Chapter I

INTRODUCTION
Introduction

Enquiries into the political structure have for long been assigning considerable importance to concepts such as, the class, the elite, and the status groups. These imply that social groups within a social system are differentially located in respect of wealth, prestige and power. The significance of the study of such inequalities occupies a central place in political sociology. To quote Bottomore, "The division of society into classes or strata, which are ranged in a hierarchy of wealth, prestige and power is a predominant and almost universal feature of social structure which has always attracted the attention of social theorists and philosophers". 1 Following this, among others, there are two main theories interpreting the source and distribution of power in society. These are: (a) diverse conceptions regarding elite(s) and mass (es); and, (b) various interpretations of the Marxist theory of ruling class and the subject class(es). Irrespective of the academic development they are considered as opposed to each other. Rare is it to find an attempt to synthesise the two theoretical positions, or to prove adequately that one of them is comprehensive enough for understanding the distribution of power in society. 2

2. Besides elite and class theories, there are pluralist theories and the Weberian theory.
No doubt, there are obvious aspects of dispute between them. The elite theories contend that always an organized minority rules over the unorganized majority of a population, due to their superior qualities. In contrast, the ruling class is a dominant organized minority in conflict with the subject majority, which to an extent is also organized.

The elite theories argue that every society has a political elite which discharges the functions of government and enjoys certain powers and privileges which distinguishes them from the rest of the society. But a little reflection points to the possibility of an indirect control over the elite on account of the structural disparities of wealth and power. There is little or no disagreement on the view that the disparity in the ownership of wealth is one of the chief reasons of inequality in politics. Here, Marxist sociology stresses the importance of the ownership of the productive instruments as the prime factor in generating socio-political inequalities. It has been argued by Laski that "the main index to the nature of any actual state is the system of economic class relations which characterise it," and the role of the state is "to put coercive power at the disposal of the class which, in any given society, owns the instruments of production there".

5. H.J. Laski, *Marx and To-day* (Fabian Society, 1943), pp. 16-17. The other roles of the state-ideological and conformative - and the relative autonomy of politics, would be considered under the theory of ruling class.
Further, elite theories focus on the conflict between two minorities - between those who hold political office and those who seek it - whereas, class theory stresses on the struggle of the economically deprived against the privileged, both of which are cohesive groups with a certain degree of common interest and consciousness. * At the same time, while elite theories often ignore history and treat social facts in their static, rather than dynamic aspects; the ruling class theory strongly holds that no social phenomenon can properly be studied unless it is placed in the context of history, since what it is at present, is always a product of what it was or has been. *

*In short, the concept of ruling class refers to the nature of the social system and the internal socio-political forces, while the concept of political elite refers to the process of political decision making. However, though differing in their basic orientation, both the theories examine the same phenomenon. It will not be improper to say that they are to an extent complementary. Precisely, here is the present research venture.*/

It is the contention of this study that a proper understanding of the nature and dynamics of the political elite in society cannot be adequate without an analysis of its relationship with the economic structure. Hence, the present endeavour is largely directed towards establishing the kind of relationship between the economic structure and the power structure as it exists at the village and the state levels in the state of Orissa.
I Theories Analysing Power

The study of power occupies a central place in political sociology and has, in a sense, provided the main impetus to the growth of the discipline itself. And yet there is a continuing debate over the source and distribution of power in a society. Broadly speaking, this debate has its roots in three opposing theoretical positions: pluralism versus elitism versus class approach (or Marxism). To understand the source and distribution of power, it is considered essential to have a critical appraisal of the salient debates and controversies over the various approaches prevailing in sociology. Accordingly, discussion in this section involves: (1) elite theories including the theories of governing elite, multiple elite (and integration theory), and power elite; (2) Weberian theory of class, status and power; and, (3) the theory of ruling class, including the various trends in the marxist literature. However, the major thrust would be on the theories of elite and the ruling class.
(a) Elite Theories:

The analysis of elite covers the entire gamut of studies, from relatively specific studies of an elite in a micro-situation to the highly generalised study of the national elite over broad periods of time. At the same time, some studies have attempted to single out different categories of elites, as members of legislatures, bureaucrats, military bosses, businessmen, and intellectuals. There have also been studies which have identified

the existence of a general elite at the micro-level. All these studies, usually, tend to demonstrate that a number of individuals in well-defined roles actually dominate the system either by controlling or influencing its decision-making process. Such studies, therefore, reduce the study of politics and society to a study simply of power relations. Ignoring the fact of economic development and class formation, they only describe the formal excercise of power. However, amidst the bulk of literature on elites, the elite studies have always posed some basic problems, such as, the definition of the concept of elite, identification of the elite, and the relationship between different types of elites.

GOVERNING ELITE

Elite studies owe much to Gaetano Mosca. His main thesis is that, all communities are ruled by an organised minority and this minority, "enjoys the advantages that power brings, (and)... the more numerous class is directed and controlled" by them. The ruling organized minority is called as "ruling class" or political class which is narrowly identified by him as the public power and equated with government personnel. But more than Mosca, it is in the hands of Vilfredo Pareto, that the concept of elite has received some theoretical sophistication. Pareto has defined elite as, "a class of the people

who have the highest indices in their branch of activity". But in his analysis, like Mosca's division of the population into two categories of the ruling and the ruled, he had divided the population into two unequal strata - elite and non-elite, the former is again divided into a governing elite and non-governing elite. He holds that societies are dominated by a certain organized minority who are, by nature, superior to non-elites "in intelligence, character, skill, capacity, power, etc.," and hence, they are the best, the choicest, the select few in a society.

