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## **UNIT 4 LIBERAL AND MARXIST PERSPECTIVE**

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### **4.0 LEARNING OUTCOME**

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Throw light on the Liberal perspective of the State
- Analyse the views of Marxist scholars on the State, and
- Discuss the new trends in the Liberal and Marxist analyses of the State

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this Unit, we propose to analyse two major perspectives of political philosophy regarding the origin, nature, role, purpose and functions of the State. These are the Liberal and Marxist perspectives, which seek to describe the State as an institution / apparatus grounded firmly in two major ideologies with the same name that is, Liberalism and Marxism. The discussion on these ideologies reflects on certain basic questions pertaining to the relationship between the human beings and the State; what is/what ought to be the nature of this relationship, what is/ought to be the relationship between State and society or civil society, what are the functions of State, how are they to be performed and most importantly, why do human beings need the State.

The State is a highly differentiated, specialised and complex institutional phenomenon. We have already dealt with the nature, purpose and evolution of the State in the first Unit of this Course, this Unit would delve more into the different viewpoints on the State. In modern western political thought, the State is usually identified with an impersonal and privileged legal or Constitutional order with the capability of administrating and controlling a given territory. The earliest expression of this conception could be traced to Rome in the ancient world, but it did not become a major object of concern/analysis until the development of the European State system from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The historical changes that contributed to the transformation of medieval notions of political life were immensely complicated. Struggles between monarchs and feudal lords over the domain of their rightful authority, peasant protests, revolts against the tyranny of excess, taxation and social obligation, spread of trade, commerce and market relations, flowering of Renaissance

culture, consolidation of national monarchies, challenge to the universal claims of Catholicism and religious strife, struggle between the Church and State and emergence of the secular domain-all these played a part.

While the works of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Jean Bodin are of great importance in these (1530-1596) developments, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) clearly expressed the new concerns regarding the nature of State as the public power and its relationship to the ruler and the ruled. The major concerns of political analysis were: What is the State? What are its origins and foundations? What is the relationship between State and Society? What should this relationship be? What does and should the State do? Whose interest does the State represent? Some of these queries have been raised in the initial three Units of this Course. Some of them pertaining to the relationship between the State and the civil society will be dealt with later in Unit 19.

In modern societies, the relationship between the State, as the sphere of political authority and economy in which wealth is accumulated, goods and services produced and income distributed, is regarded as crucial to the overall pattern of relationships. The most important issues concern the extent to which resources should be allocated by people who can control them through having money and the extent to which they should be allocated by the people who can control them through having political authority. The State is seen as the only system of relationship, powerful and pervasive enough to control the dominance of commercial interests.

An understanding of the State, therefore, is crucial to the grasp of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century political thought and practice. Even those traditions, which have reacted most critically against the State, such as Marxism or Anarchism, cannot but reflect on its profound significance. So much so that it can easily be said that the State is being slowly rediscovered by even those political theorists, who are working from a Marxist perspective. As far as the Liberal perspective is concerned, it is full of reflections on practices such as citizenship, family, property and rights usually within a broad over-arching account of the State, its nature and purpose. Interestingly, despite centuries of analyses, thought and debate, social scientists have not yet reached anywhere close to agreement (nor is it necessary because of the very nature of the subject matter) on the essential nature, role, and character of the State. Nevertheless, we will in this Unit, discuss the contested as well as not so contested domains of the State.

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## **4.2 THINKING ABOUT THE STATE**

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Even though, a detailed discussion on the nature of State has been made in the introductory Unit of this Course, there are a number of reasons why it is important to think more carefully about the State. Practically, it is now almost impossible to conceive life without it. Statehood not only represents a set of institutions but also a body of attitudes, practices and codes of behaviour. State has subtly penetrated most of our lives. We begin and end our lives within its confines. Thus, besides being a complex concept, it is also an everyday reality that we cannot ignore as brought out so well by David Held (1998). He observes, "The State or apparatus of 'Government' appears to be everywhere. regulating the conditions of our lives from birth registration to death certification. Yet, the nature of the State is hard to grasp. This may seem peculiar for something so pervasive in public and private life, but is precisely this pervasiveness which makes it difficult to understand. There is nothing more central to political and social theory than the nature of the State, and nothing more contested."

Secondly, as Held (*ibid.*) puts it, the State is neither a neutral institution which we can afford to ignore nor has it arisen out of pure chance or accident. There are customary features which have evolved slowly over the years. Nonetheless much of

its form and structure can be understood completely only by grasping the legal and political theories surrounding it. Sometimes, they are more of ex-post facto theorising and trying to comprehend the actual structures that have arisen; while, at other points it is the theory in itself which has given rise to the development of specific institutions. Since it is the ideas underlying theories of the State which often determine both the form of the State and our attitude to it. It is crucial to grasp them in order to have an informed understanding of the State.

Thirdly, there is considerable conceptual intermeshing surrounding the very idea of the State. Often concepts such as society, community, nation, government authority, sovereignty and so on are muddled together with the notion of the State. This is so due to the diverse uses of these concepts within differing theoretical contexts. Moreover, reflections on concepts such as law, authority, rights and obligations imply the existence of some form of a State and are hence meshed into it. Thus, an essential, prelude to any study of such concepts would be familiarity with the theories of the State. This centrality of the State is echoed in the opening lines of Bluntschli's classic, *The Theory of The State* - "Political Science in the proper sense is the science which is concerned with the State". Bluntschli's view is also reaffirmed in some more recent texts in political theory. D.D. Raphael, for example, observes that "Political is whatever concerns the State".

