UNIT 11 POWER AND AUTHORITY

Structure

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of power is the key to understand and analyse politics, political institutions and political movements of the systemic process, both in the national and international arena. It is the centre of political theory. H.D.Lasswell and A. Kaplan declared, " The concept of power is perhaps the most fundamental in the whole of political science: the political process is the shaping, dissolution and exercise of power." It is the concept of power that political science is primarily concerned with. Thinkers like Machiavelli and Hobbes advocated the study of power as the central theme of politics. Hobbes wrote: " There is a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceased only in death." A few decades ago, Frederick Watkins suggested, "The proper scope of political science is not the study of the state or of any other specific institutional complex, but the investigations of all associations insofar as they can be shown to exemplify the problem of power." Perhaps this view was further strengthened by William A. Robson when he suggested, " It is with power in society that political science is primarily concerned – its nature, basis, processes, scope and results. The focus of interest of the political scientist is clear and unambiguous; it centers on the struggle to gain or retain power, to exercise power or influence over others, or to resist that exercise."

While studying the concept of power and its various manifestations in the systemic processes, one is reminded of what Joan Woodward said in his pioneering work, *Industrial Organization*: *Theory and Practice*. He said, "It seems that the sociologist cannot win in his attempts to establish a rigorous experimental framework for his research." It has, on the whole, been indeed a complex process of multi-dimensional character to analyse the operational structures of power, both as a central theme of social order and also as a factor of motivation of ambitious men, whether one looks at Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia.

Before we discuss about the various conceptual dimensions of power, it is desirable that students of politics ought to have some basic understanding of the concept of power. Let us see what Andrew Heywood in his work on *Political Theory: An Introduction* (Palgrave, 1997, P. 122) had to say in his introductory remarks on the concept of power:

All politics is about power. The practice of politics is often portrayed as little more than the exercise of power and the academic subject is, in essence, the study of power. Without doubt,

students of politics are students of power: they seek to know who has it, how it is used and on what basis it is exercised. Such concerns are particularly apparent in deep and recurrent disagreements about the distribution of power within modern society. Is power distributed widely and evenly dispersed, or is it concentrated in the hands of the few, a 'power elite' or 'ruling class'? Are powers essentially benign, enabling people to achieve their collective goals, or is it a form of oppression or domination? Such questions are, however, bedeviled by the difficult task of defining power; because power is so central to the understanding of politics, fierce controversy has surrounded its meaning. Some have gone as far as to suggest that there is no single, agreed concept of power but rather a number of competing concepts or theories.

Moreover, the notion that power is a form of domination or control that forces one person to obey another, runs into the problem that in political life power is very commonly exercised through the acceptance and willing obedience of the public. Those 'in power' do not merely possess the ability to enforce compliance, but are usually thought to have the right to do so as well. This highlights the distinction between power and authority. What is it, however, that transforms power into authority, and on what basis can authority be rightfully exercised? This leads, finally, to the question about legitimacy, the perception that power is exercised in a manner that is rightful, justified or acceptable. Legitimacy is usually seen as the basis of stable government, being linked to the capacity of a regime to command the allegiance and support of its citizens. All governments seek legitimacy, but on what basis do they gain it, and what happens when their legitimacy is called into question?

The annals of international history are a testimony to the study of struggle for power. Power as a model of analysis has been explained and explored by various social and political scientists since the time of Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. One could perhaps agree with the view that the Federalists, Pareto and Mosca are power theorists. This line of thought has further been advanced by George Catlin, Charles Merriam, Bertrand Russell, Harold Lasswell, and many others. With the onset of liberalizsation and the globalisation of economy, the whole area of empirical study of power has become a special sort of social theory.

11.2   EMPIRICAL STUDY OF POWER

It has never been an easy task to study and analyse the concept of power empirically. As Maurice Cowling, in his pioneering work, *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* (1963), says that there are real difficulties about access to the centres of power in modern society, even in a democracy. It may be easier to "discover the truth about contemporary power than to publish it; the difficulties are greatest for those who have been participants".

