation of surplus takes place in a non- coercive manner by the method of contract. The appropriated value is shared by the ruling class. This leads to exploitation of one class by the other. Marx says that economics is the base and polity, legal set up, ethics and morality all are part of superstructure. Hence those who control economic structure in society, they protect and perpetuate their interest through legal and political structures in society.

Marxism is named after the famous twentieth century philosopher, **Karl Marx** (1818 –1883). Marx was born in Germany but later he shifted to England. Marx is the most virulent critic of capitalism. He propounded many new ideas, which not only changed the course of philosophy but the world history too. Marx talked about the unity of the workers and an impending revolution in the capitalist system. However, many states which were later built around Marxist ideas became dictatorships and personality cult regimes which slaughtered its own people to save the 'revolution'. His major works include: The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, On the Jewish Question, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, The Holy Family, Theses on Feuerbach, The German Ideology, The Poverty of Philosophy, Manifesto of the Communist Party, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.



Source

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Karl\\_Marx\\_001.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Karl_Marx_001.jpg)

Extraction of surplus remains the major source of sustenance and perpetuation of domination and exploitation in the capitalist system. Surplus value is that amount of value created by the labour power for which the labour power is not paid. According to Marx, there is only one way to end this exploitation, i.e., revolution. A revolution will end the current power structure in society and eventually it will demolish the class system itself, hence ushering into classless and stateless society. Marx predicted that conditions are ripe in advance capitalist societies of Europe for revolution.



([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian\\_Revolution\\_of\\_1917.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Revolution_of_1917.jpg) : Picture of Russian Revolution).

However, the impending revolution did not occur in advanced capitalist societies and it happened in a backward society of Russia. This made many Marxist scholars to rethink about the capitalist societies. They started thinking about the ways political power is exercised and maintained in advance capitalist societies. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, came up with the idea of hegemony to explain the working of political power in capitalist societies. Gramsci believed in the relative autonomy of the political structure from the economic base. Gramsci says that the state controls the society through both coercive power and by consent. Coercive power is the repressive function of the state. In modern advance states this coercive power is rarely used. The state manufactures legitimacy for its power by generating consent from the masses. This generation of consent is done by cultural, ideological and educational means. Hegemony represents the

acceptance of the views on reality, of dominant class by other classes as 'common sense'.

	<p><b>Antonio Gramsci</b> (1891-1937) was an Italian Marxist writer, politician, political theorist, philosopher, sociologist, and linguist. He was imprisoned by the regime of Benito Mussolini. He is well known for his theory of imperialism, which seeks to explain the causes of capitalist domination in European societies. Gramsci continues to influence the Marxist thinker even in twenty-first</p>
<p>century.</p>	
<p>Source : <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gramsci.png">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gramsci.png</a></p>	

According to Ien Ang, "The Gramscian concept of hegemony is mostly used to indicate the cultural leadership of the dominant classes in the production of generalized meanings, of 'spontaneous' consent to the prevailing arrangement of social relations - a process, however, that is never finished because hegemony can never be complete". So hegemony is the moral and intellectual leadership through which the subordinate classes give consent to be dominated by the ruling classes. Hegemony works very profoundly; even the words we speak or write have been constructed by social interactions through history and shaped by ideology of the dominant class. But unlike Marx, Gramsci says that there is not a single dominant class but there is a shifting and unstable alliance between different classes. Therefore the consent is not a permanent state of affairs. So 'hegemony's victory is never

final' and the resistance by the subordinate groups to total domination continues.

**Hegemony** is the moral and intellectual leadership through which the subordinate classes give consent to be dominated by the ruling classes.

#### 5. iv) Foucault on Power :

Foucault does not present an ordered and coherent doctrine of power. In his writings power is the spirit which fills all other discourses. Therefore his views on power can be gleaned from his various writings. Foucault is thought to be difficult to understand, however it is convenient to understand Foucault through his own words. While examining the play of power he explained that the use of power in modern times is very different from earlier times. Now power is not repressive but power is productive.

