Chapter II
APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ELITES

It is evident from the above discussion that there are varied conceptions of elite and elite formation. Depending upon the nature and structure of a given society, classification of elites can be worked out. Elites and society are interrelated in the sense that elites may guide and direct structure and change in a given society, and in return a society may determine the nature and character of its elites. It does not, however, imply that there are no generalised or societal elites. Besides the generalised elites, there are always elite specific to the nature and character of a given society. An attempt is being made here to enlist the main approaches to the study of elites and the techniques by which they are identified.

Functional Approach

Functional approach emphasises on the positive functions performed by elites in a given society. For example, the outstanding idea in the term 'elite' is of 'superiority'. Elites in a society are people who possess in marked degree qualities of intelligence, character, skill, capacity, etc. Pareto considers a class of people as elite who have the highest indices in their specific branch of activity.
While referring to a study of social equilibrium, Pareto divides the 'elite' into two classes: (1) a governing elite; (2) a non-governing elite. A governing elite comprises individuals who directly or indirectly play some considerable part in government, and a non-governing elite comprises the rest. For example, a top ranking footballer is member of the non-governing elite. In a given population there are two strata; (1) a lower strata (non-elite), and (2) a higher stratum (the elite); the latter is further divided into two; (1) a governing elite; and (2) non-governing elite.\(^1\)

Ministers, judges, and senators are examples of the governing elite. The non-governing elite may desire to join the ranks of the governing elite. The distribution of population into elite and non-elite and of elite into governing and non-governing elite explains Pareto's approach to the study of elites in terms of 'social equilibrium'. The circulation of elites is inevitable and an ongoing process in all societies except where a fixity of status prevails.

Another most known theorist G. Mosca observes that the elites direct the military and civil organisation of a community and this he considers as a real art of governing in the hands of the 'higher circles' of the ruling class. Mosca says that such an art of governing is better than crude empiricism and mere individual experience. He men-
tions about the aristocracies of functionaries in this regard. The Roman senate, the Vetrican nobility and the English aristocracy developed governments that were distinguished for carefully considered policies and for great steadfastness and sagacity in carrying them out. Thus, the art of governing enjoys prestige with certain classes of persons. In some societies the hereditary castes and communities and monarchs restrict the number of persons and families who could acquire the art of governing. Such hereditary aristocracies were found in China, India, Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc. For us what is important is that Mosca considers the art of governing as a positive quality and a sort of force of inertia among those who remain at the helm of political affairs. ²

The viewpoint put forward by Mosca is apparently antithetical to modern political situation all over the world. Mosca no doubt in his analysis takes into account social and intellectual superiority, education and environment as global trends towards democratization of polity.

Talcott Parsons looks at the phenomenon of power as a recharging instrument to keep the society in working order so it can manage recurrent societal crisis. Power, therefore, performs very basic strategic functions. The four basic functional pre-requisites of the social system, according to Parsons, are goal-attainment, adaptation, inte-
gration, and pattern-maintenance and tension-management. Goal-attainment refers to the determination and realization of collective goals. The use and development of effective means for achieving these goals implies adaptation. Integration refers to the maintenance of appropriate consensus and social cohesion in society. And finally, maintenance of cohesion and tension management between individuals, groups and organisations is the pre-requisite of all social systems. Different types of elites, namely, political, economic, cultural, and specialized elite contribute to the realization of societal pre-requisites. Such functions are performed by elites universally. Elites ensure moral unity, coordination and harmony among different groups, curbing of factionalisation and resolution of conflicts and protection from external dangers.

A considerably similar view is expressed by Bottomore. Bottomore concurs with Mosca who considers elites as a minority or a political class or governing elite occupying the positions of political command, and directly influence political decisions in the interests of larger society. The elite groups may be engaged in varying degrees of competition, cooperation or conflict with each other. According to Bottomore, this particular view resembles with Pareto's view of 'circulation of elites'. Bottomore labours hard to refute the Marxist conception of a ruling class. A class-
less society is impossible as there is always a minority which actually rules. In fact, Bottomore in the entire argument prefers the use of the concept of 'power elite' rather than the 'ruling class'. The concept of a governing elite explains the social forces as the source of new elites and this particular view is to some extent closer to Marxian point of view of power. The classification suggested by Bottomore in terms of intellectuals and managers in general and in the specific contexts keeping in view important similarities of social structure and culture places him differently compared to both Pareto and Mosca on the one hand, and Marx on the other. However, when he refers to democracy and plurality of elites Bottomore finds himself closer to the non-Marxian or functional approach to the study of power elite.

