



# CHAPTER 1

**FORMS OF GOVERNMENT:**

**TOTALITARIAN AND  
AUTHORITARIAN STATES, AND  
LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC STATE:  
(MEANING AND FEATURES)**



## I. TOTALITARIAN STATE

### I. (a) Meaning of Totalitarian State

Totalitarian state is one in which the state has full control over the whole life of the individual. No part of his life is beyond the control of the state. It claims jurisdiction over the whole social life in the state. If the Bible teaches that "we live, move, and have our being in God", totalitarianism teaches that "we live, move and have our being in State." In it "an individual's life is not his own. It is a trust given to him by the state to be used in the service of the state." Totalitarian State declares itself to be omnipotent and infallible. In practice it really means the all-powerfulness and infallibility of the ruler of the state.

In the words of **Finer**, "Totalitarian state is the veritable contradictory of the liberal democratic type of government. The scope and authority of government is not limited, but just the reverse is total."

While discussing the meaning of Totalitarian State, **Asirvatham** observes : "In current political literature, the term 'Totalitarian State' is used in contrast with the term 'Liberal Democratic State.'"

Explaining the meaning of a Totalitarian State, the **Foreign Policy Association of America** defined it as a state 'which embraces all the activities of individuals and subordinates them to national (ruler's) ends.' It is a state of truly sovereign authority which dominates all spheres of the country." It practices a cult of state worship. Authority of the state is unlimited. The individuals are the components of the state and they have to think, live and act as the state wishes them to do so.

To sum up, we can write that Totalitarianism is a political concept which conceptualises state as an all powerful institution exercising unlimited authority, power and control over its all people and their all social, economic, political and cultural organizations, and associations in society. In fact, there exists no difference between the state and society and the state power penetrates in almost every aspect of the social, economic, political, religious, cultural and ideological life and activities of the people. Mass media, civil society and all public and private institutions work under state control and power. There is little respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual and the state is considered to be the end and the individuals as the means. State is characterized by political repression, dependence on force and fear for commanding obedience to laws and policies, single centralized leadership and its authority, monolithic ideology of the ruling leadership, and absence of social, economic, political checks upon the ruling establishment. These are the hallmarks of a Totalitarian State.



The Totalitarian State has been known to us by different names: Bonapartism in France, Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, Communism in China and other communist states. The key characteristic of a Totalitarian State is its solid opposition to any institutional division of power. There is a total centralisation of power and authority of state in the hands of a single ruler or the ruling group or ruling party.

Western political scientists hold that there are two basic types of Totalitarian States:

- (i) The Radical Totalitarian State e.g., Communist States, i.e. states ruled by all powerful and centralised communist parties and
- (ii) The Conservative Totalitarian States e.g., Fascist and Nazi States i.e. states ruled by single dominant parties or family of the ruler of each such state.

### I. (b) Totalitarian State : Features

*Prof. Neumann* specifies five features of a Totalitarian State :

(1) Against rule of law, Totalitarian State stands for rule of state police ; (2) It involves a total centralisation of power into the hands of the ruler of the state ; (3) There is only one political party – the political party of the ruler ; (4) Against pluralistic society, it stands for total state control over individuals and a monolith social-economic-political system ; and (5) It is based on force and coercion. It acts through force for securing obedience of the people.

We can identify the following features of a Totalitarian State:

- (1) Totalitarian State is totally opposed to a democratic state.
- (2) It is based on the concept of total centralisation of powers in the hands of the top ruler and his party or family.
- (3) State is regarded as the end and the individual as a means.
- (4) The ideology of the ruler is the ideology of the state and all the people of the state have to accept it.
- (5) People have little role in the decision-making. Decisions are made by the rulers and imposed upon the people.
- (6) The basis of all state action is force. Force is used to command obedience and to instill fear of state authority among the people.
- (7) No part of individual's life is outside state control.
- (8) Rights of the people depend upon the wishes of the rulers. Only those rights are given which are considered good for the 'health of the state'.
- (9) The struggle for power is kept confined to the ruling group. No dissent or opposition is tolerated.
- (10) The ruler or his party is the government. The power of the government is exercised by the leaders of the ruling party irrespective of the fact whether they hold any position in the government or not.



One leader, one party, one ideology, total centralization of power and authority in the hands of top leadership, scant respect for the rights and freedoms of the people and full penetration of the power and authority in all aspects of public and private life of the people, are the hallmarks of a Totalitarian State.

