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DISTINCTION BETWEEN SOCIETY, NATION, STATE AND GOVERNMENT

You have studied about the concept of the state, its elements, and concepts such as nation, nationality and the distinction between nation and nationality in the last lesson. You have also known, in the previous chapters, the meaning of Political Science and Politics and what makes the two distinct from each other. In this lesson you would know about some other concepts, especially about ‘society’, ‘government,’ and ‘other associations’ and thereafter distinction between them.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- know the meaning of society, government and other associations;
- distinguish between state and society;
- distinguish between state and other associations;
- distinguish between state and government;
- distinguish between state and nation.

3.1 State and Society

You have known the meaning of the state in the last chapter. It is, as you know, a political society with its four elements: population, fixed (definite) territory, government and sovereignty. You also know that it acts through law and endowed to this end with coercive power, maintains within a community the universal external conditions of social order. Society, as a concept, is both an organization as well as a system of social relationships. It is an organization, a social organization encompassing a web of social relationships.

**Notes**

3.2 Distinction between State and Society

We must differentiate between state and society otherwise we will be justifying state interference in all aspects of human life, thereby affecting human liberty. Considering the two as interchangeable terms lead to the growth of deceptive social and political theories. MacIver rightly warns: “To identify the social (i.e. the society) with the political (i.e. the state) is to be guilty of the grossest of all confusions which completely bars any understanding of either society or the state.” In fact, the ancient Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) did not make distinction between the state and society. For them, polis was both the city, i.e. the society and the state. The idealists such as Rousseau, a French political philosopher of the 18th century, also regarded the two as one.

The distinction between the state and the society can be explained as under:

- (a) Strictly speaking, the state is a political organization; it is society politically organized. Society, on the other hand, is a social organization and has within it, all types of associations (social, economic, religious, political, cultural and the like). Society is both broader as well as narrower than the state. It is broader when it is used to describe the whole community of mankind; it is narrower when it is used to describe a small group of a village.
- (b) In terms of origin, society is prior to the state. Society may be said to have been born the day the human life must have begun. But the state did not begin with the society; it must have started at a later stage of social development. Human beings are social being first and then political beings.
- (c) Being prior to the state, society is clearly a natural and therefore, an instinctive institution. The state, on the other hand, is artificial, a created institution; its was made when it was needed. That is one reason that we see the state as a formal and legal organization with its body, its structure. The society, too, is a body, an organization; it is not as formal an organization as the state is.
- (d) The state exists for the society in the same way as a means exists for its end. The state is, therefore, a means and the society is an end. It is always the means that exists for the end; the end never exists for the means.
- (e) The state is sovereign: no sovereignty means no state; the society is not sovereign; it exists without being sovereign. As sovereign, the state is supreme over all other organizations, institutions and individuals within its boundaries; as sovereign, the state is independent of all other like states; sovereignty gives the state a separate and independent existence.
- (f) The state has to have a definite territory. You have read that definite territory is an essential element of the state. It is, therefore, a territorial organization in so far as it stays on the definite portion of territory: its territorial boundaries are fixed, definite and permanent. Society does have a territory but its territory is not permanent; its place of operation may extend or may get limited. The Islamic society, for example, transcends national boundaries. So does the Free Mason Brotherhood.
- (g) The state has general rules of conduct called the laws; the society, too, has general rules of conduct but they are called rituals, norms, habits and the like. Laws of the state are written, definite and clear; those of the society, are unwritten, indefinite and vague.

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- (h) The state's laws have a binding sanction. The violation of the laws of the state is followed by punishment: physical or otherwise or both. The rules of the society, if violated, lead to social boycott, i.e. social exclusion. The area of the state, we may say, is the area of that of taking action in case of disobedience; it has power is force. The area of society, on the other hand, is the area of voluntary cooperation and its power is goodwill; its method is its flexibility.

In spite of these distinctions, society and state are closely inter-connected and inter-dependent. Social conduct and the structure of the society must conform to the laws of the state. The state, on the other hand, must be responsive to the will of the society.



Intext Questions 3.1

Fill in the blanks :

1. Polis, for the ancient Greeks, was both the city and the
2. Society, in terms of origin, is to the state.
3. Society being instinctive is a organization, the state, being mechanical is an organization.
4. The state exists to act as a of society.
5. The society provides an to the means of the state.
6. The area of society is cooperation; the area of the state is action.

3.3 State and other Associations

An association is an organized group of people which seeks to achieve some specific objectives through joint efforts. An association has, therefore, three features:

- (a) organization of the people
- (b) some common/ specific objectives
- (c) joint efforts.