Besides the thesis of the inevitability of a minority rule in any given society; both Pareto and Mosca pointed out the phenomenon of the circulation of elite. Pareto explains the circulation of elite chiefly in terms of the change in the constellation of psychological attributes - "residues" (sentiments). Though he referred to both the processes in which individuals articulate between the elite and the non-elite, and also in which one elite is replaced by another; he devoted greater attention to the circulation of individuals between the elite and the non-elite. Mosca, unlike Pareto, had considered both psychological and sociological factors, in so far as, he noted that the rise of new elites (or of new elements in the elite) in part is due to the emergence of social forces,

11. ibid, pp. 1423-24
13. Specially residues of the persistence of the aggregate and the residues of the combination.
which represent new interests (e.g., technological or economic interests) in the society. He acknowledged that new social groups may be formed as a result of economic and cultural changes. For him, members of the lower strata of society, in the process of circulation, rise to the middle strata of the society from where they climb further up the top of the social and political ladder. So he stressed the importance of the middle class, from which the ruling elite is ultimately recruited.

However, both of them had constricted the historical process to an unending cyclical movement and had neglected the structural transformations in the society. Even in Western democracies it is observed that there is not much circulation of elites. S.M. Miller studying the recruitment of elites in 14 countries found that "there is no historical evidence in favour of the social mobility from the manual strata of the population into the upper levels". Likewise, Wence, after undertaking a comparative analysis of occupational composition of the cabinets and parliaments of 19 countries— including India—, found that, by and large, the members of Parliament and Cabinet ministers are not recruited from the lower-middle or lower classes. But Mosca supporting the modern democracies of the West, held an exaggerated view of the lowering or removal of barriers obstructing the movement of lower classes

15. G. Mosca, op. cit, p.337
17. S.M. Miller, "Comparative Social Mobility", Current Sociology IX (1), 1960, p.89.
to the political class.

The concept of ruling elite, as presented by Mosca and Pareto, does not expose clearly how the individuals of a ruling elite come to occupy the positions of power. Neither of them solved the problem of relationship between governing elites and social classes. "They seemed to realise in principle that the two were separate entities, but confounded them in practice". Further, though both of them mentioned that the governing elite is an organized minority, they have neither spelled out the degree of the cohesiveness of the members of the governing elite nor said anything on their social background or common interest or something like 'elite consciousness'. Moreover, the relation between the governing elite and the masses is represented as more passive.

Both of them were laissez-faire liberals. Their favour for the rule of elites was, probably, because they were conditioned by a milieu which was still semi-feudal and generally not yet permeated by bourgeois democracy. Whatsoever it may be, it is a fact that they could influence several academicians even of the present generation.

Referring to Mosca's statement that inevitably one group or a party succeeds another in power and it contains within its own ranks an organized minority, Robert Michels

observes that elections, changes in Cabinet, expansions in
suffrage and things like that are only myths, the reality is
that of the principle of minority rule. While studying the
socialist parties of Europe, particularly, the German Socialist
party, he contended that every organization tends to be oligarchic.

This is his oft quoted "Law of Oligarchy". According to him, unless the fight between the
elites and the masses is over, it is impossible to install a
true democracy, of course, he too said; The defects inherent
in democracy are obvious.... It is nonetheless true that as
a form of social life, we must choose democracy as the least
23 of evils".

In short, the theory of ruling elite, ignoring the
socio-historical structures, only concern the formal political
process and the way the political system functions. It holds
that a disproportionate degree of power rests in the hands of
an organized minority of the society. The common masses are
treated as unorganized and passive in the decision making
process. However, with regard to democracy, they reconcile
with the inequality of the rulers and ruled by emphasizing
competition and circulation of elites. Thus, the idea of the
division of society into classes and its dynamics through
class conflict, is practically rejected.

22. R. Michels, op. cit.
23. ibid, p. 407.
MULTIPLE ELITE

While later studies of elites in their concern with the problems of political power have followed Pareto and Mosca in the main, they have insisted on the plurality of elites in modern societies. For instance, Karl Mannheim defending modern democracies specifies the various types of elites and their functions in Western democracies. "We may distinguish the following types of elites, the political, the organizing, the intellectual, the artistic, the moral and the religious. Whereas the political and organizing elites aim at integrating great number of individual wills, it is the function of the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral-religious elites to sublimate these psychic energies which society, in the daily struggle for existence, does not fully exhaust." Almost a similar development is apparent in the writings of Raymond Aron. Others of the same line of thinking are Lasswell, Dahl, Lipset, Bell, Key, Truman, Riesman et al. They stress that multiple political elites in a democracy compete among themselves and thereby generate a basic restraint against violation of democratic norms and rules by any one elite. According to the pluralist frame, almost every legitimate group in society has the opportunity for representation in the governmental process and that the authority is diffused

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24. K. Mannheim, Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction (London: Kegan & Paul, 1940), p.82. Here he has expounded the relation between ideology and leadership.

and decentralised. To assume, that political power is equally shared in a society based on gross inequalities, is nothing but to distort the social reality and reject the class approach to the study of politics. Anyway, now the term elite is applied to functional - often simply occupational - groups which have high status in a society. So we have studies on political elite, business elite, bureaucratic elite, intellectual elite and so on.