Similarly, N.P. Barry (1981) observes that 'the history of political theory has been mainly concerned with the State. No doubt all the problems of politics including justice, freedom and rights are in the end State-related. Historically, politics does have a wider scope than the State. Yet, in a contemporary sense, it is difficult to see politics existing apart from the State or from the aspiration to Statehood. Politics now is intrinsic to the State. However, this does not limit politics to one particular entity nor is State clearly a single thing. The diversity of State theory is a major factor of the philosophical appraisal of the State and the diverse values attached to it. The State is a complex of ideas and values.

These ideas are dense in texture and diverse in interpretation. To seek to grasp them is to understand much of the human political experience spread over a number of centuries, the richness and variety of which is encompassed or reflected in the theories of the State. Those interested in understanding their society/societies have to explore the various approaches to the State and decide which of them, if any, provides the best explanation of how the State has developed and how it works. This makes the study of different theoretical perspectives on the study of the State not only important, but almost essential. The most comprehensive perspectives out of them are represented by the Liberal and the Marxist perspectives.

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### **4.3 THE LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STATE**

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The Liberal perspective of the State is based on the philosophy of Liberalism, which broadly represents freedom, modernity and progress. Emerging around the same period as that of the evolution of the modern States, it came to signify the attempt to define a private sphere independent of the State. Gradually, Liberalism became associated with the doctrine that freedom of choice should be applied to matters as diverse as marriage, community, religion, economic and political affairs. In fact, to everything that affects daily life (Macpherson, 1973). In this view, the world consists of free and equal individuals with natural rights. The concern of politics should be the defence of the rights of these individuals in a way that must enable them to realise their own capacities. The mechanisms for regulating individuals, and pursuit of their

respective interests were to be the Constitutional State, along with private property, the competitive market economy and the family which was distinctly patriarchal.

Liberalism is hailed for upholding the values of reason and toleration in the face of tradition and absolutism (Dunn, 1979). No doubt, Liberalism celebrated the rights of individuals to life, liberty and property, but liberal individual was generally the property owning male and the new freedoms were first and foremost for the men of the new middle classes. It is notable that the Western world was liberal first and only later, that too after extensive conflicts, it became democratic, when universal franchise became the norm all over.

Broadly, a Liberal conception of the individual and the State consists of at least four basic elements. *First*, it is individualistic. It asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity. *Second*, it is egalitarian. It confers on all individuals the same moral status and denies relevance to any legal and/or political order of difference in moral worth among human beings. *Third*, it is universalistic. It affirms the moral unity of human species and accords a secondary importance to specific historical associations and cultural forms. *Fourth*, it is meliorist. It acknowledges the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements (Gray, 1986).

Hobbes was among the first to make a more curious search into the rights of States and duties of subjects (Cf Skinner, 1978). His thoughts mark a point of transition between a commitment to the Absolutist State and the struggle of Liberalism against tyranny. In so doing, he produced a political philosophy which became a fascinating point of departure for reflection on the modern theory of the State. It was Liberal because Hobbes derived the existence of society and the State by reference to free and equal individuals as the components of social life and emphasised the importance of consent in the making of a contract or bargain, not only to regulate human affairs and secure a measure of independence and choice in society, but also to legitimise such regulation. Interestingly enough, his political conclusions emphasised the necessity of a practically all-powerful State to create the law and secure the conditions of social and political life. Thus, his thought reflects a constant tension between the claims of individuality on the one hand, and the power requisite for the State to ensure peaceful and commodious living on the other (Macpherson, *op. cit.*).

In the Hobbesian conception, as we have seen in Unit 1, the State is regarded as pre-eminent in political and social life. While individuals exist prior to the formation of civilised society and to the State itself, it is the State that provides the conditions of existence of the former. The State alters a miserable situation for human beings by changing the conditions under which they pursue their interests. It constitutes the society through the powers of the sovereign to enforce the law. The self-seeking nature of individuals' behaviour and patterns of interaction necessitates the indivisible power of the State. The State must be able to act decisively to counter the threat of Anarchy. Hence, it has to be powerful and capable of acting as a single force. The State and its actions can and must be considered legitimate. The 'Leviathan' or the Sovereign State represents the public, the sum of individual interests, and thus can create the conditions for individuals to live their lives and to go about their competitive and acquisitive business peacefully.

John Locke (1632-1704) raised a fundamental objection to the Hobbesian conception of State as an indivisible sovereign public power to look after the interests of self-seeking individuals: "This is to think that men are so foolish that they take care to avoid what mischiefs may be done by Pole Cats or Foxes, but are content and think to be safe, to be devoured by Lions". He rejected the notion of a great Leviathan, pre-eminent in all social spheres, an uncontested unity establishing and enforcing the law

according to the Sovereign's will. It is worth noting here that Locke had approved of the revolution and settlement of 1688, which imposed certain Constitutional limits on the authority of the Crown in England. For him, the State (or government as Locke often put it) can and should be conceived as an 'instrument' for the defence of the life, liberty and estate or property of its citizens, that is, the State's *raison d'etre* is the protection of individual's rights as laid down by God's will and as enshrined in law. Society exists prior to the State, and the State is established to guide society.