So understood, family is an association. Its people are organized through ties of blood; all the members of the family work together to attain objects common to the family. The other examples of the association are Cricket Club, the Church, the Red Cross Society, the Residents' Welfare Association and the like. Associations make up the society. The state is also an association which exists, along with other associations in the society. But the state as an association is different from other associations. These differences may be explained as under:

- (a) All the associations, including even the state, consist of people. But while the membership of the state is compulsory, that of the other associations is voluntary. A person has to be a member of a state: no person, as he/ she becomes adult, is a member of two states; his/ her membership of the state is a matter of compulsion. The membership of an association, say a Church, Cricket Club, the Red Cross Society

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is voluntary i.e. it depends on the will of the person: a person may join an association or may not.

- (b) A person is a member of one state at one time; he/ she can not be a member of two or three states at the same time. But a person may be, a member of numerous associations at the same time. X is a member of the Cricket Club, the Church and the Residents Welfare Association – all at the same time.
- (c) All associations function on territory. But while for a state as an association, territory has to be definite, the other associations do not have permanent territory. The other associations must have place to conduct their activities but that place need not be definite: that place may be Green Avenue today, Blue Avenue the next month. The state's territory does not change, it is fixed for all times.
- (d) All associations, including the state, exist to perform and achieve certain ends. While for the state, the purpose is always general (maintenance of law and order for example) for the other associations, the purpose is usually specific, particular. The Cricket Association exists for playing cricket, a specific and a particular purpose. We can say that the sphere of state's activity is all inclusive while that of any other associations, is always limited.
- (e) The character of the state is national. The character of other associations may be local, provincial, national and even international (The Indian National Congress, for example, is a national political party, and therefore it is of national character). The Residents' Welfare Association is local in character; the Government Teachers Association of Haryana is a provincial association; the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is international in character.
- (f) The other associations differ from the state in so far as they are not sovereigns while the state is. The other associations may be and actually always are autonomous but they have to work within the rules of the state. The state is sovereign because it is supreme over all other associations and is independent of all other states.
- (g) The violation of the state's laws is accompanied by punishment like imprisonment. No other association has the power to punish its members physically. At best they can only employ pressure or expel a defiant member.

The relationship between the state and other associations is significant in many respects. The other associations help the state reduce its burden; they perform functions even greater than those of the state; some of them, (for example, the family, friendship groups, church) have been in existence much before the state. The state need not take away their powers; it need not dominate them. What at best, the state can do and in fact, should do is that it should supervise their activities; should co-ordinate their activities, and should see that the other associations function properly within their spheres. Important as these other associations are in their internal domains and in their functions, they need not override the authority of the state, and should never challenge the state's sovereignty. The state, on the otherhand, need to ensure the other associations their autonomy.

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Intext Questions 3.2

Choose the correct answer from the words given in the brackets:

1. The features of an association are (a) organized group of people (b) interests, and (c) joint efforts. (common, particular)
2. The membership of the state is (voluntary, compulsory)
3. Family, as an association, is to the state. (prior, later)
4. The other associations do not possess the state does. (sovereignty, population, fixed territory)

3.4 State and Government

The government, as you know, is one element of the state. It is the agency through which laws are made, enforced and those who violate laws, are punished. It is the visible manifestation of state authority. It consists of all the persons, institutions and agencies through which the will of the state is expressed and carried out. Though the state speaks through the government, it is proper to differentiate between the two.

- (a) The state has authority inherent in itself whereas the government has no inherent powers. The government gets its structure, authority and power from the Constitution of the State.

The Constitution being the collection of basic rules, is the fundamental law according to which the government of a state is organized.

- (b) The state is a larger entity that includes all the citizens; the government is, relatively a smaller unit that includes only those who are employed to perform its functions. We are all citizens of the state, but we are all not functionaries of the government. Garner writes: "The government is an essential organ or agency of the state but it is no more than the state itself than the board of directors of a corporation is itself the corporation."
- (c) The idea of state is quite abstract. The government is the concretization of the idea of the state. We see the government, not the state.
- (d) The state is a near permanent institution; it is so because it does not die unless it is attacked and made a part of the other state. The government is temporary; it is so because it may change: today's rulers may not be tomorrow's rulers. To put it the other way, the state may be the same everywhere whereas, the government may vary from one state to another. India, the United States, Great Britain and France for example, are all states. But the governments which work in these states may not be of the same type. In India and Great Britain there is a parliamentary government, whereas in the United States of America there is presidential government.

Parliamentary Government is a system of government where the legislative organ of the government is closely related to its executive organ; the cabinet is taken from the legislature and is responsible to it, especially to the lower house of the legislature.

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Presidential government is a system of government where the legislative organ of the government is independent of the executive organ; the executive exists separately from the legislature and is not responsible to it.