**Marxist Approach**

'Domination' is a key concept in Marxist understanding of politics. The Marxist notion of conflict cannot be comprehended fully without the concept of domination. In fact, the notion of 'class' implies 'class domination', and class domination is a continuous process. Class domination is economic, political, and cultural. Politics is expression of dominance, class domination, however, can never be purely economic or purely cultural. It must necessarily
have a strong and pervasive political content. Politics provides necessary sanction and legitimation to all forms of domination.\textsuperscript{5}

There is no single version of Marxism and power politics. Besides Marx, one has to consider the writings of all the major Marxist thinkers such as Engels, Lenin, Luxumberg, Gramsci, Trotsky, etc.\textsuperscript{6} We admit that there is an absence of a systematic political theorisation of all the writings of Marx and Engels, and there is a need to construct or reconstruct the Marxian notion of power, politics and dominance. And there is also the politics of Marxism. Marxist political theory in essence deals with men and women utterly immersed in political life, struggles and ideas.

In Marx there is no such thing as economics alone. In fact, Marx talks of 'political economy' in which the political element is always present. And in this way politics is a pervasive and ubiquitous articulation of social conflict (class-conflict), and as such it enters into all social relations. Politics is a specific phenomenon implying the ways and means whereby social conflict particularly class conflict, is manifested.\textsuperscript{7} However, Marx also treats the concept of power politics as a superstructural rather than a specific autonomous phenomenon. Thus, there is a relative poverty of Marxist political theory. The neo-Marxists, however, value the theory of politics a great deal, the
concept of State is an important component in their analysis.  

Though Marxism is not a so clearly constructed theory of domination, yet the question of power remains central to the Marxist theorization. Social relations among individuals are seen as a phenomenon of power by Marx in terms of the autonomy some enjoy over others. But the question is: Do individuals have autonomy in the Marxist frame of reference? In the German Ideology, Marx and Engels clearly write: "The ideas of the ruling class in every epoch are the ruling ideas; i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it."  

From this formulation it is evident that power is embedded into class, and class is not simply 'class', but it is 'class domination'. This particular point is also articulated by Marx and Engels' notion of 'hegemony', which is the ideological predominance of the ruling class. The power of the labour lies in its challenge to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, and consciousness plays a significant role.
in it. In the entire analysis the central message is the class-based power of the dominant class. However, Marx also takes into account the role of the state so long as it remains at the helm of affairs; in periods of actual social crises and tensions the state takes over the class-based power.

Gramsci in particular talks of power of the intellectuals. The intellectuals are the dominant groups, deputies exercising the subaltern function of social hegemony and political governance.\(^{11}\) Intellectuals perform two functions: (1) the organisational, and (2) the connective. Thus, the organisation of hegemony and the organisation of political functions are two major superstructural levels at which intellectuals function. According to Gramsci intellectuals are found at the cultural-ideological domain. In the German Ideology also, Marx and Engels refer to a division of labour in the ruling class between the active class ideologues and the more passive and receptive intellectuals.\(^{12}\)

Marx considers intellectuals in bourgeoisie society to those who are the managers of legitimation, though not being aware of their role as such. Another important point in the Marxist perspective is the categorical rejection of the state as a trustee and instrument or agent of society as a whole, because Marx considers the concept of society as of a 'class-society'. In class societies, the concept of society
as a whole is therefore a mystification. The dominant interests of the bourgeoisie are always under threat. In fact, according to Marxism the state is an essential means of class domination, and the state is a partisan institution. So long as bourgeoisie remain a ruling class, it encompass the society as a whole and the state as its hand-made. The class bias of the state is in essence the central point of Marxist notion of power. The state, Engels considers, as the official representative of the capitalist society irrespective of its form. The state is essentially a capitalist mechanic. It exploits its citizens as a capitalist instrument. The workers remain wage-earning proletrait. 13

Our study of Sikar district shows the role of class dominance in power-politics and the challenge to their class hegemony by party-based cadres and their leadership. Some economically strong candidates from outside the parliamentary constituency entered into electoral politics, at times they were successful, and at other times they faced severe challenge and opposition leading to their defeat in the electoral game. Contrarily cadre-based party ideologues and activists also entered into electoral power game, and they too faced opposition from party-based class dominants in particular. It is necessary to reflect upon both the situations to come out with a clear understanding of the connec-

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tion between political power and class domination.