Kornhauser has tried to analyse the difficulties involved in the methodologies to understand the various centres of power in a political system in the article, "Power relationships and the Role of the Social Scientists" in his edited book, *Problems of Power in American Democracy* (1957). According to him, these difficulties could be somewhat expressed in the form of questions such as, "What social scientist are you?", "What parts of society want what types of knowledge, to be used by whom, towards what end?". It is not possible to have compatible doctrines and models regarding methods and objectives in studying power. These difficulties have been beautifully presented in theoretical works of political scientists like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, T.D.Weldon, Oakeshott, Butterfield, E.H.Carr and the like.

In any discussion of power, one has to keep in mind that most of the studies on power by eminent researchers are simply reflections of simplified versions of politics outside their time;

these are not the presentations of the real politics of their contemporary society and time. An objective bias in the selection of small subjects having limited ramifications could well lead to methodological conclusions that may not be true in case of the 'great society'. In the preface to his well-known work on power studies, *Who Governs?*, Robert Dahl said, "Many problems that are almost unyielding over a large area can be relatively easily disposed of on this smaller canvas. It is not, perhaps, wholly accidental that the two political theorists who did the most to develop a descriptive political science were Aristotle and Machiavelli, who, though separated by eighteen centuries, both witnessed politics on the smaller, more human scale of the city-state."

11.3   CONCEPTS OF POWER

Power is normally understood as the possession of control, authority, or influence over others, a relationship in which an individual or a group is able to exert influence over the minds and actions of others. According to Arnold Woofers, it is defined as the ability "to move others or to get them to do what one wants them to do and not to do, what one does not want them to do." Authority is closely connected with power. It might take various forms such as political, economic and ideological. One might say that concepts like morality, ethics, religion, customs and traditions may operate as limitation on power. Politics as 'authoritative allocation of values' is deeply interlinked with power and authority.

Most of the researchers who analyse the concept of power often start with two propositions: that in any polity some people have more powers than others, and that power is an object of desire, a 'utility'. Power is understandably associated with honour, deference, respect and dignity. One has, of course, to distinguish the power of the man from the power of the office that guarantees authority and legitimacy.

One has also to be careful about the distinction between apparent and real power. While analysing various dimensions of power, Maslow prefers to talk about the psycho –pathology of ambition as well as mental framework of some men. He says, " Their jungle philosophy (that of authoritarians) does not change even when they grow up and come out of the jungle. It resists new facts. It is sick because it reacts to an outgrown past, rather than to the real present." These persons are psychologically perverted ones because what they run after is nothing but an illusion. Maslow concludes that "Of course for those who actually live in a jungle-like world – and there are plenty who do so today – a jungle philosophy is realistic and reasonable."

11.4   POWER – MARXIST AND WESTERN APPROACH

The concept of power is one of the fundamental concepts of political theory. The analysis of the nature of power in both socialist and capitalist societies is essential for understanding the nature of politics as well as the state. Lenin said, " The question of power cannot be evaded or brushed aside, because it is the key question determining everything in a revolution's development, and in its foreign and domestic politics". While studying the concept of power, what often comes to mind is its use in a broad sense by the Marxist thinkers. Both Marx and Lenin highlighted the social relations in a political system as well as the relationship between man and environment. Over the millennium, in reality, nature has always been both the subject and the object of power. Earlier, nature's control over man had given a different definition of power. With the control of man over nature because of growth in science and technology, the concept of power acquired a new definition and dimension. As a synonym of political and social domination in state structures, power assumed multi-dimensional forms.

In the Marxist approach and terminology, the concept of power is identified with the control of state power through revolutions. Lenin said, "the passing of state power from one class to another is the first principal, the basic sign of revolution, both in strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of the term". The basic spirit of any revolution is the question of power in the state. He said, "The class struggle becomes real, consistent and developed only when it embraces the sphere of politics. In politics too, it is possible to restrict oneself to minor matters, and it is possible to go deeper, to the very foundations. Marxism recognises a class struggle as fully developed, nation-wide only if it does not merely embrace politics but takes in most significant thing in politics-the organisation of state power".