- (e) The sovereign powers lay with the state; it is the state which is sovereign. The government only exercises power. The government's powers are delegated and derivative; the state's powers are real and original.
- (f) The opposition to the state is different from the opposition of the government. We criticize the government; we never condemn the state. The criticism of the state is a revolt; the criticism of the government is not a rebellion. We would never hear from an Indian that India is bad; but we would usually hear that the policies of the Indian Government headed by a political party or a multitude of political parties are bad. It is a crime to condemn one's state; it is a duty, in fact it is a right to criticise one's government.
- (g) The government is merely an element of the state. Accordingly, it is one part of the state. It is a part of the whole (of the state). As a part, the government is not greater than the whole. When we talk of the state, we talk of the population, the definite territory, the government and sovereignty. But when we talk of the government, we talk of one part, one element of the state.
- (h) The state's territory is always definite. It remains unchanged. Its boundaries remain where they are. The government's territory is never permanent. Muhammad Tughlaq had changed his capital to a place called Daulatabad. Many governments had changed their capitals to London during the World War II, fearing the German attack.



Intext Questions 3.3

Answer the following questions. Give one word only:

1. Which organ of the government makes laws?
2. Which organ of the government enforces laws?
3. With whom does sovereignty lay?
4. Through which organ does the state express its will?
5. If the state is an abstraction, what is its concrete form?

3.5 State and Nation

By nation, as you know, we mean a historically constituted stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and physiological make up manifested in a common culture. Nation, Bluntschilli says, is "a union of masses of men bound together specially by language and customs into common civilization which gives them a sense of unity". A nation is a culturally homogeneous social group.

NATION connotes the concept of people who are conscious of their historical and cultural background and who wish to perpetuate this background politically, i.e. within the framework of a state.

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The state, as we know, is a people organized for law within a definite territory; it is always sovereign-supreme internally and independent externally. The nation is a group of people psychologically bound together while sharing common joys and sorrows. The distinction between state and nation can be explained as under:

- (a) Nation and state are distinct entities. A nation may not be always a state; India was not a state before August, 1947. A state may not always be a nation. Austria - Hungary was a state but not a nation before World War I because the heterogeneous people did not form a culturally homogeneous people.
- (b) The state is a state because it is sovereign. The nation is not a state if it is not sovereign. Sovereignty is the chief characteristic of a state; it is not a feature of the nation. A nation becomes a nation-state when the nation attains statehood.
- (c) The state is a political concept while the nation is a cultural, and a psychological body. Hayes says, "Nation is primarily cultural, and only incidentally political". What it means is that nation is not a political concept, it is only spiritual.
- (d) Laws bind the people together in a state; sentiments and emotions bind the people in a nation. The unity of the state is always external; the unity of the nation is eternal. In the case of the state, unity is imposed; it comes from above through laws. In the case of nation, unity comes from within, through emotions.
- (e) There is an element of force connected with the state. The state's laws are binding. There is a coercion exercised by the state if its authority is defied. In the case of the nation, there is the element of persuasion.
- (f) The elements of the state are definite: population, fixed territory, government and sovereignty. The elements of a nation are not definite. Somewhere common language helps constitute a nation, somewhere else, common race makes a nation. Common religion, for example, was a factor in making Pakistan as a nation; it was common language in the case of the United States as a nation whereas it was common heritage that made India a nation.
- (g) A state may be larger than a nation. The former USSR had, within it, more than a hundred nationalities. Conversely, a nation may be larger than a state; a nationality may spread over two states. The Korean nationality is spread over two states: North Korea and South Korea.



Intext Questions 3.4

Fill in the blanks:

1. Before the World War I, Austria – Hungry was a state, but not a
2. When a nation attains statehood, it becomes a
3.bind the people together in a state.
4. While the state is a concept, the nation is a cultural entity.
5. people form a culturally social group.



What You Have Learnt

In this lesson you have learnt about the meanings of concepts such as society, government, and association. You had already, in the previous lesson, known about the state, nation and nationality. Now you should know that state and society are different terms: state being a political concept, maintains the external social order; society, being a social concept, has in it a multitude of associations and organizations. The state is a means and the society is an end. You have also learnt that though the state is an association, it is distinct from other associations; it alone has sovereignty, the other associations accept the sovereign predominance of the state. The state and government are not the same, though the government does everything on behalf of the state. The government is an organ of the state, a state's agency which makes laws, enforces them and punishes those who violate those laws. Nation is a cultural and a psychological unity and as such an eternal one. The state, you must have noted, is a political structure/organization.



Terminal Exercises

1. Define the terms: (a) Nation, (b) Government (c) Association
2. Distinguish between State and society.
3. Distinguish between State and Other Associations.
4. Distinguish between State and Government.
5. Distinguish between State and Nation.



Answers to Intext Questions

3.1

- (1) state,
- (2) prior
- (3) natural, artificial,
- (4) means
- (5) end,
- (6) voluntary, mechanical

3.2

- (1) particular,
- (2) compulsory,
- (3) prior
- (4) sovereignty



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3.3

- (1) Legislature
- (2) Executive
- (3) State
- (4) Government
- (5) Government

3.4

- (1) nation
- (2) nation-state
- (3) Laws
- (4) political
- (5) Homogeneous

Hints of Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to sections (a) 3.5, (b) 3.4 (c) 3.3
2. Refer to section 3.2
3. Refer to section 3.3
4. Refer to section 3.4
5. Refer to section 3.5



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