Most scholars of multiple elites conceive of political elite as composed of individuals who excercise an inordinate amount of political power in society. H.D. Lasswell defines it: "The political elite comprises the power holders of a body politic. The power holders include the leadership and the social formations from which leaders typically come, and to which accountability is maintained, during a given period". This definition differs from the formulation of the earlier elite theorists in the sense that it isolates political elite from other elites and includes the recruitment of the elites from the 'social formations'. Anyhow, almost all studies of political elite are confined to the simple process of recruitment. Rarely are the biographies of the elite referred to the historical social structures. But to understand changes in the leadership, it is essential to know the trends which characterize the leadership change over a period of time. In addition, inequality is a social fact. The opportunities and abilities of an individual is determined by his position in a society. Hence it is also

necessary to study the present social structure, so as to relate the position and interest of the elite in the society. This means, the study of the social and historical structures are necessary pre-conditions in the study of the dynamics of political leadership.

In sum, whatever may be the development and modification in the theory of elites, the core contention that there exists in a society a minority of the population in well-defined roles which dominates the system either by controlling or influencing its decision making process remains by and large, unchanged. Further, the elitists believe that the power structure of any society is determined by the character and abilities of its political leadership. They have attempted to demonstrate that since there is political competition and equality of opportunity in modern democracies there exists necessary checks and balances against monopolisation of power. The essence of their attack, is directed towards refutation of Marx’s theory of social classes on two fronts: (1) the concept of ruling class is fallacious as demonstrated by the circulation of elites, and (2) a classless society is impossible, since in every society it is a minority which actually rules.

Closely related to pluralism is the integrational theory which suggests that social inequalities are necessary and natural. Parsons - the theoretician of structural functionalism - holds that stratification is as universal as society itself.

He defines stratification as "the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the standards of the common value system". Likewise, Davis and Moore observe: "As a functioning mechanism a society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions".

The acceptance of inequality as the natural order is extended by the assumption that society operates by the distribution of rewards according to ability, and that differential rewards account for the existence of stratification. This kind of theory embodies the view that in societies, talent and hard-work are appropriately rewarded, and the distribution of rewards is governed by an invisible hand. Thus, inequality serves a useful and essential function.

The argument for the necessity of social inequality is not satisfactory when there is an unseen hand in the distribution of positions of privilege. Moreover, the outstanding fact of social inequality is that people are by and large, born into family positions of privilege or otherwise. Further, this theory

31. K. Davis and W. E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification", American Sociological Review, vol. 10, no. 2, 1945, pp. 242-49. They argued that social inequality is an unconsciously evolved universal device by which societies ensure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons. See their "Reply and Comments", American Sociological Review vol. 18 (1953).
holds that there are competing bases of power in a society, through which individuals and organizations have the opportunity to enter into the decision making process. The logical extension of it into empirical investigation is already noted in the works of the pluralists. In fact, the works insist that in every human institution, there is an ordered system of power and that the power structure tends to be stable over time. Their focus is mainly directed towards the exercise of power with a conspicuous neglect of the sources and interest.

POWER ELITE

Besides the ruling elite and the multiple elites, there is also the power elite model, developed by C.W. Mills. The central theme of his book, The Power Elite is that there is an elite which dominates the American social order; the power complex, Mills holds, is made up of three related but fairly autonomous forces - the chieftains of the economic corporations, the political directorate, and the military warlords. He observes that the power elite has succeeded in corrupting the whole of American society and viewed the masses as passive in American politics.

Devoid of the conflict between the power elite and the people, this theory fails to account for the dynamics of a

society. The tripartite classification of power offers no analysis of the relative importance of each, their origin and their consequent impact on the social structure. The overlapping interests of the elites make it still more difficult to assess the relative power of each.

However, in refreshing contrast to the theories of the ruling elite and the multiple elites, the theory of power elite provides an analysis of the structure of the society and brings forth a composite group from the key sectors of the society who control major policy decisions, affecting large numbers of people. Following Mills, several studies which have been conducted point out that the economic elites, more than the civic virtues which they display, have larger covert economic interests in their interactions with the state. This raises a series of crucial questions about interrelations between local, national and international business interests and political forces. However, the power elite theory while analytically helpful, has less predictive power.

(b) Weberian Theory of Class, Status and Power:

The dispersion of the original Marxist analysis of class into class, status and power is attributed to Max Weber.

He found the principal weakness of Marxism in its economic interpretation of social and economic development. Hence, his attempt was to stress the multiple factor approach in the explanation of social structure and change. He observes:

"Classes, status groups, and parties are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community". As we shall see soon that Marxism does not deny the importance of non-economic factors. It only holds that ultimately the economic relationships are determinative. This emphasis does not preclude the significance of political, cultural, military or psychological factors.

For Weber class is the position and common life chances in the economic order. A person in a certain class occupies a particular position in the economic order which defines by and large, his life chances. Class interests and struggles emerge broadly from the inherent logic of market relationship. Status is expressed by a specific style of life of a group from the other members of the community. And power is "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action". So he defines the state as the political structure or grouping which, "successfully upholds a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use


of physical force in the enforcement of its order."