Locke placed a strong emphasis on the importance of government by consent, which could be revoked if the government fails to sustain the 'good of the governed'. Legitimate government requires the consent of its citizens, and government can be dissolved if the trust of the people is violated. In Locke's opinion, the formation of the State does not signal the transfer of all the rights of the subjects to the State. The rights of law making and enforcement (legislative and executive rights) are transferred, but the whole process is conditional upon the State adhering to its essential purpose: the preservation of life, liberty and estate. Sovereign power or sovereignty remains with the people. Thus, an Absolutist State and the arbitrary use of authority are inconsistent with the integrity and ultimate ends of society.

Locke believed in the desirability of a Constitutional monarchy holding executive power and a Parliamentary assembly holding the rights of legislation. Although he did not think this was the only form of government and his views were compatible with a variety of other conceptions of political institutions. The government rules and its legitimacy is sustained by the consent of the individuals; it could be interpreted to suggest that only the continually active personal agreement of individuals would be sufficient to ensure a duty of obedience, that is to ensure a government's authority and legitimacy (See: Plamentoz, 1963). The government by virtue of the original contract and its covenants, is bound by the law of nature and thus, bound to guarantee 'life, liberty and estate.' The price of this is a duty to obey the law, an obligation to the State unless the law of nature is consistently violated by a series of tyrannical political actions. In the eventuality of such situation, Locke believed, a rebellion to form a new government, might not only be unavoidable but just.

The duties of the State are the maintenance of law and order at home and protection against aggression from abroad. The State according to Locke, should be the regulator and protector of society so that individuals are able to satisfy their needs and develop their capacities in a process of free exchange with others. Thus, Locke can easily be called one of the first great champions of Liberalism as his works clearly stimulated the development of what we may call liberal democracy by advocating the rights of individuals, popular sovereignty, majority rule, a division of powers within the State, Constitutional monarchy and a representative system of government.

The need for limits upon legally sanctioned political power was taken further by two of the other notable advocates of Liberal democracy: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and James Mill (1773-1836). For these two thinkers, Liberal democracy was associated with a political apparatus that would ensure the accountability of the governors to the governed. As Bentham wrote : "A democracy... has for its characteristic object and effect... securing its members against oppression and depredation at the hands of those functionaries which it employs for its defence". Thus, democratic government is required to protect citizens from despotic use of political power. Macpherson calls this a "Protective case for democracy" (See: Constitutional Code, Book 1 and Macpherson, *op.cit.*).

Bentham and Mill argued that "Only through a system of vote, secret ballot, competition between potential political leaders (representatives), elections, separation of powers and the liberty of the press, speech and public association could the interest

of the community in general” be sustained. They thought of the concepts of social contract, natural rights and natural law as misleading philosophical fictions, which failed to explain the real basis of the citizen’s commitment and duty to the State. This basis could be understood by grasping the primitive and irreducible elements of actual human behaviour. The overriding motivation of human beings, according to them, is to fulfill their desires, maximise their satisfactions or utilities, and minimise their suffering; society consists of individuals seeking as much utility as they can get from whatever it is they want; the government must act according to the Principle of Utility. Bentham thus proposed free education, guaranteed employment, minimum wages, sickness benefit and old age insurance as well as a system of agricultural communes and industrial houses to take care of the destitute as distinguished from the poor.

The State must aim to ensure, by means of careful calculation, the achievement of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which, according to Bentham and Mill, was the only scientifically defensible criterion of the public good. It also had four subsidiary goals: “To provide subsistence; to produce abundance; to favour equality; to maintain security”. If the State pursues these goals, it will be in the interest of the citizens to obey it. Thus, Bentham and Mill provided one of the clearest justifications for the Liberal Democratic State that ensures the conditions necessary for individuals to pursue their interests without the risk of arbitrary political interference and to participate freely in economic transactions. These ideas became the basis of classical 19<sup>th</sup> century Liberalism, wherein the State was to have the role of the umpire or referee while individuals pursued, according to the rules of economic competition and free exchange, their own interests. Periodic elections, the abolition of the powers of the monarchy, the division of power within the State plus the free market was to lead to the maximum benefit for all citizens.

If Bentham and Mill have been called reluctant democrats, John Stuart Mill was a clear advocate of democracy, preoccupied with the extent of individual liberty in all spheres of human endeavour. Liberal democratic or representative government was important for him as an important aspect of the free development of individuality and participation in political life was vital to create a direct interest in government and, consequently, a basis for an involved, informed and developed citizenry. According to Macpherson and Dunn, James Mill conceived of democratic politics as a prime mechanism of moral self-development and achievement of ‘human excellence’. A system of representative democracy, according to Mill, makes government accountable to the citizenry and creates wiser citizens capable of pursuing the public interest.

Thus, the Classical Liberal State was born out of protest and dissatisfactions, which led the newly emerging middle classes to reject the older system of power structure. They wanted to free production and trade from unnecessary restraints, both sacred and secular. They wanted a voice in determining what the services should be and how much should be paid for them. They wanted a State, which honoured thrift, industry and enterprise, just as they wanted a society, which could dispense with obsolete hierarchical arrangements in which the honoured places were reserved for the high born aristocrats. However, if a State were to be able to meet the aspirations of the rising middle classes, it could, as the supreme coercive authority, enslave, free or plunder the industrious. This was the dilemma that kept the Liberals torn between their need for the State and their fear of it. They defined the authority of the State and the liberty of the individual as opposites, only to find that they cannot dispense with either of them.