While differentiating between power and the state, Lenin was of the opinion that social power existed before the origin of the state, and would continue to be there long after the "state withers away". Criticising the views of Pyotr Struve that the state would continue to exist even after abolition of classes, Lenin said "First of all, he quite wrongly regards coercive power as the distinguishing feature of the state: there is a coercive power in every human community; and there was one in the tribal system and in the family, but there was no state…the distinguishing feature of the state is the existence of the separate class of people in whose hands power is concentrated".

According to the Marxist thinkers, the sphere of politics includes all aspects of the state; it implies all types of relationship among the classes, be it economic, ideological, semi-psychological and other. Lenin said, "it is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of interaction between all classes."

The term power is often used in a diverse sense, in both polysemantic and indefinite manner. According to Fyodor Burlatsky, "the natural scientist speaks of power over nature, the philosopher over the objective laws of society, the sociologist of social power, the economist of economic power, jurists of state power, psychologists of man's power over himself, and so on." Thus, although every expert talks about the importance of power, it is almost impossible to provide an explicit meaning of power.

The western sociologist highlights power as an essential factor in all social kinetics. The French sociologist talks of "the aura of mystery surrounding power". Michel Halbecq writes, "At present the phenomena of power preoccupy theorists of public law and political scientists." Francois Bouricoud emphasises that in its political form, power posseses the most formidable enigma. The sociologist Crozier opines that power is present in all processes of social life. There is indeed lack of specificity regarding the source of power. The western sociologists most often are extremely empirical, refusing the philosophical content of power, or are in love with abstract sociologising dimension of power. Maurice Duverger takes a positive view of power. He is critical of viewing power or authority from a metaphysical or philosophical point of view. He proposes that the emphasis should be given mainly to the practical methods by which power commands respect and the means by which it obtains submission. Duverger, however, is not very consistent in his observations. While discussing about some of the general indications of power, he prefers to indulge in the philosophical groundings of power.

Some of the western thinkers have also talked about the biological concept of power. Going back to the Greek days, Aristotle viewed power as a natural condition of society, nature determining the character and process of society.

Aristotle said, "For that some should rule and, others be ruled is a thing, not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule. And whereas there are many kinds of both of rulers and subjects, that rule is better which is exercised over better subjects- for e.g., to rule over men is better than to rule over wild beasts. That work is better which is executed by better workmen; and where one man rules another is ruled, they may be said to have a work."

Some of the leading western sociologists were not in favour of this tendency towards biologism. George Burdeau, for example emphasised that power and society were born together. John William Lapierre conceived power as the exclusive attribute of social organisation, as a social factor inherent in the social group, and enforces the concept of power from the fact that man belongs to a group.

Some researchers like Herbert Simon have presented a very narrow definition of power. Simon uses the concepts of power and influence as synonyms. Others like Gerard Bergeron are reluctant to use the term power and desire this term to be replaced by the concept of "control" to ensure that what they say is ideological neutral. This type of approach, in effect, may not be able to provide a scientific analysis.

A definition in "A Dictionary of Social Sciences" says: "Power in its most general sense denotes (a) the ability (exercised or not) to produce a certain occurrence or (b) the influence exerted by man or group, through whatever means, over the conduct of others in intended ways." This definition of power is deeply influenced by Max Weber's famous formulation: "power signifies any capacity to work one's will within given social relations even against opposition, independent of what that capacity is based on." This juridical conception of power was very popular among the western writers during the 1950s and 60s.