Domination is the practical and empirical expression of power; and underlying all political domination is the fundamental relationship of command and obedience. This means that domination is exercised by a minority by imposing its views on the majority. Position in any social hierarchy is finally established by the power held by those in other positions. The desire for prestige is considered as the dynamic factor of politics.

The formulation is conspicuous in the absence of an adequate analysis of the origins of power and of its exact relation to class and status groups. In fact, Weber never settled the causal and concomitant relationships between class, power and status, and their relevance to social change; and implied, that stratification is an inevitable social feature. He believed, class, status and power are closely interdependent, although none of them could be fully explained by the others.

It will be apparent that the relations between class, status and power can be the subject of many permutations and

combinations, and sociologists have produced a wide variety since Weber. There are also attempts to synthesise Marx and Weber by pointing out that class conflict is a special case of a general theory of conflict arising from the universal problem of authority, or from unequal distribution of power.

(c) The Theory of Ruling Class:

In a broad way, Marxism distinguishes five distinct types socio-economic formations, namely primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist and communist, socialist being the first phase of communism. Each of these formations has its own appropriate productive forces and the corresponding relations of production, and the superstructure. In slave, feudal and capitalist systems, people are divided into a ruling class and subject class(es), who are inherently in conflict with each other. The development of the socio-economic formations ascends from the lower to the higher one, depending on the qualitative development of the productive forces, which in turn, are determined by the conflict between the ruling and

42. For example, R.S. Lynd and H.M. Lynd, Middle Town: A Study in American Culture (Constable, 1929); W.L. Warner and P.S. Lunt, The Social Life of a Modern Community (Yale University Press, 1941); H. Miller, Rich Man Poor Man (New York: Signet Books, 1965); and R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset (ed), 1966, op. cit.
43. R. Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford, 1959), pp. 253-54.
Socio-Economic Formation

Mode of production

 Forces of production

 Instruments of production

 Means of production

 Relations of production

 Working people

 Ruling class

 Labour

 Skill

 Superstructure

 Institutions

 (Political, legal, Religious etc.)

 consciousness

 (idea, view etc.)

 Surplus

 appropriation

 Subject class(es)
subject class (es).

With regard to the distribution of political power, Marxism holds that it is determined by the nature of social forces of production and distribution in use, at a given historical time. The state is necessarily a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. It could have neither arisen nor maintained itself had it been possible to reconcile the classes. It came into being to defend the most general interests of the ruling class. As such, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of 'order' which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes. Thus in all class societies, political authority is based on coercion.

Several topical questions emerge from the above mentioned broad Marxist perspective. Do the socio-economic formations always exist in a pure and concrete form? Does every society follow the ascending series of the types of formations? Is it that the state is totally subservient to the ruling class? Let us try to get the Marxist answers to these and other questions.

47. K. Marx, Critique to the Gotha Programme (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972).
in the following.

In most historically constituted communities, the production relations do not in their totality conform to a single type. For instance, we cannot find a single illustration in human history, where the whole working population was enslaved. Instead, in every slave society, there were survivals of primitive-communism, the rising traces of feudalism, existence of independent petty-producers, and also in many cases, an emerging merchant class. Likewise, there is no perfect example of feudal system. And the same happens to be in case of capitalism as well in socialism.

Marx was quite aware of historical specific socio-economic formations under the decisive frame of a single dominant mode of production. This is clearly demonstrated by the way he deals with the different forms of capital itself. He observed that even in a fully developed capitalist society, the earlier forms of capital (interest bearing and merchant) perform a definite function and participate in the distribution of surplus value. Lenin also analysing the specific historical forms in the transition form feudalism to capitalism noted that the transitional society is an intrinsic form of the present (semi-feudalism). In fact, Engels in a letter to Marx had actually spoken of Ottoman Turkey as 'semi-feudal'.

52. Capital, vol. III, part IV and V.
53. V.I.Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", Collected Works, vol. III.
54. Selected Correspondence (Calcutta), p.363.
It follows, that in almost every society, besides a predominant mode of production, there exists one or more other forms, and that the transitional societies may have independent forms, quite distinct from the five types. Thus Marx rightly said that over the same economic basis, there may be endless variations and gradations, "due to innumerable empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial composition, effects of external historical influences, and so on, and can be understood only through analysis of these empirically given conditions". To recognise these variations is to emphasize the impossibility of explaining concrete historical processes solely in terms of the general types of socio-economic formations.

On the basis of the above evidences, the Althusserian school stresses that the concept of the mode of production is an abstract object referring to a set of relationships, a matrix of structures, institutions, and relations. And within this matrix the economic relations determine, in the last instance, the relations of the entire matrix. Thus the social formations are only the concrete forms observable in historical societies. These forms can be understood from an a priori valid axiom of modes of production which must be empirically verified in each case. To-day, all the Marxists agree that

55. K. Marx, Capital, vol.III, chap. 47, Sec. 2, p.792; see also Capital, vol.I, chap. 31, vol.III, chap. 52; F.Engels, Feuerbach, chap 4, and his, Peasant Wars in Germany, chap. 1; and V.I.Lenin, Peasantry and Working Class, para 2; and his, Friends of the People, part 3, div.I.

in addition to the predominant mode which approximates the reality, the other modes need specific investigations in their own right. Thus the identification of the major relations of production is by no means sufficient for analysing the political structure of a society.