The Classical Liberals, therefore, perceive the State as suspect, for it possesses power and power corrupts. They naturally insist on limiting the powers of the State. For

them, the 'State is best which governs the least'. Jeremy Bentham admonished the State to 'be quiet'. Herbert Spencer declared that 'government is essentially immoral' while Edmund Burke concluded, "It is the positive power of the State to prevent much evil; it can do very little positive good." Similarly, Thomas Paine went to the extent of arguing in his common sense that "Government, even in its best state is but a necessary evil".

Interestingly, while all Liberal thinkers agree on a theory of limited State, there is no unanimity among them as to whether such a limited State should necessarily be a minimum State. However, most of them would accept that the Liberal State may have a range of service functions, going beyond protection of rights and the upholding of justice. For instance, J.S. Mill prescribes 'optional' areas of State interference in fields of education, care of children and insane, relief for poor, public utilities like water and regulation of hours of work.

Among the negative functions of the State permitted by the Classical Liberals, the most important is the protection of person and property against the mischief of others. *Secondly*, the State seeks to enforce contract obligations among individuals and while enforcing contracts the State does not regulate, direct or interfere with the conduct of individuals ; it merely gives effect to their expressed will. *Thirdly*, the State is expected to promote exchange so that buyers and sellers, producers and consumers, employers and workers may have free access to the market.

This third function involves not only the provision of a standard medium of exchange, uniform currency, standard weights and measures but also physical means of transaction like roads, railways, telephone and other means of communication. *Fourthly*, the State has to maintain free competition so as to achieve general welfare. *Lastly*, the State may perform / undertake some ameliorative functions like providing for public education and taking care of children and the disadvantaged sections of society as distinct from the general welfare activities. However, it is remarkable that the Liberals not only describe the functions of the State, they also specify effective devices to restrain State's power like Constitutionalism, separation of powers, decentralisation of authority etc.

The arrival of mass democracy and the revolution in communication led to a conception of State as the provider of general welfare and not simply, as Classical Liberals believed, the guardian of the framework within which individuals may provide for themselves. Consequently, the power and scope of the government has increased notably during the last hundred years. People now demand government intervention to meet their basic needs. They have realised that most of their problems are not a result of the niggardliness of nature. They are artificial and man-made and so can be solved by individuals through collective deliberation and collective action and that can be possible through the institutions provided in a democracy. This realisation paved way for the ideas of Welfare State.

The advocates of Welfare State or the New Liberals did not build a philosophy upon the demonisation either of private enterprise or of the State. They continue to believe in the creative potential of capitalism, provided it is governed/guided by collective intelligence represented through effective public agencies. Thus, the Welfare State aimed at a readjustment of incomes in order to provide adequately for the disabled and the disadvantaged, economic recovery and the diffusion of such concentration of power that account for economic disadvantage.

According to the New Liberals, "The function of the State is to secure conditions upon which its citizens are able to win by their own efforts all that is necessary to a fulfill civic efficiency. It is not for the State to feed, house or clothe them. It is for the State to take care of the fact that the economic conditions are such that the normal

man who is not defective in mind or body or will, can by useful labour feed, house and clothe himself and his family. The 'Right to Work' and the Right to a 'Living Wage' are just as valid as the Right to Property (Hobhouse, 1964). These theorists believe that there is a reciprocal obligation between the individual and the State. The individual owes the duty to work industriously for himself and his family. The State, on the other side, owes to him the means of maintaining a civilised standard of life.

The development of the notion of the Liberal Democratic State in the works of Hobbes, Locke, Bentham and the father-son duo of Mills comprises a very heterogeneous body of thought. That it had enormous influence in the Anglo-American world is beyond doubt but it also gave rise to seemingly endless debates and conflicts. Rousseau, for instance, came out with an idea of social contract which creates the possibility of self-regulation or self-government. He held that sovereignty cannot and should not be transferred simply because it could neither be represented nor alienated. He believed, "Sovereignty not only originates in the people, it ought to stay there" (Sec: Cranston, 1986). Rousseau saw individuals as ideally involved in the direct creation of the laws by which their lives are regulated. The sovereign authority is the people making the rules by which they live. This idea of self-government in Rousseau's thought does not create just a State – a political order offering opportunities for participation in the arrangement of public affairs, but aims at formation of a type of society – a society in which the affairs of the State are integrated into the affairs of ordinary citizens.

T. H. Green, however, added new dimensions to the Liberal perspective. He argued that the State is neither a 'will' nor an 'artifice', but an institution whose purpose is to ensure common good. He attempts to reconcile Rousseau's theory of General Will with Austin's theory of Sovereignty by agreeing that the supreme coercive power indicates the visible presence of the State, but also expects the State to be a moral order that synthesises individual identity with common good. Therefore, the function of a State, according to Green, is not the maintenance of law and order but removal of hindrances in the moral development of individuals. The State is moral because it creates conditions that enable its members to fulfill their basic potentialities. Recourse to force by itself cannot be the legitimate basis of a State. He asserts but concedes that some amount of force may be legitimate when it is used to achieve specific ends sanctioned by the common good of the community. Hence, "Will, not force, is the basis of the State", proclaims Green.