The western concept of power as the capacity to work one's will is reflected in the writings of Engels when he said, "Authority, in the sense in which the word is used here, means the imposition of the will of another upon ours; on the other hand, authority presupposes subordination." While analysing both the Marxist and the western approach towards the concept of power, one finds that the western approach is heavily indebted to the focus on institutional will: the dominant will of a group or organisation whereas the Marxist approach relies on class will as the basis of power. Raymond Aron and Crozier prefer to use "law" in place of "will", and in place of domination, they would like to offer direction, influence or control.

Power is, thus, the real ability to implement one's will in social life and political power represents the real capacity of a given class, group or individual expressed in politico-legal norms, while discussing about the nature of power one has to keep an eye on the following aspects: a class approach of power, concentration and diffusion of power accruing from the pluralistic nature of society, different aspects of power such as economic, political, social, differentiation between social and personal power, characteristics of power in different socio-political structures, and isolation of legal principles from volitional ones.

In the 1930s, politics came to be viewed as a system of relationship with respect to power. Both George Catlin and Charles Merriam were at the forefront of this trend. Later, other political scientists such as Harold Lasswell, M.A.Kaplan, and others followed suit. Lassswell's 'Theory of Elites' wherein he highlighted the "distribution of values" as the base point of the political process became the source point of the majority of American students of politics, and political science came to be treated as the science of power. Thus, both western political sociology and

Marxist thinking on the growth of political systems have contributed a great deal towards the development of the concept of power.

The concept of power, one must not forget, is multidimensional. Often power and influence criss-cross each other's area of operation. Some people talk about "intentionalist" and "structuralist" understanding of power. According to the intentionalist, power is an attribute of an identifiable object such as political party, social grouping or any interest group. The structuralists understand power as a form of social system. Sociologists like Talcott Parsons and neo-Marxists such as Althusser belong to the structuralist school of thought.

Steven Lucas, in his book "Power: A Radical View (1974)" talks about three phases or dimensions of power. According to him, power has the ability to influence the pattern and the process of decision-making framework. It has also the ability to influence political agenda and control people's thoughts. Thomas Hobbes first enumerated the notion of power as having the capacity to make decisions in his major work *Leviathan* (1651). This has mostly been the basis of conventional thinking in the area of political science. Robert Dahl in his book, *A Critic of the Ruling Elite Model* (1958) has supported this concept of power, which according to him could be both objective and quantifiable. This approach was widely adopted by political scientists and sociologists, especially in America during the 1950s and 60s.

While discussing about power as the ability to influence the decision making process some researchers prefer to highlight non-decision making as the "second phase of power". In their seminal essay, "The Two Phases of Power (1962)" P. Bachrach and Baratz insisted that "To the extent that a person or group – consciously or unconsciously – creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power." As Schattschneider said, "Some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out."

The third dimension of power is its capacity to influence the thought process of an individual or group. The ideas and views of individuals or groups are mostly influenced and structured by factors such as family, peer groups, schools, churches, mass media, political parties, and the overall environment at the work place. Vance Packard, in his study, "The Hidden Persuaders (1960)" has analysed the factors that have the ability to influence and manipulate human behaviour in a particular direction, what Steven Lucas said, "Influencing, shaping or determining his very wants." In his book *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Mareure, the leading neo-left theorist, talks about this aspect of power in advanced industrial societies in which the needs of the society could be manipulated through modern technology. This is what he said created "a comfortable, smooth, reasonable democratic unfreedom."

11.5 CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY

According to C.J. Friedrich, concept of authority implies a root of command to which obedience is rendered without any inducement, a 'social fact', and a social conduct within an interlinked, independent social structure. This type of analysis implies that the concept of authority is basically a part of classical theory, according to which authority is invariably linked with other concepts of social behaviour such as morality, customs, law, natural law, contract, expediency, and utility.