Foucault distinguishes between Right to death and Power over life. He says that classical thoughts about power take power in one way only, i.e. Right to death. This is the juridical power of taking life. But Foucault says that power not only functions in this way, but in other ways too. And Foucault developed the idea of Power over life to explain this other way. Let us first understand the right to death. This is a right to take life or let live. This is called juridical power. The idea of such kind of power was developed by enlightenment theorists. While explaining juridical power Foucault says that juridical "power was exercised mainly as a means of deduction, a subtraction mechanism, a right to appropriate a portion of the wealth, a tax of products, goods and services, labour and blood levied on subjects... a right of seizure...it culminated in the privileges to seize hold of life in order to suppress it" (History of Sexuality, Volume-1, Page 136).

The juridical power is about prohibition and punishment. The juridical power is quantifiable and tangible. So, if I am prohibited my powers are taken away and someone else gains power. So this is zero-sum game of power. For example when one violates a law, he is punished by either taking away some fine or taking away his liberty. The juridical power is exercised by the official institutions (law, police, bureaucracy etc).

In contrast to the notion of Right to death (juridical power) Foucault develops another idea of power, i.e. Power over life. The Power over life includes; Disciplinary power and Bio-political power. Explaining the Power over life, Foucault says, "the growing importance assumed by the actions of the norm at the expense of the juridical system of the law, law cannot help but be armed, and its arm, par excellence is death... but a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms...such a power has to quantify, measure, appraise and hierarchies rather than display itself in murderous splendour. It does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from its obedient subjects; it effects distribution around the norm... a normalizing society is the historic outcome of a technology of power centred on life"<sup>2</sup>

The Power over life is productive and not subtractive. It's enabling power. This power has a positive influence on life. Through methods of control and regulation, this power tries to optimize and multiply life. It wants to make life more efficient. Therefore in another words Power over life wants more life and better life by managing at very micro levels. Since power is productive and enabling, here is no point in getting rid of power. Getting rid of power will mean disempowerment. In sum, the Power over life is located everywhere and in everything. This is located in unofficial institutions, like social norms. This is enforced not by individual but by society through

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<sup>2</sup> History of Sexuality, Volume-1, page -144.  
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positive and negative incentives and choices. These are not enforced by law or formal institutions but are enforced by opinions and norms of society. This power does not result in reduction, rather in production.

The Power over life is exercised through disciplinary power and bio-power. The Disciplinary power is normalization of individual body. Foucault says, 'discipline is centred on the body as a machine its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and docility, its integration into subsystems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines: an antomo-politics of the human being" <sup>3</sup>

So through discipline, the individual body is managed and tracked. The discipline is intended to optimize the capabilities and efficiency of the body. In his book "Discipline and Punish" Foucault analyses the penal system to demonstrate the ways in which the power is exercised. Here he analyses the changes in the prison system. Before 18<sup>th</sup> century the punishment was ceremonial and it was intended towards the prisoner's body. For example, the public execution was used as a ritual to re-establish the king's authority and at the same time demonstrate it to the audience. Starting from 18<sup>th</sup> century, Foucault observes a change in prison system. The mechanism of close surveillance replaces the earlier brute force. However it was not humanizing. Rather this was a more correct economy of power. "Discipline is a series of techniques by which the body's operations can be controlled. Discipline worked by coercing and arranging the individual's movements and his experience of space and time. This is achieved by devices such as timetables and military drills, and the process of exercise. Through discipline, individuals are created out of a mass". There are three principal

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<sup>3</sup> History of Sexuality, volume-1, page-139.

mechanisms through which the disciplinary power operates: Hierarchical observation, Normalizing judgment and Examination. Observation and the gaze are key instruments of power. We can see the example of observation and the gaze in modern prison system. The modern system of prison is best represented in the Bentham's prison design of 'Panopticon'. The design consists of a circular structure with an "inspection house" at its centre, from which the managers or staffs of the institution are able to watch the inmates, who are stationed around the perimeter. The idea is to watch the inmates without them being able to tell whether or not they are being watched. Hence the inmates will always behave in a way that they are being watched. This leads to internalization of surveillance.

According to Elisheva Sadan, "Foucault is concerned about the expansion of discipline in the governing system and the police, bodies for which the entire society is a field of action and object of disciplinary action. Although Foucault did not believe that disciplinary power spreads throughout society systematically, he estimated that most of the major social institutions are already infected by it, and hence the great similarity, in the structure of prison factories, schools, detention camps and hospitals. The transition from torture to rules is also a transition from physical punishment to psychic punishment of the soul and the will".