T.H. Green is believed to have transformed the very basic character of English Liberalism by defining the State not as an aggregate of individuals pursuing private good but as a device for realising common good and positive freedom. Conscious of the great inequalities in his society, he suggested remedies like compulsory education, universal suffrage, active participation in the affairs of the State by all, change in the character of the Parliament and also limitations on the Right to Property. Green, according to MacIntyre (1971), "Was the apostle of State intervention in matters of social welfare and of education ; he was able to be so because he could see in the State an embodiment of that higher self, the realisation of which is our moral aim".

Green's revisionary Liberalism found its systematic exposition in the writings of Hobhouse who attempted to synthesise the philosophies of Mill and Green. He accepted the need for government intervention not on paternalistic grounds but to ensure some level of well being for all as an essential precondition for a Liberal society. Believing that the idea of liberty shall not prevent the General Will from acting for the common good, he also stressed on the contribution of welfare measures to the realisation of the Liberal values of equality of opportunity. Keynes and Beveridge further extended this by justifying extension of public control on humane grounds.



The post-World War period ushered Keynesian consensus in England and Roosevelt's New Deal in U.S. reflected a public opinion which favoured an activist State and mixed economy something like a middle path between the old liberal tradition and the new socialist ideals. However, there were still those who swam against the current and claimed allegiance to Classical Liberalism. The most noteworthy among them was F.A. Hayek and Nozick who rejected central planning and collectivism as leading to totalitarianism and pleaded for a return to free market and spontaneous social order. He believed that useful social institutions could arise and function without any overall organisation, without exercise of power or authority, without coercion and thus without compromising individual liberty.

Another important exponent of Liberal perspective is Karl Popper who rejects the wholesale transformation of society that Marx advocates and justifies piecemeal reform of social institutions (or social engineering as he would like to call it) as the path of reason. Similarly, Isaiah Berlin offers an eloquent defence of the importance of 'negative liberty'. However, the most extraordinary revival of Liberalism comes in the writings of John Rawls, who developed a concept of justice that is congruent with liberty and reciprocity. He retained Utilitarianism's aim of maximising social welfare but insisted on separateness of persons so that none are viewed as means to the ends of the society at large. He also emphasised that cooperation, toleration and mutual advantage are the keys to stability of a well-ordered society.

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#### **4.4 THE MARXIST PERSPECTIVE**

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The Marxist Perspective, also commonly regarded as the class theory of State, is basically a perspective, which has evolved from the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and some other classic Marxist theoreticians such as Vladimir Lenin, L. Trotsky and A. Gramsci. It is worth remembering here that Marx did not offer a theoretical analysis of the State as such. His work on the State comprises a fragmented series of philosophical reflections, contemporary history, journalism and incidental remarks. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marx rarely focused directly on the complex concept of State. From the beginning, Marx made it clear that the point is not to contemplate or interpret the world, or the State, but to change it.

Therefore, it is difficult to acquire any clear unitary theory of the State from the diverse writings of Marx and Engels themselves. More so, because the emphasis of Marxism has not been to understand the State in itself, but rather to explain it as a result of a more fundamental reality, which is usually economic in character. Thus, it is the functional role of the State within the economy, rather than its Constitutional or institutional form, which is significant. Basically, Marxism is a 'praxis' philosophy mostly responding to immediate events and issues. The closest Marx ever comes to a systematic treatment of the State is in his early work, "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", but there too, he engages in mainly negative criticism. It is intrinsic to Marxist perspective that the State is seen as a universal but temporary phenomenon which ultimately has to be done away with. Most of the Marxist writings have been directed to the fact that the ultimate end of history and class struggle is Communism, which has to be a Stateless condition.

Despite such theoretical constraints, there is one central concept in Marxist theorising about the State – the idea of class (Ostrom, 1974). The State is seen as the expression or condensation of class relations, which implies a pattern of domination and oppression that are other general elements of Marxist perspective. A class interest is seen to manage the State apparatus in the interests of that class alone. This involves the exercise of power over other groups or classes. The history of States is therefore,

the history of such class domination and class struggle. This notion of class also links up with human labour and a particular theory of human nature and history; however, it is class which remains the key to the State.

The emergence of new social classes was one of the central factors leading first to the revision of Classical Liberalism in the works of John Stuart Mill and later of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim. This very process in the context of the development of industrial capitalism, was also a key factor in the social, economic and political environment that provided the fundamental motifs to the Marxist perspective on State. As Engels argued, 'It was ... Marx who had first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain are, in fact, only the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes (See: Selected Writings of Marx and Engels).

This point of view has been emphasised by almost all political commentators of Marx and Engels. One such recent commentator has thus put it: Most of their political writings were produced to describe specific historical context; and / or to provide a theoretical basis for the identification of political class interests and an appropriate mode of intervention in the class struggle. Marx believed that the State belongs to the superstructure and in course of history, each mode of production gives rise to its own specific political organisation to further the interests of the economically dominant classes. In 'The Manifesto' he declares "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Jessop, 1983).

For Marx and Engels, the State expresses human alienation. It is an instrument of class exploitation and class oppression. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx denounces the bureaucratic and all powerful State and advises its destruction. He then projects an image of the future society free from the internal tensions of the capitalist society, which would perfect and universalise all the elements of the bourgeois society that could be universalised. He believed that the communist society would eliminate all forms of alienation for the human individual, from nature, from society and from humanity. It will establish a true democracy with the majority ruling for all intent and purpose for the first time. The transitional State – the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' -lies between the destruction of Capitalism and attainment of Communism.