Authority is broadly understood as a constitutional means through which one can command compliance or obedience and influence the behaviour of another. Whereas power is broadly concerned with the *ability* to influence behaviour, 'authority' is understood as the *right* to do

so. Political philosophers over the decades have differed regarding the fundamental basis on which authority rested. However, they all agreed with the view that authority has moral dimensions. Authority is a form of constitutional power and provisions by which one can influence the behaviour of others. Power is more concerned with ability whereas authority is attached with the concept of right. Power is often identified with persuasion, pressure, threats, coercion or violence. The constitutional overtone is absent in the case of power, whereas authority has both legal and moral overtones.

Modern sociologists have approached the concept of authority from a different angle. The German sociologist, Max Weber, considers authority as a form of power, a 'legitimate power'. He analyses it as a matter of people's belief about its legitimacy. Although theoretically, the concepts of power and authority are treated as separate identities, empirically both tend to cross each other's boundary. While some researchers have considered authority as an essential feature of order and stability, others have looked at it as a symbol of authoritarianism.

Basically, both power and authority are mutually exclusive concepts. Authority is widely understood as a means of gaining compliance. On the other hand, power involves the ability to accomplish goals. It might take various forms such as pressure, intimidation, coercion or violence. Authority and power are intrinsically interlinked. Authority is rarely exercised in the absence of power, and power always implies some amount of authority.

Max Weber advocated three 'ideal-types' of conceptual models: such as traditional, charismatic and legal-rational authority. In traditional society, authority was linked with established customs and traditions. It was closely associated with hereditary systems of power and privileges. The second form of authority is linked with the power of an individual's 'charisma' or personality. Some consider this type of authority as divinely ordained. Sometimes, this type of authority could be 'manufactured' through the media and the 'cult of personality'. And this spectre of total power might lead to the growth of authoritarianism in political systems. This form of authority has its limitations in liberal democratic political systems. Max Weber identifies the third form of domination as legal-rational authority. This form of authority is very significant in modern industrial societies and is often regarded as the symbol of large-scale bureaucratic organisations, and it operates through a body of clearly defined rules and procedures. One must not, however, be unaware of the darker side of the onward march of bureaucratic authority, its de-personalised and inhuman social environmental dimensions.

11.6 DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY

The concept of authority has become a highly controversial aspect of political theory in contemporary international political system. The progressive growth of individual rights and liberties, the world-wide movement for human rights and the advance of a tolerant or permissive social ethics have encouraged social scientists to look at the concept of authority from a grass-root oriented human angle. This development in the field of social science has ensured a backlash that has encouraged the defenders of authority to highlight its importance.

Beginning from the social contract theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there has been a spate of liberal literatures in the field of social science that provided a classic justification for authority. These liberal theories emphasised that in the absence of an established legal authority to ensure order and stability as well as to protect individual liberty and rights, there could be imbalance in the growth of social systems. To neutralise the authoritarian trends in society, these liberal thinkers suggested that authority could be constrained through legal-

rational forms of constitutional provisions as the very basis of authority arising from 'below', the consent of the governed.

The conservative thinkers, on the other hand, always regarded authority, to quote Roger Scruton (1984) as an essential feature of all social institutions, a 'natural necessity' for leadership, not a result of consent from the governed.

The conservative ideas and doctrines became very popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was indeed a reaction against growing political and economic doctrines that emphasised the basic philosophy of the French Revolution. Not surprisingly, two streams of conservative ideas got reflected in the social science deliberations of the time. With the growing trends of an authoritarian and reactionary form of conservatism in continental Europe that refused to accept any idea of reform, there emerged in Britain and America, a more flexible form of conservatism that preferred 'natural change' or 'change in order to conserve', in the form of social reforms.

The conservative reforms were more in the form of traditions, history, and experience. They perceived the society as a moral community and strongly advocated a strong government to ensure the enforcement of law and order. They advocated non-ideological and programmatic interactions between the state and the individual.

Since the 1970s, conservative doctrines have been facing strong challenges from the New Right. The supporters of the New Right believe in economic liberalism or neo-liberalism and social conservatism. Neo-liberalism is often considered a backlash of the policies of liberal, socialist and conservative governments of the twentieth century. It believes that the breakdown of social structures is a result of the growth of liberal and permissive values and is in favour of traditional values, social discipline and restoration of authority.