**Pluralist Approach**

Pluralism as a perspective is essentially a description of the functioning of modern democratic socio-political systems. It is a critique to major approaches, namely, the elite or ruling class theory, and (2) the class-conflict theory. Pluralism sees power not as a centralized phenomenon but as a decentralized reality in the hands of democratically elected leadership. In this way pluralism can be contrasted with elite and class models in terms of the nature and scope of power and the relations between leaders and masses. A given political system is pluralistic when several groups or factions influence policy in such a way that a given group or members of groups do not control decision-making. Pluralism is therefore a perspective regarding political power in terms of its decentralization in the hands of elites who could have a mass background as well. In fact, Mannheim tried to reach a reconciliation between the idea of elite and the idea of democratic government. As such pluralism is nothing but a competition model of democracy, that is, competition for power among several political parties, and none of them aim to bring about a radical change in the social structure. In this way pluralism is also distinctly different from the Marxist view of
politics and power. Well-known economist Schumpeter and some others argue what political parties do in democratic countries is analogous to entrepreneurs in a profit-seeking economy. Others have applied the theory of games to political behaviour. These analogies may prove to be quite risky for the functioning of a democratic political system, particularly in the Indian context.

Reconciliation between the elite theory and the pluralistic perspective is found in the system of checks and balances, with regard to elites in a democratic society. Raymond Aron highlights this view as he observes that there are everywhere business managers, government officials, ministers, trade union secretaries, but they are not recruited everywhere in the same way and they may either form one coherent whole or may remain considerably distinct from one another.

David Ricci sums up the pluralist position as believed by the pluralists themselves. The pluralists believe that they are the true modern-day liberals. This is said to be true about Robert Dahl's view regarding pluralism. The main thrust of democratic theories including liberals such as John Stuart Mill is an insistence on a free and open method for electing leaders. All pluralists including Dahl and Truman think of themselves as fundamentally democratic and liberal by assuring frequent elections and inviolable civil
rights in order to choose leaders and make them responsible. As such pluralists reject the criticism that ultimately they emphasise competing class interests. The pluralists argue that the thrust of liberal politics is factional strife rather than class-conflict. They believe that the economy and polity are not inextricably linked. The critics however, perceive pluralists as conservative. But the pluralists counter the criticism by saying that they are committed to fact finding. The sense of pluralism is that some men should govern and others should follow, and in this way everyone has a status and responsibility in the community. A stable and decent society can be established and maintained mainly in this way. Numerous oligarchical structures of power, trade unions, corporations, universities, government bureaucracies etc, can be seen as illustrations of division of labour and democratic functioning of society.

Competition between elites and nomination of second level elites by the elites themselves are not found as defences of democracy and representative government. The ideal of direct participation by people in legislation and administration and the means to strengthen it can alone bring out the true character of pluralism. According to Schumpeter, Raymond Aron and some others, democracy is to be conceived as something accomplished and complete, as a distinct type of political system. Democracy also means
extending access to democratic institutions to groups which had remained deprived in the past.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, democracy has two dimensions: (1) as a doctrine and political movement of the lower classes of society against the dominance of the aristocratic and wealthy classes; and (2) as a movement towards ideal condition of society in which man would be self-governing.

There is a debate whether political parties are necessary to a democratic system of governance, and whether the competition between parties and elites is sufficient to ensure democracy. Responses to this debate are varied. Karl Mannheim believed that if individual citizens had at least the possibility of making their aspirations felt at certain intervals, a society would be democratic.\textsuperscript{19} However, Schumpeter and Aron take a different view. Schumpeter emphasises on the conditions for the success of the democratic method which are as follows: the high quality of the human material of politics (elites); the regulated effective range of political decisions; the services of a well-trained bureaucracy of good standing and tradition; and the democratic self-control.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, Aron states three conditions for the success of contemporary pluralist democracies. These are: (1) the restoration of governmental authority in settling disputes and enforcing the decision, (2) an efficient economic administration; and (3) a check on the influ-
ence of those individuals and groups who want to change the whole framework of society.\textsuperscript{21}

Dahl's conceptual framework has three basic concepts: (1) the distinction between actual and potential power; (2) the method of focusing on decisions; (3) the political criteria for decisions. Besides these criteria it has four notions: (1) Homo-civicus, (2) Homo-Politicus, (3) The apolitical stratum, and (4) The Political Stratum. In his study of politics in New Haven Dahl finds that most citizens are not interested in political affairs; they are contented to be simply members of the community - homo-civicus. However, some members developed an abiding interest in political matters, hence homo-politicus. The two citizenship strata are lower in status or greater in size than the apolitical stratum (homo-civicus), and the upper aggregate, a small stratum (homo-politicus). According to Dahl Community power is a more complex phenomena than as observed in the works of Hunter and Mills. This is the reason why Dahl has not used the word 'elite' and has preferred the word 'political leaders'.\textsuperscript{22}