The second type of power over life is called Bio Power by Foucault. According to Clare O'Farrel, in Foucault's terminology, Bio Power is a technology which appeared in the late eighteenth century for managing populations. It incorporates certain aspects of disciplinary power. If disciplinary power is about training the actions of bodies, Bio Power is about managing the births, deaths, reproduction and illnesses of a population. Essentially this technology is used by the modern nation-states with the help of numerous diverse techniques to use the statistics and control and manage

the population. Bio power is the normalization of population. In Foucault's own words "Bio Power is the power which gave itself the function of administering life"<sup>4</sup>. Today, the nation states want to make sure that every being falls in the average. They collect large scale statistical data to see the "alleatory events" (deviations), and then regulate and manage them. Bio power "focuses on the species body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological process: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a bio politics of the population"<sup>5</sup>The Bio Power is different from the disciplinary power in terms of surveillance. In disciplinary power the surveillance is of direct observation and gaze, and in Bio Power the surveillance is abstract by the means of statistics.

In enlightenment theories of Power (juridical power) resistance was to gain liberation from prohibition, it was defiance of limitations. Use of power over me was taking my power and hence resistance was meant to gain more power. But such an idea of resistance has no place in Foucault's idea of power (Power over life). Here power is not subtracting but it is productive. Foucault says that disciplinary power and Bio Power produces its own resistance. Resistance to power is part of the power relations. Essentially, the power administers and determines the place and time of resistance. What one thinks as an opposition to power, ultimately feeds into and support the very power which is being opposed. So, resistance is not reducing the power rather it leads to augmentation of power by playing in the hands of power. So what's the way out. There is a disagreement amongst scholar about resistance to normative power. Foucault did not clearly show a way

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<sup>4</sup> History of Sexuality, Volume 1, page 138

<sup>5</sup> History of Sexuality, Volume-1, page, 139

out. Foucault talks about the idea of “critique”, which means not being governed quite so much. The point is to subvert power in many small ways. According to Nivedita Menon, there are three types of struggle against power in Foucault’s understanding:

- i) Against ethnic/social/religious domination- typical of feudal societies.
- ii) Against exploitation (which separates individuals from what they produce) – typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalist societies.
- iii) Against forms of ‘subjection’ (meaning both to the subject and to be subjected to). In this kind of struggle, the attempt should be to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of the kind of identity and individualization linked to the state and to governmentality.

#### 5. v) Feminist Theories of Power :

**Feminism** is an ideology and social movement, which revolves around the questions concerning justice to women in society. The ideology highlights the injustices in various domains of social life and critically analyses the causes for the injustices. The ideology and movement seeks to bring a positive change in the life of every woman.

Feminism is the theory and practice of analysing and ending the subjugation of women. The aim of the feminists is to liberate all women irrespective of race, colour, region and economic background. The practice of feminism is seen in dispersed movements for women in different parts of the world. The theoretical aspect of feminism is very dynamic. There is a wide array of views within feminism. Despite their theoretical difference, all feminists are united by a desire to highlight the causes and phenomenon of inequality of women and propose some remedies. The causes, analysis and remedies vary

from one group of scholars to another. We can identify three waves of feminism in the process of development of feminism: the first wave of Liberal and socialist feminism (18<sup>th</sup> century to early 1920s), the second wave of Radical feminism (1960-1980) and the third wave of Post-modernist feminism (1980s onwards). These waves include the emergence of a number of types of feminist scholars. In recent times a number of new set of theories are emerging, e.g., black feminism, third world feminism and eco feminism.

Usually the feminist theorists have not discussed or theorized about power explicitly. But power remains a central theme, an undercurrent in the writings of feminist scholars. Generally, the feminist scholars discuss the powerlessness and subordination of women and domination of men. According to the Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy, it is possible to identify three main ways in which feminists have conceptualized power: as a resource to be redistributed, as domination and as empowerment.

