Power: An Introduction

I BA.LLB.
Semester II
Module: Theories of Power and Authority

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“..of the infinite desire of man, the chief are the desires for power and glory.”

-Bertrand Russell

•Power along with glory has remained the greatest aspiration for performing the tasks and treated as greatest reward of humankind.
• We use concept of power in general conversation very often. Comparing or talking about the power of........
- personals- either having power or lacking it
- Institutions or group of person
- countries
- media and sometimes media personals in specific.

• Now the question is that why we are talking about or studying the power? and what do we mean by power?
Why Power?

- Power is the central concept in Politics.
- Power structure is embedded in the social structure and social structure is in turn shaped by the power structure.
- In Political Science, we study the patterns of relations, social interactions, roles at play, etc. In each of them Power dynamics exist. Without studying power we can not understand such dynamics in reality and totality.
- Studying Conflicts- Studying the Domination
- National Power
- Socio-Political Movements etc.
- In short how power is institutionalized is the matter of enquiry of Political Science.
**What is Power?**

-In general terms- an ability, strength or capacity
-The ability to do things or to produce effects within social interactions.
-Type of behaviour that derives from social relationships and organized social interactions.

**Max Weber** - “The possibility of imposing one’s will upon the behaviour of the other persons even against their will.”

*Explanation* - Someone or some group is imposing its will and purpose or purposes on others, including on those who are unwilling or adverse.
- The exercise of Power is depend on the capacity to impose such will or to achieve the related purpose.

**Robert Dahl** - “A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something which B would not otherwise do.”

- From the definition of the Robert Dahl we can draw the following propositions of Power.
Propositions- [McLean & McMillan: 2009]
1. A has effects on B’s choices and actions
2. A has capacity to move B’s choices and actions in a way that A intends.
3. A has capacity to override the opposition from B

The above definitions and propositions suggest the first notion of Power i.e. **Power Over** Somebody.

Two questions...
1. Is power only individual’s attribute?
2. Is power only a Domination?

-Many theorists locate power at collective level – attribute it to **collectivities and structure.** [Marxists and Feminists]
-View of power, not merely as Domination..... Concept of **Power To** and not merely power over

-**Power To**- Power as enabling and enhanced capacity emerging from the collective action, generated when people communicate and act together. (Hannah Arendt) [Bhargava and Acharya: 2008/2011 ]
Talcott Parsons –

Analogue of money in the Economic System-
*Power is something which circulates in the society the way money does.
* Possession of money gives the capacity to secure goods and services. Possession of power gives the capacity to secure the performance of political obligation.
-Hence power is **facilitative** and **systemic** i.e. the property of entire social system and not merely of few individuals.
Three Dimensions of Power by Steven Lukes-

1. Visibly- more explicit- Exercise of power to prevail the interest of dominant one- Indicating Power Over (at the time of Decision Making)
2. Less Visible- Power is exercised to ensure that some things would never come on Agenda (at the time of Agenda Setting)
3. Implicit- Not so visible- People are dominated by ideas. People desire those things which are in fact desired by those who are in Power. (Power as Thought Control)- more close to concept of Hegemony given by Gramsci.

There are many contestations of power. Power is essentially contested concept.
A is exercising her power over B then is B Powerless?

Answer is NO...
-Everybody has Power.
-Though everybody may lacks in having Authority. Authority is Legitimate Power.
- Some People are more Powerful, while Some are less powerful. But having less power need not means not having Power at all.
As power is relative, in the course they may feel that they are powerless. -Slaves- Power of Persuasion
- Working Class- Power of Creating the Surplus Value.
-Many times B is reluctant to the power exercised by A and hence try to oppose it. Hence Power is Dialectical in nature.
Why amount of Influence or Exercise of Power differs?

Three Factors attributed for such difference. They are:
1. Resources- Resources are the means by which one can influence the behaviour of others. Eg. Money, Land, Information, Food, Social Standing, etc. More Resources –More Influence.
2. Skills- Variations in the skills or efficiency to use these resources differs the exercise of Power.
3. Motivations – Variation in the motivations and intentions.
References:


Thank You!