Interestingly, neither the phrase 'Dictatorship of Proletariat' nor the idea of eliminating State power was mentioned in the Manifesto. Instead, Marx and Engels talk about the 'Political Rule of the Proletariat' advising the workers to capture the State, destroy the privileges of the old class and prepare the basis for the eventual disappearance of the State. They are convinced that existing States, whether as instruments of class domination and oppression or bureaucratic parasites on the society, grow inherently strong and remain minority States, representing the interests of the small but dominant and powerful possessing class. Keeping this in view, Marx advises the Proletariat to seize the State and make it democratic and majoritarian for transitory phase and destroy it ultimately. The destruction of the State has only one implication for the communists, namely the cessation of an organised power of one class for the suppression of another class (Draper, 1977).

Marx seems to have modified his views on the State during 1848-1852. It was during these years that Marx accepted Engels' formulation that Dictatorship was necessary to fill the vacuum that would come up as a result of destruction of the old order and till the creation of the new order. They stressed that it did not mean the permanent rule of one person or group rather it was to be an extraordinary power during an emergency

for a limited period. Still, Marx did not define, in any specific way, as to what the Dictatorship of the Proletariat entailed and what its relationship to the State was. It can be said that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was Marx's name for the State that leads the transition to Communism and therefore to the end of the State itself (Elster, 1978). The name is apt to grasp Marx's insistence, as distinct from the Anarchists, that States continue to be necessary in the period between the overthrow of Capitalism and the emergence or establishment of Communism. The pre-communist State has a mission to perform; it is indispensable for superintending the transition to communism and, in so doing, creating the conditions for its own demise.

The idea that force is the foundation of States is a dominant view in Western political theory from Machiavelli through Hobbes to Weber and beyond. What is distinctively Marxian is the additional claim that the State is always the 'dictatorship of a class'. The State, for Marx, is the means by which the exploiting class organises its 'class dictatorship' and also the means by which the dominant class overcomes its coordination problem.

In Marx's view and even more explicitly in Lenin's, the revolutionary party is useful for countering the State's role in decapacitating subordinate classes, just as it is indispensable in the struggle for State power. But it is only with the conquest of State power that the coordination problems of subordinate classes can be definitively redressed. It is by organising its own 'class dictatorship' that a previously subordinate class fully becomes a 'class for itself'. Joined with the orthodox historical materialist claim for the inevitability of Communism, these positions explain Marx's and Lenin's identification of the State under socialism with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It is notable that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is not a form of government, but a type of State; a State superintending the transition to Communism or, what comes to the same thing in Marxian scheme, a State where the working class holds State power. Simply put, workers' power does not imply a dictatorial form of government. However, it does imply restrictions on the rights of former exploiters and other social strata whose interests are detrimental to workers' interests.

Thus, Proletarian Dictatorship proclaims inequality in order to superintend the transition to a classless society where equality for all is finally achieved. For the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and therefore Communism to be possible, proletarian class rule must not only be materially possible but also institutionally feasible; the Proletariat must be able to constitute itself as a ruling class and reproduce its domination for as long as the construction of Communism requires. Only then would Communism be on the historical agenda in the sense that means for its realisation can be conceived. 'Taking men as they are and laws as they might be.' The Anarchists and Social Democrats contended that the Marxist political order could turn out to be a rigid oligarchy of technocrats and officials and could ultimately result in negation of liberty.

The Social Democrats articulated the possibilities of using the existing State for the realisation of Socialism and enhancement of human freedom. However, Marx continued to advocate the revolutionary overthrow of the existing bureaucratic – military State and replace it with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat that is truly democratic and majoritarian. He wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* emphasising the transitional nature of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat : between the capitalist society and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into another. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the State can be nothing but the revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

There are two dominant strands in Marx's account of the relation between classes and the State. The *first* stresses that the State generally, and bureaucratic institutions in particular, may take a variety of forms and constitute a source of power which need not be directly linked to the interests, or be under the control of, the dominant class in the short-term. By this account, the State retains a degree of power independent of this class : its institutional forms and operations or dynamics cannot be inferred directly from the configuration of class forces; they are 'relatively autonomous'. However, Marxian theory has little to say in general about the autonomy of the State (Levine, 1987). We have already briefly touched upon this aspect in Unit 1 of this Course. Marx himself does not address the question directly though many of his historical investigations, his reflections on politics and even some of his casual remarks made in passing in other contexts bear on the question. But it would be difficult to trace a full-fledged theory out of all the pertinent material available.

The *second* strand, undoubtedly the dominant one in his writings, holds that the State and its bureaucracy are class instruments, which emerged to coordinate a divided society in the interests of the ruling class. For Marx, the State is the means through which economically dominant classes overcome their intra-class coordination problems and organise their domination of subordinate classes. The State, then, can only be a class State; and politics, by definition, is a form of class struggle. If the end of class society is materially possible and also institutionally feasible, it follows immediately that the State and politics generally can be transcended. With the end of classes, the State and politics will end too. In the *anti duhring*, Engels introduces the notion of the 'withering away' of the State in which the 'government of persons' is replaced by the 'administration of things'. Both he and Marx accept central planning and direction without force and coercion as a feature of the Proletarian State but they fail to resolve the possible conflict between centralised planning and individual freedom in the communist society.