The pluralist theory is also described as neoliberalism, as an intellectual construct of wide significance. It goes beyond the middle class liberalist construction. It provides prescription and justification for func-
tioning of political institutions. It challenges the orthodoxy of classical liberalism, mainly the tenets of rationality or rational man, and remarkable groups and responsible political institutions. Thus, liberalism has not been a static theorization. The process theory of democracy emphasising competition and choice, free speech, frequent elections, multiple political parties, widespread franchise, etc. can be explained in terms of process and change. Both Schumpeter and Truman have clearly provided a process theory. Historical perspective becomes necessary to understand the evolution of liberalism and pluralism. Pluralism has been opposed both as a method and as phenomenon of tolerance. Method presumes tolerance, and the latter is possible only by the pluralist method. Tolerance implies diversification and accommodation of diverse individuals, groups and segments of socio-political life, and the method contributes to mapping out of such political actors and agents in a given society.

The Reputational Approach of Floyd Hunter

Floyd Hunter in his book - Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers, expounds the reputational theory of elites. Hunter believes that power is located in the community, and the individual derives his power only as a constituent member of the community. Hunter writes: "Power of the individual must be structured into associations,
cliques, or institutional patterns to be effective. It is the community which is the repository of power. One may therefore presume that the community possesses some structure of power, some network of stable relationships which permit it to endure largely unchanged. The community is maintained by the collective efforts of the whole (collectivity) but major changes in it are effected only by "Leaders".

How to identify the men and women who wield great power and effect major changes into the community? Hunter drew up a list of persons who were reputed to hold commanding positions in the economic, political and social life of the community. Then he asked a panel of judges who were aware of Atlanta affairs to sortlist the most fluential forty of the list of one hundred and seventy which he had drawn. Taken together the techniques, first listing the persons of repute and then interviewing them to validate the list, are known as the reputational method.

Hunter discovered that an overwhelming number of the top forty were associated with business and finance. All the leaders were not concerned with all the matters which affected the community, in fact some were interested in some issues and some in other. In this way, leaders with similar interests in similar issues formed a clique. But here also
Hunter found that dominant members of each 'clique' belonged to some aspect of the financial sector. But these cliques consulted with each other on any major policy matters affecting the community.

The members relating to policy matters did not constitute a large group. Below them stood a larger group which formed what Hunter called the 'understructure of power'. This understructure consisted of groups such as the Basasscociation, Rotary club, churches etc. The understructure helped in the implementation of the decisions taken by the cliques. A leadership elite, several cliques, and an understructure consisting of associations with large membership, and groups of people with limited power constituted the community power structure in Atlanta.

Hunter says that the power of leadership had legitimacy because the community was aware of the power of the elite, yet it did not resist. The elites were able to perpetuate their influence and power because of the dominant position they occupied in the economic system, and secondly due to the conviction of the community in the excellence of capitalism, hence it permitted itself to be ruled by the modern lords of a privately owned economy. Hunter believed that the elite basically served their own interests and wanted to maintain status quo in their own favour. Hence, they ignored the interests of other groups in the community.
Hunter's suggested solution to this problem was to increase group activity among the individuals who were disadvantaged. ²⁵

Hunter's theory was criticised by many liberals who believed that in American society it was the group which exercised control over the elite, whereas on the contrary, Hunter's study found that the elites did not take care of the groups while taking major policy decisions.

**The Positional Theory of Elitism of C.W. Mills**

C. Wright Mills' theory entails the presumption that every community is an enduring thing, with steady and persistent power entrenched into its continuing institutions. Mills viewed that in American society those who were powerful were so due to the positions they occupied. Short of their institutional positions they would be nobody. The military establishment, the state, and the corporation were the key institutions in regard to power in American society. Mills then argued that the men who held dominant positions, "strategic command posts" in those few institutions constituted the 'power elite' of American society. ²⁶

The five major approaches to the study of elites are: functional, Marxist, pluralist, reputational and positional. All of them indicate at the core of elite as an entity and
as a structural phenomenon. Implicit in these approaches are the methods and mechanisms for studying elites in a given society. In fact, these approaches are not exclusive, they are rather complementary to each other.
Notes and References


(8) Luxemburg, Rosa, op. cit.; Gramsci, A., op. cit.


(10) Ibid.

(11) Gramsci, op. cit.


(19) Mannheim, K., *op. cit.*

(20) Schumpeter, J.A., *op. cit.*

(21) Aron, Raymond, *op. cit.*


(24) Ibid.

(25) Ibid.