About the second question, while the types of society form an ascending series, i.e. from primitive communism to slavery to feudalism to capitalism to communism via socialism, it does not mean that all societies in their development pass necessarily through each successive stage, before being able to move on to the next. What is true of human history in general, does not necessarily apply to each particular society. Specific communities under specific historical-social conditions may bypass one or more stages in their development. In the Grundrisse, Marx describes the development of primitive communism in terms of three major alternative forms - Asiatic, feudal and ancient (slave based) - determined by specific geographical, historical and ethnographic circumstances. He also observed some sub-categories of the pre-capitalist formations, such as the slavonic - a combination of elements from the Asiatic and feudal forms. Obviously, the sequence of development is only general, and specific societies may not necessarily follow the same order in their development.

Finally, let us consider the relations between the State and the classes. The conception of the state as an instrument for upholding the dominance of the ruling class over subject class(es) appeared constantly in almost all the writings of Marx and Engels, but they have also considered a certain degree of autonomy of the state in "exceptional circumstances". Marx concedes in the 18th Brumaire that there may come a time in the life of a society when the state appears as an equilibrating rather than an exploiting force. In the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte "the state seems to have made itself completely independent". Similarly, Engels notes that the state's power achieves its maximum independence during periods when opposing classes approach equality in power. In short, neither Marx nor Engels ever considered social relations of production as a sufficient condition for the understanding of the specific phenomenon of political power.

It has also been argued that at times the state may wish to pursue certain policies which check the interest of the

59. op.cit.
61. F.Engels, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, chap. 9, Lenin, State and Revolution chap. 1; Smc Sec. 3, and Marx and Engels, German Ideology, Part.1
ruling class on limited issues for limited periods for the benefit of the subject class(es) or a section of them. Of course, such concessions depend mainly on their political struggle, which the state cannot altogether ignore. Besides, Mao observes that in post-colonial societies, as there are conflicts between the ruling classes - feudal lords and the bourgeoisie - there prevails contradictory ruling class interests, thereby rendering a certain autonomy to the state, over and above the class forces. At the same time, it appears that in the new states, the state apparatus is more developed than the economic base, and is thus capable of maintaining its relative autonomy, which even sometimes enables it to perform the role of a mediator between the conflicting classes. Some political parties and a few political leaders too assume important role, independent of classes, and are in a position to mediate.

To recapitulate, students of Marxism (excluding structuralists) consider the state as primarily an organ of class rule, with a little autonomy of its own depending on the sociohistorical forces. It achieves its maximum autonomy in periods when the opposing ruling classes approach equality in power. And to a little extent, it is independent in ex-colonial countries as well as apparently in those countries where the working class

carries out decisive political struggles.

Besides the above view, there is the structural theory of Althusser and Poulantzas which strongly rejects the notion that the state can be understood as a simple instrument in the hands of a ruling class. Althusser argued that the superstructures are realities in themselves, and are distinct from the economic structure. There are a multiplicity of contradictions existing at all levels of the social formation. Hence, determination is never simple. It is always complex and multiple. However, he acknowledged that the autonomy of the superstructures is relative and not absolute. And "in the last instance", the social whole is determined by the economic conditions.

Structuralists insist that the state is oppressive not because it supports the interests of the dominant class, but because it is responsible for the cohesion of an entire system within which the dominant classes dominate. So in contrast to the classic view of coercive character of state, they assign importance to the maintenance of order, to the ideological indoctrination through the slogans of free and equal citizens and 'open' competition. Further, the state also plays a

conformative role which contain, incorporate and moderate the conflicts inside class society.

In sum, there is enough ground to believe that Marxism does not treat state as a mechanically determined product of the class structure, on the contrary, it stresses the importance of the study of the relative autonomy of the state, beyond the class forces, which is the product of specific historical and social circumstances. At the same time, the role of the state is not only to coerce the subject class, but also to play ideological reformative and conformative roles.

Unlike the pluralistic persuasion of absolute sovereignty of the state, the Marxists consider the state as primarily an organ of class rule, with a little autonomy of its own. Contrary to the concept of 'ruling elite' or political elite, the ruling class is a cohesive group with common positions in the organization of production, and having common interests and consciousness. Again, the ruling class theory does not restrict itself to the formal exercise of power in a specific period of time, in isolation from the society, instead, it relates to the total historical social structure. Having outlined the theories analysing power, let us now discuss the relevant studies in India.

73. M.B. Brown, op. cit.
2. Indian Studies:

In India, out of the three above mentioned sociological theories analysing political power-elite theories, Weberian theory and ruling class theory, the Weberian theory, so far, has only a very limited influence in the academic world. Though implicitly, most structural studies recognise Weberian ideal typical formulation, it is only Beteille, who used the approach most explicitly, in the study of an Indian village. His attempt to synthesise caste, class and power denotes a step forward from the earlier Indian village studies. But the scheme does not clarify the relationship between caste and class as homologous, analogous, or discrete entities, thus making it impossible to ascertain the causal, concomitant or contingent relevance of the social factors to appraise the social reality unequivocally.

Not only does Weberian theory have little influence but also the power elite and the ruling elite models have almost no impact in the Indian studies of power. Thus, we are left with pluralism (multiple elites) and Marxism (class approach).