- (11) Totalitarian state stands for a monolithic society with one leader, one party, one ideology, one government and one rule.
- (12) Through propaganda and officially sponsored mass movements, the rulers try to show their 'popularity and representativeness' .
- (13) Totalitarian state has no faith in internationalism. It regards war as an instrument of central importance and a means to progress and power.
- (14) Press and means of mass media are owned and run by the state. Only that part of public opinion is projected which suits the rulers.
- (15) Change of rulers is sudden and characterised by big, and often violent changes in all policies.
- (16) Totalitarianism glorifies the nation and places full emphasis upon the idea of state as the power system.
- (17) The totalitarian state is exclusive. It does not believe in liberalism and sharing of power.
- (18) There is a lack of independent judiciary. Totalitarian state stands for rule of the ruler and not rule of law.
- (19) Totalitarian state embodies the cult of state worship. The rulers rule the state. No difference is made between state, government, society and party.
- (20) A totalitarian state is opposed to socio-economic-political pluralism.
- (21) The constitution of the state is used as a cloak for legitimising the power of the ruler or the powerful leadership. Complete centralisation of authority, absence of an independent judiciary, and rule of rulers and not the rule of law, are its basic principles.

Out of all these features, *A.R. Ball* in his book "Modern Politics and Government" specifies five most salient features of a Totalitarian State :

- (1) All aspects of individual and society activity are theoretically the political concern of the government.
- (2) One party is politically and legally dominant. The party provides the only institutionalised basis for political competition, recruitment and opposition.
- (3) There is an elaborate ideology which regulates all political activity within the state.
- (4) The judiciary and the mass media are rigidly controlled by the government and civil liberties stand seriously curtailed.
- (5) A modern Totalitarian state emphasises constant mobilisation of the population for winning mass support for the ruler, and for providing his rule with a democratic cloak. The regime is legitimised by mobilised consent and forced and directed political participation of the people.



With all these features, the totalitarian state dominates all aspects of the life of the people. They live by the rule of the state which really means the rule of the person or persons who wield the power of the state at a particular time. Oxford Dictionary of Politics records : Totalitarianism i.e. Totalitarian State is "A dictatorial form of centralised government that regulates every aspect of state and private behaviour."

## II. AUTHORITARIAN STATE

Authoritarian State is very near to a totalitarian state and is far away from a democratic state. A.R. Bal has observed : "The states which do not fall between the two categories Democracy and Totalitarian states belong to the category of authoritarian state.

**C.H. Dillon** defines an authoritarian state as one in which "all authority and power are concentrated in the hands of a few i.e., the government whose rule is essentially not responsible. The people participate in few of their decisions but are subject to all of them."

**E.B. Schulz** writes: "An Authoritarian government is characterised by the possession of supreme authority either by one person or by a minority group which is in no way accountable to the people over whom control is exercised." Authoritarian state is one which is governed by an authoritarian government.

In simple words, a state governed by on very powerful ruler or a civil or military dictator/junta is held to be an authoritarian state. It is characterized by a strong centralized governmental structure in which the executive dominates the legislature and even also uses the judiciary for serving its needs. The citizens are entitled to limited freedom and attempts are made to secure manipulated, committed and full support from one or some organizations or parties of the people. An authoritarian government is neither a true representative of the people nor responsible and accountable to them. It works as an autocratic government and uses force and coercion for securing the obedience of the people towards its policies, decisions and orders.

### II. (a) Authoritarian State : Features

In its content and form an authoritarian state is quite near to a totalitarian state. The difference between the two is one of degree and not of kind. In it, the state control over the people is not total but excessive. Limited and regulated openness is permitted. Centralisation is considered ideal but along with it some limited devolution or sharing of authority is also tolerated. The executive is excessively powerful and dominates other organs of the state. In such a state, the power is in the hands of a military dictator or a civilian junta. Manipulative politics is practised. Either Modernisation or Traditionalism is used to win popular support for securing some credibility. Religion or an ideology is often used to secure support and serve the ends of the rulers. Several countries of middle east and Africa have been living with authoritarian governments.

**A.R. Ball**, uses the term Autocratic state for an authoritarian state and specifies its following seven features :

- (1) Big limitations are imposed on open political competition i.e., upon political parties and elections.



- (2) There is absence of a dominating political ideology such as communism or fascism, although racialism or fundamentalism or nationalism or theocracy often provides some basis for attempted political uniformity.
- (3) The definition of what is "political" is more restricted in totalitarian system than in a authoritarian system.
- (4) The political rulers mostly use force and coercion to command political uniformity and obedience.
- (5) Civil liberties enjoy low priority and governmental control over judiciary and mass media is direct and considered justified in the interest of public good.
- (6) The basis for rule is founded either in traditional political elite or in a new modernising elite, often the army, which seizes power by a coup (As was done in Pakistan in October 1999) or as a result of internal civil war and political disorder or instability. Manipulation and suppression constitutes the basis of the power of the rulers.
- (7) It is usually one civil or military group/junta or a dictator that monopolies political power and control over the state and its government.