Conservative political philosophy has always been criticised for its support for elite groups and status quo in society. However, against this criticism, conservatives argue that as human beings are morally and intellectually imperfect, it is always preferable to depend on the wisdom of tradition, authority and a shared culture than to be obsessed with abstract principles of political theory. From their stand point, authority is an intrinsic link that ensures social cohesion and strengthens the structures of society.

The advocates of conservatism are Edmund Burke, Michael Oakeshott and Irving Kristol. The advocates of authority strongly plead that an erosion of authority would lead to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt argued that a strong traditional authority is indispensable for the growth of moral and social behaviour, and provides a sense of social identity. In her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), she suggested that the decline of traditional values and hierarchies was responsible for the advent of Nazism and Stalinism. All said and done, the concept of authority has not always been accepted without reservations by social scientists. It has been considered a threat to reason and critical understanding. Such apprehensions have been highlighted by psychological studies. William Reich (1897-1957) in his work, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1935) presented the view that the damaging repression brought about by the domination of fathers in traditional authoritarian families could have been responsible for the origin of Fascism. Theodore Adorno and others in the book, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) claimed to have evidence that persons having strong deference for authority have fascist tendencies. This view has been further strengthened by the psychologist, Stanley Milgram (1974) in his studies on the behaviour of guards in Nazi concentration camps and the US military during the Vietnam War.

11.7 SUMMARY

One of the major questions that often rise in any study of political science is the precise relationship between power and authority. In Cicero's phrase, "power lies with the people, authority in the Senate". His neat contrast between power and authority gets blurred as we analyse the various dimensions of these two concepts over the decades, and confront the realities behind these concepts. Interpretations of power and authority have varied with the growth of ideological dimensions of political systems. There are good reasons to suspect the exercise of 'power' and 'authority' in contemporary international systems. Although some of the researchers are very critical of Hannah Arendt's essay on Authority in her book, *Between Past and Future*, Carl Friedrich's study of Tradition and Authority, and Robert Nisbet's reflections on *The Twilight of Authority* as their reactions to radical egalitarianism and to the Marxist tradition, one must not forget to see the streams of progressivism in these writings. Hannah's revolutionary politics, Friedrich's faith in reason, and Nisbet's weakness for pluralism have revolutionised thinking in the field of social movements. Contemporary reflections on power and authority are more in tune with grass-root oriented approaches towards the process of human empowerment.

1. Power is central to the understanding and practice of politics. It can be exercised on three levels: through the ability to make or influence decisions; through the ability to set agenda and prevent decisions being made; and through the ability to manipulate what people think and want.

2. Power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others, based upon the capacity to reward or punish. By contrast, authority is the right to influence others, based upon their acknowledged duty to obey. Weber distinguished between three kinds of authority: traditional authority based upon custom and history; charismatic authority, the power of personality; and legal-rational authority derived from the formal powers of an office or post.

3. Authority provokes deep political and ideological disagreements. Some regard it as essential to the maintenance of an ordered, stable and healthy society, providing individuals with clear guidance and support. Others warn that authority tends to be the enemy of liberty and undermines reason and moral responsibility; authority tends to lead to authoritarianism.

4. Legitimacy refers to the 'rightfulness' of a political system. It is crucial to the stability and long-term survival of a system of rule because it is regarded as justified or acceptable. Legitimacy may require conformity to widely accepted constitutional rules and broad public support; but it may also be manufactured through a process of ideological manipulation and control for the benefit of political or social elites. (Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: An Introduction* Palgrave, 1997, Page 150.)

11.8 EXERCISES

1. Explain the concept of power and its various dimensions.

2. Discuss the Marxist and western views of the concept of power.

3. Explain the difference between power and authority.

4. Explain the concept of authority.

5. Examine the concept of authority in the contemporary international political system.