i) Power as a resource: the liberal feminist thinkers treat power as a resource. The liberal feminists carry the tradition of individualistic liberalism, which emerged after the enlightenment. Those who take power as a resource believe that power is tangible and quantifiable. So one can possess power and there might be variation in the quantity and quality of the possession. If this is a possession, it can also be reduced or taken away. The liberal feminist say that men possess power and women are powerless because the distribution of power in social, political and legal system is not right. Therefore, women face legal, political and social constraints which make them unequal and discriminated. If women will have less power they will not be able to gain "critical social goods". Susan Moller Okin argues that "when we look seriously at the distribution between husband and wives of such critical social good as work (paid and unpaid), power, prestige, self-

esteem, opportunities for self-development, and both physical and economic security, we find socially constructed inequalities between them right down the list". The remedy to alter the socially constructed inequalities is a major redistribution of power in society. This can be achieved by legal, economic and political power given to women. This will make women equally powerful to men. Some of the popular liberal feminist scholars are: Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, Harriet Tubman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Betty Friedan, Rebecca Walker, Naomi Wolf and Martha Nussbaum.

ii) Power as domination: According to Sushila Ramaswamy (Political Theory: Ideas and Concepts), an individual or group exercises domination when it can issue a command to others and can be certain that this will result in obedience. Many feminist scholars do not see power as a resource rather they see power in terms of relationship. Power is seen as relations of domination and subordination between men and women. Radical feminists mainly use the terms 'Patriarchy' to refer to this type of relationship. Gradually, patriarchy has emerged as an all-encompassing concept to explain the power relationship in society from a feminist point of view. Therefore patriarchy is the key term to understand the feminist view of power. Patriarchy literally means 'Rule of father' in a male dominant society. Historically this rule of father or the centrality of male is manifested in personal, legal, political, social and economic domains of society. According to Sylvia Walby (Theorizing Patriarchy), this is a system of social structure and practice in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Similarly, Juliet Mitchell (woman's Estate) says that patriarchy is an ideological phenomenon that underpins the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity and it is only with the psychic transformation of patriarchy that women will secure liberation". Hence the features of a patriarchal social structure are: i) it is a male dominated structure, where most of the powerful roles in society are played by men and women are hardly able to

achieve power ii) men supervise, protect and control women iii) some attributes and qualities are attached to male and some to female iv) male attributes and qualities are highly valued in society compared to the female attributes v) the centrality of male in society is taken as natural and not social.

**Patriarchy** (rule by father) is the term used by the feminist scholars to illustrate the existing social relationship and the consequent social setup. In this social system the female is subjugated by the male, who wields power. The systemic disadvantage and oppression is visible in every domain of social, political and economic life. The violence against women is one of the direct uses of power by male to oppress and dominate women in society.

Essentially patriarchy exemplifies a power relationship between men and women. This power relationship is hierarchical and based on domination and subordination. The domination exists in all its five senses (Wrong) – coercive, induced, competent, personal and legitimate. The men wield control over production, reproduction sexuality and even body of women. The patriarchy justifies the control by gender stereotyping. And this gender stereotyping perpetuates itself by reinforcing the myth of the masculinity and the femininity. Nivedita Menon says that Patriarchy should not be understood as a single homogenous structure, rather the contemporary feminist scholars think in terms of patriarchies- differentiated over historical epochs, geographical regions and cultural communities. She also says patriarchy overlaps and interacts with other systems of oppression on the basis of class, caste imperialism etc. - and produces specific effects.

There is a debate about the origin and sustenance of patriarchy. Some socio-biologists (like Steven Goldberg) argue that patriarchy arises more as a result of genetic makeup of sexes. Goldberg argued that male dominance is

a human universal and is a result of our biological makeup. However this type of view is generally rejected by the social and political theorists (social constructionist theories). According to the predominant view (social constructionist theories) patriarchy is a social construct. Carol Pateman (The Sexual Contract) says that the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection. So the origins of patriarchy are linked to the gender defined roles, where social behaviour and norms are identified as appropriate and inappropriate for each sex. Gerda Lerner (The Creation of Patriarchy) argues that the patriarchy grew out of biological and social conditions to become the cultural norm.

Radical feminists argue that the end of patriarchy can only lead to women's liberation. For they try to expose the sexism and patriarchal power in social, economic, educational, language, cultural, personal and other structures of society. But what should be the strategy to resist and uproot patriarchy, is a debatable question amongst the feminists.

iii) Power as Empowerment: The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy notes that "significant strand of feminist theorizing of power starts with the contention that the conception of power as power over, domination or control is implicitly masculinist. In order to avoid such masculinist connotations, many feminists from a variety of theoretical backgrounds have argued for a reconceptualization of power as a capacity or ability, specifically the capacity to empower and transform oneself and others". Some of the important feminist scholars representing this type of views are: Jean Baker Miller, Virginia Held, Sarah Lucia Hoagland, Luce Irigaray, Nanacy Hartstock and Helen Cixous.

