

STATE AND GOVERNMENT

Government is regarded as an essential element of the state. In actual practice, the state is represented by the government. Governments exercise all authority and functions on behalf of the state. However, the terms 'state' and 'government' should not be used synonymously. 'State' represents a wider and more stable entity than 'government'. As R.M. MacIver (The Web of Government; 1965) has elucidated:

When we speak of the state we mean the organization, of which government is the administrative organ. Every social organization must have a focus of administration, an agency by which its policies are given specific character and translated into action. But the organization is greater than the organ. In this sense, the state is greater and more inclusive than government. A state has a constitution, a code of laws, a way of setting up its government, a body of citizens. When we think of this whole structure we think of the state.

Thus, so long as a state maintains its identity and independence, governments may be formed and dissolved according to the established procedure without affecting the character of the state. But a state itself may lose its identity when it is suppressed and conquered by an alien power and its constitution or the established procedure of forming a legitimate government is suspended. The subjugated people may, however, retain or revive their feeling of national solidarity and re-establish their state in due course.

The state serves as a symbol of unity of the people. The image of the state inspires unity among the people and provides them with an identity as a nation. It

arouses national pride and a spirit of sacrifice among the people.
Government

only represents a working arrangement to carry out functions of the state.

Government commands our obedience; the state commands our loyalty.

Government may be good or bad, efficient or inefficient, but the state will continue

to be a symbol of our national greatness. We may criticize or condemn the government, and still acclaim the greatness of our state!

It is, however, essential that our duties and obligations toward the state should

be determined by the character of the government it creates. If the government

loses its credibility, it should either be replaced according to the established procedure, or the credibility of the state itself will be eroded. The government

should be subjected to constant watch so that it conforms to the image of the

state as the protector and promoter of our common interests. Any theory which

does not provide for a concrete control mechanism over the government is bound

to have disastrous consequences.

The idealist theory does not make a distinction between state and government.

It creates an image of the perfect state. Hegel eulogized the state, especially the nation-state, as the 'march of God on earth'! This theory demands complete

subordination of man to the authority and command of the state, without ensuring

whether the actual government which makes such demands, conforms to the

image of the ideal state or not!

The liberal-democratic theory is more rational in this respect. It treats the state

as a product of the 'will of society', an instrument of conflict-resolution' and of securing the common interest; then it authorizes society to constitute a government by free choice, and demands that the government should be responsible to the people, and should work with the continuous consent of the people. Any political theory which creates a truly constitutional government cannot be ignorant of the fallibility of government. It must recognize the distinction between the state and government.

Marxist theory treats government as agency of the state. It attributes any imperfection of government to the state itself. Accordingly, so long as society is divided into dominant and dependent classes, any government is bound to serve as an instrument of the dominant class. Thus, Marxist theory regards the state itself as an instrument of class exploitation, and advocates transformation, and ultimate withering away, of the state in order to restore 'authority' to a classless society.