1. Among the studies on the changing position of caste and tribe in the power structure see, F.G.Bailey, Caste and the Economic Frontier (Manchester, 1957), and his Tribe Caste and Nation (Manchester, 1960); and also, S.C.Dube, India's Changing Villages (London: 1958). Among faction studies see, O.Lewis, Life in a North Indian Village (Illinois, 1958); and on Leadership see, R.L.Park, and J.Tinker (eds), Leadership and Political Institutions in India (Princeton, 1959).


There too, as the foregoing will reveal, the literature has more or less meagre theoretical relevance. However, let us have a brief outline of the studies having some affinity to the two approaches.

**ELITE STUDIES**

The elite studies in India have focused on the size of the elites, the relations between the elites, their nature of recruitment, and the degree of social mobility between elites and masses. But often in those works, the 'theory has been of minor relevance; the word 'elite' then implies no more than 'the men at the top', whatever the particular context of discussion happens to be'. This naturally, carries with it the problem of identification of the elite studies in India.

Anyway, in the beginning some of the elite studies were based on secondary source material, while others were substantiated with casual fieldwork. Presently, we have a few historical and political studies of the elites at the macro-level. There are also some studies on different categories of elites - intellectuals, bureaucrats, businessmen, and

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6. For example, A. Betelille, "Elite, Status Groups and Caste in Modern India", in P. Mason (ed), ibid.
7. For example, J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), see also articles of Stokes, Mukherji, Dobbin and Johnson in E. Leach and S. N. Mukherji (eds), *op. cit*.
Besides a few studies are concerned with rural and urban elites.

No doubt, since 1960s several students on the problems of elites in India, have assigned primary significance to the political factor, and thus, we have a few detailed empirical studies on the social backgrounds and attitudes of the political leaders, both at macro and micro levels. Some studies confined to the background attributes and perceptions of the members of the Parliament, while others to the state legislators.


Many of these studies, if not all, have relied solely on the Who is Who published by the Parliament or Assemblies or analysing the newspapers or at best, administrating a questionnaires. A few studies have also used computerised analysis of election data, published by the Election Commission of India. Needless to note the limitations of such studies. Those who occupy high positions in the concerned political institution are taken for granted as the members of the elite. Then their background attributes and present attitudes, beliefs and perceptions are surveyed in total isolation from the historical social structures. Here it might be useful to question the basic assumption of the above studies, in general, that a political system can be studied from the top, in power terms (the scope and extent of institutions), when political power is so dependent on political economy.

Of course, there are a few studies which at least have related the political elite background to the social structure of the society. For instance, Bailey analysed the social background and careers of 6 Orissa MLAs, and studied the Assembly in the overall politics of the state. Similarly Basham observed that in traditional India, the kings and the priests, were the two important elites and the system was authorititarian, monarchical - feudal and charismatic. Some have conceded that during the independence

19. F.E. Bailey, Politics and Social Change (Berkeley, 1963), and P. Narain (ed), State Politics in India (Meenakshi Prakashan, 1976).
struggle, the Western educated elite came to the fore front. Others said that there is a structural continuity of the traditional elites in the new elites of modern India. Some studies have shown that there is an emergence of a 'new elite' with a rural base, while a few others reveal that the political elite comes from the middle class and its power lies upon the property ownership.

But these studies, excluding Bailey and Narain also depended heavily on the attributional and attitudinal aspects of the social structure in a particular period of time, and ignored the historical emergence of the leadership, the economic structure, the class interest of the decision makers, and the relations between the context and the superstructure. Thus the studies again remained restricted to the formal excercise of power alone. About change, they could only observe marginal changes in the cultural set-up, in the dynamics of adaptability in the caste groups, and at times, in religious groups, but not the major changes in property relations. By not taking into account the role of political economy, these studies implicitly rationalise the existing socio-political

order and miss the dominant role played by the vested interests in the Indian political system.

So far, we have discussed the political elite studies at the macro level, but there are also a few micro-level studies. Here too, the process of identification of the elite and the purpose of the studies are akin to those of the macro-level. The major concern is again to explore political socialization, recruitment, value orientation, and the psychological perceptions of the elite. In addition to these, a few studies extend to the analysis of the processes of acquiring and exercising elitism. All these works differ widely between them in their conclusions. Some notice that the elite positions are acquired by education, contact with the influentials, and party membership, while others hold that these are due to the combination of certain ascriptive factors like land holding, and caste position.

However, unlike the macro-level studies, the micro-studies have taken into account the social structure, though not social relations of production which, as argued earlier, is one of the chief factors influencing the political leadership and political power.

26. For instance, V.M. Sirsikar, op.cit.
27. For instance, see, S.K. Lal, The Urban Elite (Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Ltd., 1974).
29. See for example, A.T. Carter, op.cit.; and also, V.M. Sirsikar, op.cit.
Karl Marx himself had consistently paid attention to the peculiar situation existent in India. He noted that in the past, the village commune characterised by the self sufficient economy was the base for the Asiatic mode of production. During that peculiar social formation, agriculture was marked by the absence of private property in land. Production was for the use through exchange. The surplus product of the commune went to the despotic monarchical state, at the top, which ruled over a large number of such communes. Indian Marxist historians, like Dange, Kosambi, and Habib, though paid very little attention to the peculiarity of the Indian historical formation, they recognised that the long and varied situation, of India's ancient and medieval history is too complex to be fitted into the traditional formations characteristic of European development. Asiatic mode of production may prove useful for future Marxist scholars working out a scientific periodisation of history, in unravelling the role of Varnas and castes in social transformations and in understanding the meaning of the various religious struggles.