In their attempts to explore the possibilities of a world proletarian revolution, Marx and Engels began to explore the political developments in the non-European world. *The Asiatic Mode of Production* examines the relevance of Marxist concepts outside the European context. They found that unlike the State in the European context, which was an instrument of class domination and exploitation, the State in Asiatic societies controlled all classes. It did not belong to the superstructure, but was decisive in the economic sphere. It performed economic and social functions for the entire society leading to an overdeveloped State and an underdeveloped civil society. Social privileges emanated from service to the State and not from the institution of private property because the State continued to be the real landlord. The State appropriated the surplus in the form of taxes and this centralised State prevented the rise of free markets, private property, guilds, and bourgeois law.

A critical examination of the idea of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat reveals a tension between the concept's organisational necessity with the larger Marxist hypothesis of enlargement of human freedom. It may be, as already discussed, because Marx sketched but never developed a systematic theory of the State and hence the idea of a political economy remained over-determined and undescribed politically (Wolin, 1987). In the process, he ignored the details that are necessary for managing a society based on equity, just reward and freedom.

Taking the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as the core of the Marxist thought, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) reviewed the ideas of Marx and Engels in his 1916 classic *State and Revolution*, which has been regarded as the most substantive contribution of Lenin to political theory. Using the model of the Paris Commune, he argues that the Proletarian Revolution destroys the Bourgeois State and establishes the Dictatorship of the Proletariat-the most appropriate political form during the transitional phase. He

clarifies that Engels' notion of the withering away of the State means that the Proletarian State withers away while the Bourgeois State is abolished / destroyed totally. This was necessary because Lenin too defined the State as a special organisation of force, an instrument of violence for the suppression of one class namely the bourgeoisie. He reiterated that the socialist revolution will lead to the political rule of the proletariat, and its dictatorship. The Proletarian State wielded coercive force but of a different kind, the majority exercised coercion over the minority, a reversal of the Bourgeois State.

The Proletarian State, for Lenin, had to perform two fundamental functions viz., suppression of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of Socialism. In due course, the economic management of society and proper utilisation of the economic resources of community would also become the most important, if not the sole function of the Proletarian State. For this purpose, the Proletarian State would rely on scientifically educated staff. When the classes are completely abolished, the State will have no suppressive function to perform. The State will gradually 'wither away' as the people will become accustomed to observing the rules of socialist life. Lenin expected that it should not take a long time for the State to wither away but none of the 'Socialist States' established under Marxian ideology have shown any signs of withering away. On the contrary, they continue to be much more powerful than any other State in contemporary history.

Lenin's (1939) fundamental achievement was to recognise that States lived within capitalist society and that the needs of different types of national capitalism led naturally to geopolitical conflicts as was evident in the First World War. He regarded the search for markets as absolutely inherent in the nature of Capitalism leading to Imperialism.

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## **4.5 NEW TRENDS IN MARXIST AND LIBERAL THOUGHT**

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The Liberal thought has made way for the Neo-liberal perspective. As we have read about it in Units 1 and 3, and as more on it will follow in Unit 5, we will not discuss it over here. Marxist analysis has made substantial headway in recent times. Marxists have started seeing State as an autonomous entity. There is an alternative 'structuralist' version that visualises autonomous administrative action within the parameters of capitalist interest serving. Such a reconstruction of Marxist theory has opened up new possibilities of a Marxist theory of Public Administration. There has also been a revival of radical anti-dependency Marxism by scholars like Bill Warren about whom we have briefly read in Unit 1.

Another important Marxist thinker about whom we have read in Unit 1 is Nicos Poulantzas. He rejects all forms of instrumentalism and opposes the argument that modern State is nothing more than a plain tool of monopoly Capitalism. He insists that the State is a complex social relation with an objective function of maintaining social cohesion so that capital accumulation can proceed unhindered. Poulantzas also criticises Miliband for analysing the State in terms of the individual human subjects who control it, rather than in relation to its structurally determined role in capitalist society (Poulantzas, 1978).

Other significant contributions to Marxian thought have been by Althusser and Gramsci. Louis Althusser felt that for a ruling class to survive and prosper, the reproduction of labour power is essential. Generations of workers must be reproduced to create the profits on which capitalism depends. Althusser argues that this kind of reproduction involves reproduction of skills necessary for an efficient labour force as well as reproduction of ruling class ideology and the socialisation of

workers in terms of it. No class, according to him can hold power for any length of time simply by use of force. Ideological control provides a better means of maintaining class rule.

Marxism is more alive today intellectually than it has been for a long time, and Marx's thought is better understood in its full scope and power than it ever was by the Marxists of the Second International. Moreover, Marxism is also questioned much more in its basic assumptions than it has ever been before and that too by the Marxists themselves. In political terms this has involved the development of new perspectives, many of which have drawn inspiration from the work of the Italian communist leader, Antonio Gramsci. The Italian thinker has become a major focus for all those currents within modern Marxism seeking a political strategy for winning power and establishing socialism in the social formations of Western Europe (Gamble, 1981).

Much of Gramsci's most influential work was concerned with an analysis of the relationship between State and civil society in the social formations of the West and how this relationship differed from that which had existed in the East (Tsarist Russia). Gramsci wanted to dispense entirely with the economic fatalism of some theorists who assumed that the economic base of capitalism would necessarily break down and that then its ideological superstructure would crumble, and its ultimate reliance on force would be exposed. He argued instead that there was no reason to suppose that economic crises in themselves would bring revolution closer, if bourgeoisie still retained ideological legitimacy. The cultural and ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie had first to be broken before a successful Proletarian seizure of power and construction of socialist order could take place. The Proletariat had to organise its own hegemony over all other groups opposed to capitalism (*ibid.*).