To put it more clearly the hallmarks of an authoritarian state are :

- (1) It is a state ruled by an autocratic government headed by a civil or military dictator or junta.
- (2) Executive is the most powerful organ of state power and it dominates the legislature and even judiciary.
- (3) Judicial independence is not respected and the authoritarian ruler or group always tries to use judiciary for securing favourable judgements and interpretations of state laws and policies.
- (4) Limited political pluralism is used to keep the people and their organizations divided. Even some political organizations are floated to demonstrate popular support for the authoritarian regime.
- (5) Scant importance is given to the rights and freedoms of the people, censorship or control over press and media is maintained indirectly or even directly.
- (6) Fear, Force, coercion and political repression is used to secure compliance with the policies and decisions of the ruling establishment.
- (7) Civil society is kept divided, weak and under control. It is even used for securing support for the power-holders.

With these features, an authoritarian state is quite near to a totalitarian state. Frequently, an authoritarian state gets transformed into a totalitarian state. When the state control over the life of the people is total, the system is totalitarian, when it is excessive, permitting limited, controlled and manipulated political participation of the people, the system is authoritarian. Ideology is used by a totalitarian state to acquire, justify and exercise power upon the people. In authoritarian regimes power is exercised and maintained with the help of several ideological principles or use of, or even otherwise through the exercise of coercion camouflaged with constitutionalism. In an authoritarian state, the executive enjoys a position of dominance over the legislature and judiciary.



### III. LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC STATES

Against Totalitarian and Authoritarian States, Liberal Democratic States are decidedly superior as these ensure a respect for rights and freedoms of the people; always work for promoting the welfare of all, and are characterized by representative, limited, responsible, accountable and transparent governments.

A Liberal Democratic State is one in which people's power is supreme. People are sovereign and they themselves elect and organise their government. The government always works according to the dictates of public opinion. It is a popularly elected, representative government which is continuously responsive, responsible and accountable to the public opinion. It is constituted by free, fair and regular elections. The people have the right to change their government, and they do change it from time to time. A government remains in power so long as it continues to enjoy popular majority support as expressed in elections and otherwise. People are free to criticise its policies. The political struggle is open and free in which a number of political parties, at least two, freely participate. All decisions are taken by majority or consensus. The majority and minorities form part of one national mainstream. There is rule of law, decentralisation of powers, judicial independence, constitutionally granted and guaranteed rights and freedoms of the people, and freedom of mass media.

The state, the authority-holders, the people and all the organisations and associations of the people accept and respect the ideology of liberalism which gives highest place to the rights and freedoms of the people. Liberal Democracy posits faith in rights and freedoms of the people, freedom of public opinion, people's right to express dissent, freedom to form associations and parties, open political competition for power, free enterprise and competitiveness in economic relations and a government working under several political, social and economic checks and balances.

S.E. Finer, Almond, Powell and almost all other modern political scientists, advocate Liberal Democracy as the best way of life.

#### III. (a) LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC STATE : MAIN FEATURES

A Liberal Democracy is characterised by the following salient features.

1. **Representative Government.** In a Liberal Democracy the government is the representative of the people. It is elected by the people. The members of the legislature are elected by the people for a fixed term. Legislature is the custodian of the finances of the nation and representative of national public opinion. The right to vote is available to all without any discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, creed, place of birth, religion, sex, and property. Except for a minimum age qualification, there is no rigid and formal qualification in respect of the right to vote. Election of representatives by the people is free, secret, uncoerced and



uncorrupt. Government represents the people and has to continuously demonstrate and prove its representativeness. It has to maintain and periodically prove its popularity. People can change the government through elections.

2. **Civil Liberties.** In a Liberal Democracy the people have the right to freely express their views. They have the right to freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of press and other means of mass media is ensured. People have the right to form voluntary associations and through them to pursue their interests. The constitution of a liberal democratic state grants and guarantees civil liberties of the people. The civil society actively works in a liberal democratic state.
3. **Defined and Specific Role of the Executive.** In a Liberal Democracy the role of the executive is defined and limited. The political executive undertakes policy formulation and the permanent executive, the Bureaucracy/Civil Service, implements the decisions and policies of the government. The latter advises the former and places at its disposal professional, expert, non-political, non-partisan objective advice, technical knowledge and experience. The political executive is representative of and responsive to public opinion. It supervises the functioning of the civil service. "The executive in the liberal democracy", observes *S.E. Finer*, "is directly accountable to public opinion from which it derives its authority to govern." In a Liberal Democracy with a Parliamentary Form of Government, the Executive is directly and continuously responsible before the legislature and ultimately before the people and public opinion. When a liberal democracy has a Presidential form of Government, there are present several legislative and judicial checks over its power. It is also directly responsible before the people and public opinion.
4. **Limited Government.** Liberal Democracy involves the concept of limited government. The government exercises only those powers as are granted to it by the Constitution. The manner in which powers are to be exercised by the governmental institutions is also specified and defined. Power-holders are not allowed to exercise their powers arbitrarily. A separation of powers is affected. The powers of all the organs are granted in a manner which helps them to act out well their roles and practise a system of inter-organ checks and balances with a view to prevent arbitrariness on the part of any one organ. The government is accountable to the people for all its actions. It holds office for a fixed tenure after which it has to seek fresh mandate from the people. Judiciary performs an active and independent role as the guardian of the constitution and fundamental rights and freedoms of the people.
5. **Social and Economic Checks and Balances.** In a Liberal Democracy there are social and economic checks and balances on the activities of government. It is characterised by the active existence and activities of a large number of social and economic associations/interest groups of the people which enjoy a large amount of autonomy. These groups play a vital role in the political process. The bulk of economic decisions in liberal democracy is not taken by the government alone. The interest groups play a vital role in it. The duty of the government is to harmonise and coordinate social and economic relations and to impose and coerce only in the last resort.