Besides, Indian history, Marx also studied the results of the British rule in India. He observed that the British had transformed India's land system, broke the village communes.

for the first time, and set in motion the seeds of social upheaval. But he further said: "The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the new ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether".

Following this prophecy, R.P. Dutt published a comprehensive work, which inspired and reared a whole generation of early Marxists. Mukherji concedes that before the emergence of East India Company, India was in the feudal epoch, and that the East India Company was born in the era of merchantile capitalism and ceased when the merchantile capital gave way to the industrial capital.

Regarding nationalist struggles in India, A.R. Desai, in his extensive work contends that nationalism in India was a product of material conditions created by the British colonialism. The British rule both broke down the pre-British economy and carried out economic reforms, which ultimately gave rise to a new class structure and social consciousness leading to conflicts of interests. And nationalism "was the outcome of the objective conflict of interest". This is, in India, the most systematic exposition of politics as a reflection of class

35. ibid, p.88
36. R.P. Dutt, India to-day (Bombay, 1946).
37. Ramkrishna Mukherji, The Rise and Fall of the East India Company (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973)
39. ibid, pp. 145-146.
positions. Likewise, Bipin Chandra argued that the Indian capitalist class was never the driving force behind the struggle. This class had consistently backed the petty-bourgeois leadership of the national movement to create conditions of growth even under imperialism and at the same time to establish its hegemony over the national movement, and to keep the revolutionary left in check.

The above studies have shown that before independence, the native bourgeoisie had lined with the forces of national liberation and combated both the imperialist bourgeoisie and the local feudal class. From this position, some scholars mechanically derive that with the departure of British, political predominance of landed aristocracy has weakened and that the basis of the Indian democracy is an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry. But several empirical studies reveal that at the local level political bodies, the landed interest is either directly or indirectly represented. Myrdal writes that the "real power at levels below the centre is mostly wielded by peasant landlords, merchants and moneylenders. This small upper strata see to it that policies effect or are turned to the benefit of themselves or their dependable 'clients' alone ... ... ... and since these groups are also the political brokers who command

the votes of the poor unorganised masses, the national leaders dare not affront them. \(^{43}\)

Bettelheim's study, among other studies, shows that in the countryside, semi-feudal relations are still very strong, and that due to its colonial heritage, a relatively large part of industry and banking capital remained in the hands of the foreign capitalists, thus limiting the power of the national bourgeoisie. In this situation, the Indian bourgeoisie have opted for closer cooperation with the foreign capital and at the same time encouraged the development of the public sector. Bettelheim argues that in the power of the state, especially at the local level, either directly or indirectly, the landed aristocracy plays a considerable dominance.

While some studies find the basic weakness of the Indian capitalist class in its integration with the world capitalist economy in a 'subordinate' position, others observe that after independence, the character of the Indian State is \textit{erapita} capitalist, and the leadership is representing capitalist class interests. At the same time, others hold that, "In the post-colonial situation there is a new basis of subordination of the big indigenous capital by metropolitan capital, and within that hierarchical relationship, there is a convergence of interests between the big Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialist

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\(^{43}\) G. Myrdal, \textit{Asian Drama} (New York: Pantheon, 1968) vol.I.


\(^{45}\) B. Chandra, \textit{op}.,\textit{cit}.

bourgeoisie". Thus in India, at the national level, the indigenous and the imperialist bourgeoisie and the landowning class at the local levels together have formed a new alliance of power and domination.

The brief discussion revealed the broad differences of opinion of the Marxist academicians on the identification of the decisive social formation in independent India, and the nature of class alliance and domination. Though quantitatively, Marxist analysis of power in India are very few in comparison to the elite studies, they have definitely made a penetrating analysis from a broader perspective and contributed much to our understanding of the Indian socio-political reality. But as obvious from the discussion, often the students of Marxism have not ventured to substantiate their forceful arguments with facts and figures. In such a non-empiric situation, it is but natural to rely heavily on the classical Marxism. The deductive inferences may be useful starting points for investigation, but by themselves, in isolation from the actual and concrete materials cannot be productive enough to expose the complexities of the Indian history and social situation. To be creative, historical and dialectical materialism shall be used afresh to the specific Indian situation. It is unfortunate that only a very few scholars have attempted this.


It may be worthwhile to mention here that much has been systematically explored about the role of caste in Indian politics, both at village and state levels. It is argued that notwithstanding the values of democratic politics, caste remains as one of the most important factors which guide the electoral choice of the majority of the people. Likewise, all political parties take due consideration of caste factor, even though overtly they denounce it. There are only a few scholars who consider that after independence, the democratic organizations and new forms of social consciousness have diminished "the importance of caste organizations and weakened caste consciousness itself".

At the village level, the role of caste groups in politics is considered still more conspicuous. Discussions around dominant and dependent castes in the villages, (including critiques of the concept), occupied several sociologists during the 1960s. It is also the common belief that caste is the context within which,

49. Among the more prominent ones, see the following: M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and other Essays (Bombay: Asia, 1962); F.G. Bailey, Politics and Social Change (Berkeley, 1963); Nockin Marriot (ed); Village India (Chicago, 1955); H. Crenstein, Gaon: Conflict and Cohesion in an Indian Village (Princeton, 1965); L. Rudolph and S. Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition (Chicago, 1967); R. Kothari (ed), Caste in Indian Politics, (New Delhi, 1970); and also, G. Rosen, Democracy and Economic Change in India (Berkeley, 1967).