Bob Jessop (1983) identifies at least six different approaches in the Marxist perspective involving different theoretical assumptions, principles of explanation and political implications :

- 1) Marx originally treated the Modern State as a parasitic institution that played no essential role in economic production or reproduction. The State and its officials tend to exploit and oppress civil society on behalf of particular sectional groups and the State becomes the private property of such officials in their struggle for self-advancement (Marx, 1843 and Hunt, 1975).
- 2) Marx also discusses the State and State power as epiphenomena (i.e. simple surface reflections) of the system of property relations and the resulting economic class struggles. This approach considers the structure of the State as a surface reflection of a self-sufficient and self-developing economic base and reduces the impact of the State to a simple temporal deformation of economic development and of economic class struggle (Engels, 1878; and Marx and Engels 1975).
- 3) Another common Marxian approach treats the State as the factor of cohesion in a given society. This perspective is closely identified with Poulantzas, but is also evident in the classic texts. For instance, Engels views the State as an institution that emerged with economic exploitation whose function is to regulate the struggle between antagonistic classes through repression and concession, and thus to moderate class conflict without undermining the continued domination of the ruling class and reproduction of the dominant mode of the production (Engels, 1884). Lenin (1917), Bukharin (1926) and Gramsci (1971) also adopt the same view at several places.

- 4) The State is also seen as an instrument of class rule. This is the most common approach evident in Marxism – Leninism. However, it is not able to explain how the State remains an instrument of class rule even in situations where the dominant class has no immediate control over it like in revolutionary situations and transitions between different modes of production (Jessop, 1990).
- 5) Another approach in the classic Marxist texts treats State as a set of institutions without any general assumption about its class character. The State is seen as a ‘public power’ that develops at a certain stage in the division of labour involving the emergence of a distinct system of government, which is monopolised by officials who specialises in administration and / or repression. This view is visible in Engels (1878) and Lenin (1917).
- 6) Marxist perspective also examines the State as a system of political domination with specific effects on the class struggle. This approach shifts attention from the question of ‘who rules’ to the forms of political representation and State intervention. It examines them as more or less adequate to securing a balance of class forces that is favourable to the long-term interests of a given class or class fraction (Marx and Engels, 1976 and also Lenin, 1917).

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## 4.6 CONCLUSION

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Thus, the Liberal and Marxist perspectives differ in their view on the nature, composition and functions of the State. The key difference concerns the composition of the State. They understand the State to be penetrated by classes or groups and, therefore, fundamentally reducible to forces that emanate from society. In the classical Liberal view or tradition, the power of a State is very closely related to its wealth, and State strategies often seek to maximise the latter to gain the former. The classic doctrine expressing this position was Mercantilism, which enjoyed great success in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it could not fulfil Liberal hopes that the hidden hand of economic growth would bring in social well-being and political harmony. Nor could the Marxian view about class-based capitalist State leading to withering away of State via Dictatorship of Proletariat and resultant genuine freedom and democracy be realised anywhere in the world. Yet, these perspectives (along with relative autonomy approach, Anti-dependency Marxism and the Neo-liberal) help us in understanding the role of State in contemporary times. Therefore, the debate and the search for a comprehensive perspective on the State continue, which may be able to associate the need for a capable State and the desire for perfect freedom for individuals and communities. This Unit attempted to highlight these perspectives.

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## 4.7 KEY CONCEPTS

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### General Will

It is what the body politic (community of citizens) would unanimously do if they were selecting general laws and were choosing voting with full information, good reasoning, unclouded judgement, public spirit and attempting to discern the common good. The term was conceived by Jean Jacques Rousseau who believed that the freedom that the noble savage (human being in the state of nature) enjoyed would be possible under the right kind of society governed by the “General Will”.

## **Negative Liberty**

The philosophical concept of negative liberty is the absence of coercion from others. In the negative sense, one is considered free to the extent to which no person or persons interfere with his or her activity.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/negative-liberty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/negative-liberty)

## **New Deal Programme**

It was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's legislative agenda for rescuing United States from Great Depression (great economic recession). It was done based on the idea that the depression was caused by the inherent instability of the market and that government intervention was necessary to rationalise and stabilise the economy.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/new-deal>

## **Praxis Philosophy of Marx**

Marxism is not a mere theory; there is an equal emphasis on practice. Marxism is neither historicism, nor historical fatalism, rather it emphasises both revolutionary and conscious activity of man called 'Praxis'. (M.P. Jain, 1969, *Political Theory*, Authors' Guild, Delhi)

## **Renaissance**

As per the Wikipedia, it literally means 'rebirth'. It literally means 'rebirth'. It was an influential cultural movement which brought about a period of scientific revolution and artistic transformation in Europe. It was period of revival, roughly the 14<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> century period, marking the transition from medieval to modern times. During this period, a cultural renewal was witnessed in the form of resurrection in the fields of science, art, literature and music.

## **Rawls' Theory of Justice**

The Theory of Justice, as given by John Rawls centres around two basic principles (i) Right of each person to have the most extensive basic liberty compatible with the liberty of others, and (ii) Social and economic positions are to be to every one's advantage as well as open to all.

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## **4.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING**

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## 4.9 ACTIVITY

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1. Try to analyse the trajectory of post-independent State from a:
  - (a) Liberal Perspective
  - (b) Marxist Perspective