According to Miller, women do not want to use the prevalent conception of power as it reduces others power. Rather women may want to be powerful in

way that simultaneously enhances the powers of others. The empowerment thinkers believe that the women can have alternative conception of power because of their experiences as mother and caregivers. Here the capacity to empower and transform oneself and others are very important. The new wave of post-modernist feminism, like ecofeminism and lesbian feminism also talk about power as transformative and empowering. Some contemporary thinker of empowerment school, like Hoagland and Starhawk, define power as power-from-within. Here they do not see power as hierarchic and controlling rather they view power as positive, creative and transformative. In essence, this view of power questions the whole frame of reference within which the debates about the concept of power occur. They do not subscribe to the predominant idea of power. Rather they use alternative ideas, terminologies and views to discuss, describe and conceptualize power.

**5. vi) Hannah Arendt on Power :**



**Hannah Arendt** (1906 –1975) was a German-American thinker and political theorist. The focus of her works was freedom and challenges to freedom, authority direct democracy and power. Her major works include: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, *On Revolution*, and *On Violence*.

Source : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hannah\\_Arendt.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hannah_Arendt.jpg)

In her book “On Violence”, Arendt says that, power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only

so long as the group keeps together. Arendt was very particular about use of the term power. She was opposed to using the term power interchangeably with other terms, like violence or authority. She argues that when violence and power are used interchangeably, the protracted synonymous use of the word erases the difference between the phenomena itself. Arendt clearly distinguishes between power and other terms; strength, force, authority and violence.

Power does not belong to an individual but to a group who are in an agreement over a common course. But the power is not a property of the group, rather it's a relationship. Since power is dependent on an unreliable and temporary agreement of many wills and intentions; power is not something stable that can be possessed.

Unlike power (which belongs to group), strength is singular, individual entity. Arendt says that it is the property inherent in an object or person and belongs to its characters which may prove itself in relation to other things or persons, but is essentially independent of them.

Arendt says that force should not be used interchangeably with power or violence. Force should be used for movements in nature, or the force of circumstance (not controlled by humans). So force indicates the energy released by physical and social movements.

Arendt says that authority can be vested in person by virtue of their office. So authority is a specific source of power. Authority requires legitimacy, since it should be accepted by those over whom it is exercised.

According to Arendt, power and violence are opposites, since power emerges when the threat of violence is not needed, for all freely consent to a certain action and act of their own volition. Arendt feels that the political theorists have confused between power and violence, and wrongly premised the

government on violence. Neither Marx nor Weber distinguished between violence and power. The government must be based on power and not on violence. If the government is based on violence both victors and vanquished will have to pay a heavy price.

Therefore Arendt's conception of power is non-hierarchical and non-instrumental. The domination and violence appears where the power fades away. Violence can never create power. Arendt is opposed to the use of violence, but she assumes that at certain moment's power might need violence. Those moments are when power has to maintain itself. When power is confronted with the danger of destruction then violence can be used for resistance. Arendt argues that when the radical evil (like governments with total domination, where coexistence is not possible, like Hitler and Stalin) dispossess us of all power, so we can do nothing else than answering it with violence. Thus at such a moment one must be prepared to fight.

