

Course Name- B.A.L.L.B.2<sup>nd</sup> sem

Subject- History

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Topic- Power of Politics: Meaning, Types and Sources of Power

# Introduction

The focal point of the study of political institutions is power and its uses. Although we think of the concept of power as being associated particularly with politics or so as to say political science, but it is, in fact, exists in all types of social relationships. For Foucault (1969), 'power relationships are present in all aspects of society.

They go right down into the depths of society.... They are not localized in the relations between the state, and its citizens, or on the frontiers between classes'. All social actions involve power relationships whether it may be between employer and employee or between husband and wife (in patriarchal society). Thus, it is of fundamental importance for the sociology to study in its manifold ramifications.

# Meaning

- In the very simple language, power is the ability to get one's way—even if it is based on bluff. It is the ability to exercise one's will over others or, in other words, power is the ability of individuals or groups to make their own interests or concerns count, even when others resist.
- It sometimes involves the direct use of force. Force is the actual or threatened use of coercion to impose one's will on others. When a father slaps the child to prohibit certain acts, he is applying force. Some scholars have defined it that it necessarily involves overcoming another's will.

- According to Max Weber (1947), power is 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. According to Steven Lukes (2005), power has three dimensions or faces: (1) decision-making, (2) non-decision-making, and (3) shaping desires.'
- For Foucault, we must explore the intimate relationship between power and knowledge. Through his case studies of madness, medicine, prisons and sexuality, Foucault has highlighted the organization of knowledge and power. He argued that a new type of power, i.e., disciplinary power, has evolved during the 19th century.

# Types of Power:

- **Economic power:**

For Marx, economic power is the basis of all power, including political power. It is based upon an objective relationship to the modes of production, a group's condition in the labour market, and its chances. Economic power refers to the measurement of the ability to control events by virtue of material advantage.

- **Social power:**

It is based upon informal community opinion, family position, honour, prestige and patterns of consumption and lifestyles. Weber placed special emphasis on the importance of social power, which often takes priority over economic interests. Contemporary sociologists have also given importance to social status so much so that they sometimes seem to have underestimated the importance of political power.

- **Political power:**

It is based upon the relationships to the legal structure, party affiliation and extensive bureaucracy. Political power is institutionalized in the form of large-scale government bureaucracies. One of the persistent ideas has been that they are controlled by elites, that is, small, select, privileged groups.

Political power concerns the activities of the states which is not confined to national boundaries. The networks of political power can stretch across countries and across the globe. Political power involves the power to tax and power to distribute resources to the citizens.

**Besides, Weber's types of power, there are a few other types also which are as under:**

- **Knowledge power:**

To Foucault (1969), power is intimately linked with knowledge. Power and knowledge produce one another. He saw knowledge as a means of 'keeping tabs' on people and controlling them.

- **Military power:**

It involves the use of physical coercion. Warfare has always played a major role in politics. Modern mass military systems developed into bureaucratic organizations and significantly changed the nature of organizing and fighting wars. According to Weber, few groups in society base their power purely on force or military might.

- **Ideological power:**

It involves power over ideas and beliefs, for example, are communism, fascism and some varieties of nationalism. These types of ideologies are frequently oppositional to dominant institutions and play an important role in the organization of devotees into sects and parties. According to Michael Mann (1986), there are two types of power, viz., distributional and collective.

- **Distributional power:**

It is a power over others. It is the ability of individuals to get others to help them pursue their own goals. It is held by individuals.

- **Collective power:**

It is exercised by social groups. It may be exercised by one social group over another.

# Sources of Power:

There are three basic sources of power: force, influence and authority.

- **Force:**

As defined earlier, force is the actual (physical force) or threatened (latent force) use of coercion to impose one's will on others. When leaders imprison or even execute political dissidents, they thus apply force. Often, however, sheer force accomplishes little. Although people can be physically restrained, they cannot be made to perform complicated tasks by force alone.

- **Influence:**

It refers to the exercise of power through the process of persuasion. It is the ability to affect the decisions and actions of others. A citizen may change his or her position after listening a stirring speech at a rally by a political leader. This is an example of influence that how the efforts to persuade people can help in changing one's opinion.

- **Authority:**

It refers to power that has been institutionalized and is recognized by the people over whom it is exercised (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992). It is established to make decisions and order the actions of others. It is a form of legitimate power. Legitimacy means that those subject to a government's authority consent to it (Giddens, 1997).



- The people give to the ruler the authority to rule, and they obey willingly without the threat of force. We tend to obey the orders of police officer because we accept their right to have power over us in certain situations. Legitimate power is accepted as being rightfully exercised (for example, power of the king). Thus, sociologists distinguish power from authority.
- Authority is an agreed-upon legitimate relationship of domination and subjugation. For example, when a decision is made through legitimate, recognized channels of government, the carrying out of that decision falls within the realm of authority. In brief, power is decision-making and authority is the right to make decisions, that is, legitimate power.

# Thus, there is a difference between authority and influence:

- Authority is an official right to make and enforce decisions, whereas influence is the ability to affect the actions of others apart from authority to do so;
- Authority stems from rank, whereas influence rests largely upon personal attributes; and
- Authority is based upon the status one holds, whereas influence is based upon the esteem one receives.

# Types of Authority:

- **Traditional Authority:**

It is the legitimate power conferred by custom, tradition or accepted practice. Traditional authority is 'hallowed with time', like that of a king, an established dynasty or a religious leader. It is based on an uncoded collective sense that it is proper and longstanding and should therefore be accepted as legitimate.

In patriarchal societies, the authority of husbands over wives or of father over his children is obeyed because it is the accepted practice. Similarly, a king or queen is accepted as ruler of a nation simply by virtue of inheriting the crown. For the traditional leader, authority rests in custom or tradition (inherited positions), and not in personal characteristics.

- **Legal—Rational Authority:**

It is established in law or written regulations (formally enacted norms) that determine how the society will be governed. This is the form of authority found in workplaces, government, schools, colleges and most major social institutions.

Leaders derive their legal authority from the written rules and regulations of political systems. It is this type of authority that characterizes modern bureaucratic organizations. Rational authority rests in the leader's legal right rather than in family or personal characteristics.

- **Charismatic Authority:**

- Weber also observed that power can be legitimized by the charisma of an individual. Charisma is 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary man and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (Weber, 1922).
- Charisma is, therefore, unusual spontaneous and creative of new movements and new structures. The term 'charismatic authority' refers to the power made legitimate by the exceptional personal characteristics of the leader, such as heroism, mysticism, revelations, or magic.
- Charisma allows a person to lead or inspire without relying on set rules or traditions. Charismatic authority is generated by the personality and the myths that surround the individual, like that of Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Hitler and Pandit Nehru.
- A charismatic leader attracts followers because they judge him or her to be particular wise or capable. It may be pertinent to mention that the charismatic authority is socially bestowed and may be withdrawn when the leader is no longer regarded as extraordinary.

- Weber used traditional, legal—rational and charismatic authority as ideal types and as such are usually not found in their pure form in any given situation. In reality, particular leaders and political systems combine elements of two or more of these forms.
- To Weber's three major types of authority, some contemporary scholars have added a fourth type, professional authority (authority based on expertise). The authority of physicians or atomic scientists, botanists, etc., is the example of this fourth type of authority.