6. **Political Checks and Balances.** A very high level of political participation of people in the political process is a hall mark of liberal democracy. All shades of public opinion are involved in the political process. Right to form political associations and to use them to influence the decision-making is an accepted and popular practice. The three organs of government are held by different hands and never united under the control of same man or body of men. No organ or institution has the power to coerce or dominate the others. The division of powers between three organs of government acts as an internal brake and prevents the government from becoming autocratic.
7. **Liberal Democracy as a System of Indirect-Democracy.** In contemporary times, Liberal Democracy has been mostly working through a system of indirect or representative democracy. The government is formed by duly and freely elected representatives of the people. The representatives of the people are elected through systematically and regularly held free, fair and transparent elections. In these elections all adult citizens are voters (who enjoy the right to vote under the principle of Universal Adult Franchise) who freely chose their representatives. Due to several factors and practical difficulties and limitations, the adoption and use of Direct Democracy, which is the theoretical held to be a purer form of democratic than indirect Democracy is currently not considered possible in most of the states of the world. Direct Democracy has been in operation only in Switzerland, however only through several modern devices like Referendum, Initiative, Recall and Publicite. Further Direct Democracy is in existence along with a system of representative democracy.
8. **Free and Open struggle for power among several political parties.** There is free and open struggle for power among several political parties who freely select and field their candidates in elections from various clearly defined and delimited constituencies. Open and free struggle for power among all political parties of the people, is a salient feature of Liberal Democracy. People have the right and freedom to form their political parties and freely use their political rights. Any person can also contest an election as an independent candidate from any constituency.
9. **Freedom to Form and Manage Political Parties and Associations.** People have the right and freedom to form their political parties or to join any existing party of their choice. The people can even change their political parties. There is open struggle for power among political parties. All political parties accept the popular verdicts in elections. The party or a group of parties which gets a majority of legislative seats gets the power to rule, and other parties start acting as opposition parties. All parties have full faith in peaceful and constitutional means of getting political power.
10. **Clear distinction between State, Society and Civil Society, and Active, Alert and Positive Presence and Role of the latter.** In Liberal Democracy, the Civil Society, a collective name for several non-government organisations or groups, associations, and in fact all social, economic and professional organisations, continuously plays an active role as a cushion between the people and their state. The Civil Society acts both as a check upon the government as well as an instrument of communication among the people, business,



trade, industry, environmentalists, capitalists and other sections of society and the government. A clear distinction among state, society and civil society is made and respected by all. Each accepts the values and role of the other.

11. **Special place for the protection and promotion of the interests and welfare of the people belonging to minorities.** Liberal Democracy gives special importance to the need for the security, protection and promotion of the rights, freedoms and welfare of the people belonging to minorities/minority communities. Even while granting and guaranteeing equal rights and freedoms on all citizens, the Liberal Democratic State places special emphasis on the educational, cultural and social rights and freedoms of the minorities. Some special steps are always taken for encouraging and securing active and alert participation of the people of minority communities in the political process, particularly in formulation of public policies and decisions. Liberal Democracy is popularly conceptualized as system of governance in which peoples' power is supreme and majority and minority opinions and needs are sought to be integrated into a coherent whole on the basis either of a consensus behind all public policies and decisions or by majority based decision-making.

Besides the above discussed major characteristics of Liberal Democracy, we can also mention several other essential features of Liberal Democracy : decentralization of functions and authority, independence of judiciary, separation of powers, enlightened citizenship, judicial review, and rule of law.

The Constitutions and Political Systems of India, USA, and UK have all these cardinal features of Liberal Democracy.



Answer the following:

1. Explain the meaning and features of Totalitarianism.
2. State the features of Authoritarian form of government.
3. Discuss all the features of Liberal democracy.