## **6. Conclusion :**

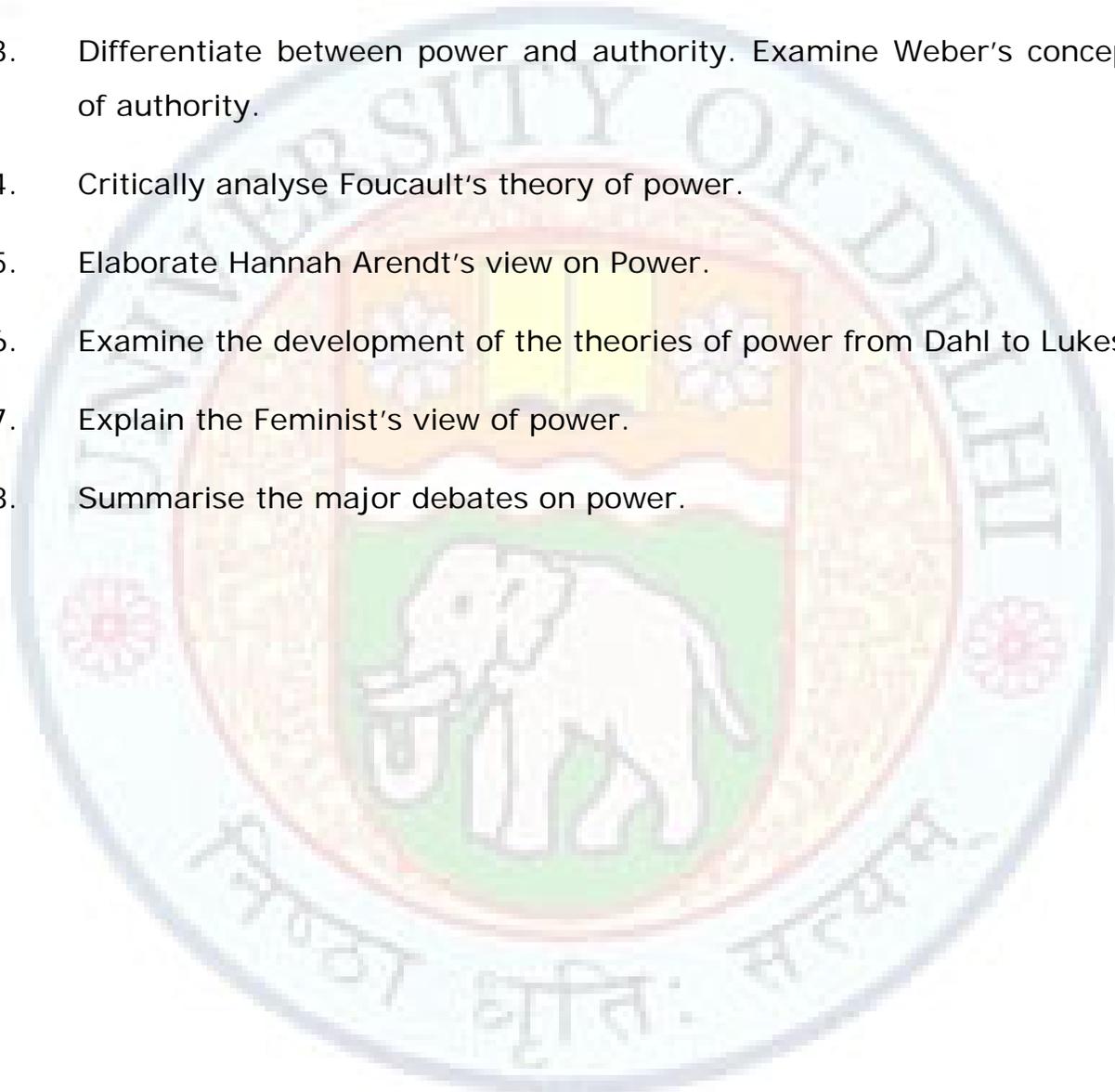
There is a greater probability that the disagreement about the concept of power will continue. The intensive probing by political theorists will expose new arenas of power struggle in social life. With the dynamic change in social and political life, new types of questions related to power will also be raised. However, the old debate about questions of power and authority, power and legitimacy, power and democracy, power and women will continue. After Foucault, there is a growing body of thinkers, who are either critics or defenders of Foucault. His ideas have thrown many challenges to be solved. Any analysis of power in contemporary times must acknowledge the concept and practice of resistance. The resistance is necessary to transform and challenge the existing power relations in social and political life.



**Questions:**

## Power

1. Power is an essentially contested concept. Elaborate the problems in examining power in light of this statement.
2. Define power. Critically analyse the nature of power in social and political scenario.
3. Differentiate between power and authority. Examine Weber's concept of authority.
4. Critically analyse Foucault's theory of power.
5. Elaborate Hannah Arendt's view on Power.
6. Examine the development of the theories of power from Dahl to Lukes.
7. Explain the Feminist's view of power.
8. Summarise the major debates on power.



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