51. R. Kothari, Politics in India (Boston, 1970).


the subsequent observations on economics, politics and rituals acquire their meaning. Needless to say that the most crucial basis of material inequality is the inequal distribution of land. A few control large areas of land while a large percentage depend on agricultural labour or sharecropping or own very little land. Only broadly one may characterise the upper castes as landowners, the middle castes as cultivating tenants, and the lower castes as agricultural labourers. But scientifically, the frame is misleading as not all upper caste men are the landowners, nor all the landowners are of upper caste. In fact, impressed by the uniqueness of caste in India, undue emphasis and unusual degree of autonomy is given to the caste in rural studies. Obviously this led to a number of biases and distortions in the understanding of the village structure.

No better is the case of tribal studies. Volumes of research works are produced on tribal life and development without even attaching a precise meaning to the term. Seldom one comes across a piece of work on the prevalence and development of the differentiation within the tribal communities.


In this fertile situation, contrary to one's expectation, the Marxist scholars have actually done very little work on agrarian class relations in tribal and non-tribal rural settings. Out of them again, many have depended heavily on census and survey material. But are these sources sufficient to provide the basis for understanding the relations of production and the inherent contradictions between the system of production and the relations of production? Obviously not.

In fact, though there are at least a few historians, economists and sociologists who have studied stages of social evolution, historical developments, Indian nationalism, social institutions and stratification, and social change at the macro-level with the historical and dialectical materialist approach, there is hardly any important study on the class structure of Indian village community. The concerned scholars have confined

59. See, Namkrisna Mukherji, The Dynamics of A Rural Society (Berlin, 1957), and his, Six Villages of Bengal (Bombay 1971)
60. S.A.Dange, 1949, op.cit.
64. D.P. Mukherjee, Diversities (Delhi: People's Book House, 1958).
their researches to the general historical socio-economic formation of the nation, and neglected the particularity of the specific historical social structure existing in the Indian villages which in the given context, would have enriched their basic generalizations, even for the macro-level. Following from this weakness, rare attention is paid to the caste system which in the pre-capitalist India, has a conspicuous socio-political role. Though many of the Marxist scholars at least implicitly acknowledge the significance of the agrarian relations in the analysis of the dialectical processes in India, village economy and society have figured little in their studies.

In India one of the chief reasons for the neglect of the micro-level studies can be found in the dependence of the Marxist scholars on Western models and concepts which were worked out by Marx for the specific historical and social systems of the western countries. In those societies, Marx and Engels observed that the proletariat is the social force for social transformation. In a pre-capitalist society, to consider the working class as the only social force for transforming the social system, is proved false long ago in China and other countries. Indian Marxists are yet to comprehend it, and give the attention due to the peasantry, and also, the peculiar socio-cultural complexes in the countryside which inhibit the social transformation. In a backward state, relying heavily on the proletariat for social change is misleading, since in these countries the industrial working class even enjoys a part of the surplus expropriated from the peasantry. Thus to repeat our assertion, Marxism provides a scientific theory and methodology with the help of which Indian
society needs to be analysed concretely; and the existing pattern of simple borrowing of the results of the European systems is bound to prove, unproductive.

Further, as noted earlier, often the class studies in India are based on attributional criteria like income, educational qualification, land holding (in figures) etc., and the common pattern of categorisation of the people is by distributing them into upper, middle and lower classes. These criteria and the categorization fail to demonstrate the historical process of structural differentiation, conflict of interests, class interactions, and the dialectical process for the emergence of the new systems. No doubt, attributional data are important to get a general picture, but a depth analysis needs an interactional study, which may contain the attributional elements.

In addition, the interactional approach shall not ignore the internal differentiation of individual classes or strata. This would thus include the attributional criteria more sharply which under specific conditions may bring a qualitatively different relations with other classes of the system, and thereby bring a change in the configuration of class alliances. That is to say a person holding 200
acres of land and having a particular pattern of interaction characteristic of landlord may be called as a landlord while if the same requirement is fulfilled by 5 acre owners he is also be considered as a landlord.

However, the categorization of classes in purely relational terms has its problems. A 5-acres landlord may face pauperisation and turn a proletariat, whilst another may continue to be upward mobile and join the dominant section of the class. Also there is the possibility of a landlord becoming pauperised without passing through the intermediate categories of the peasantry and sharecroppers. Hence the possibility of the dichotomous categories of landlord - proletariat can become true in many cases. Therefore, while it is extremely important to examine the interacting agrarian classes in relational terms, it is equally important to see how the agrarian reality presents itself in attributional terms. Thus classes should be examined both in terms of the relations of production and in terms of the amount of control over the means of production.
Review of the literature on the theories of power and the concerned Indian studies lead us to believe that to have a comprehensive empirical study one has to relate the micro-and macro-level elite and class positions, in terms of both attributional and relational aspects of the power holders. At the macro-level, the background of the political elite shall be linked to the social structure, and their policy decisions to the various class interests. At the micro-level, attempts shall be made to find out the relative importance of class and caste to power positions. Both the levels at the end may be linked to get a complex comprehensive picture of power relations in the state.