

Unit 8

The Conceptual and Theoretical Issues of Power

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Learning Objectives

After going through this Unit, you will be able to

- understand the meaning and concept of power
- explain the articulation of power among the elite and in local communities
- critically discuss the works of major thinkers on power

8.1 Introduction

In simple terms power refers to the ability of a person to influence the behaviour of another person or a group of persons in accordance with his / her own wish. In the words of Tawney (1931: 229), "Power may be defined as the capacity of an individual, or group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in a manner in which he desires, and to prevent his conduct being modified in the manner in which he does not". Power heralds a relationship of subordination and superordination between people. Many social scientists, particularly sociologists, are chiefly interested in the consequences of the play of power in social relationships. In this Unit, we begin with the meaning and concept of power and go on to the major theoretical approaches to the understanding of power in sociological writings. Here, we briefly review the viewpoints of six sociologists who explain the different dimensions of power. Later in the Unit, we discuss the articulation of power in two mutually opposed contexts: the elite on the one hand and the local communities on the other.

8.2 Concept of Power

Power always entails a social relationship between at least two actors. It cannot be an attribute of one person. To say that an individual has power is meaningless unless it is stated over whom this power is exercised. An individual or group of individuals who hold power is / are able to get others to do what they want them to do. If those on whom the power is exercised resist or refuse to obey those who are powerful, they are punished in one way or the other. Power always gives rise to asymmetry in relationships. Those who have greater access to limited resources e.g., control over finances, ownership or control over means of production and / or means of distribution are more powerful than those who do not have the means or

the opportunity to control such resources. The use of sanction in imposing one's will is an important constituent of power and it is on this count that power differs from influence.

Coser (1982), delineated two major traditions in the conceptualisation of power that can be distinguished in sociological writings. The first one focuses on power as the imposition of the will of actor A (who may be an individual or a collectivity) upon actor B despite B's resistance. Here, actor B is dominated by actor A. This approach may be traced in Max Weber. The second tradition focuses on power as a resource at the disposal of collectivities and used for their benefits allowing them to make use of it to attain their objectives. Here power is conceptualised as a collective facility. This approach may be traced to Talcott Parsons.

Two questions assume relevance at this stage, why do some people wield power while others do not? Why do some people command and others obey? At the outset one tends to think in terms of physical might and strength. The stronger person wields power and commands while the weak person does not wield power and obeys. This, however, does not hold true always. It may be said that inequality of resources leads to inequality of power, so if the resources within a specific sphere were equally balanced, there would be no power relation between two parties.

The answer to the twin questions is far more complex. It is important to know the basis on which the one who holds power claims obedience and the obedient one feels obliged to obey. Gerth and Mills (1953) explain that in itself power is simply the probability that one person will act as another person wishes. The obedience may rest upon fear, rational calculations of advantage, lack of energy to do otherwise, loyalty, or any other reason.

Dennis Wrong (1968: 679) comprehensively explains, "*If* an actor is believed to be powerful, *if* he knows that others hold such a belief, and *if* he encourages it and resolves to make use of it by intervening in or punishing actions by others who do not comply with his wishes, *then* he truly has power and this power has indeed been conferred upon him by the attributions, perhaps initially without foundation, of others". A group, which is unorganised, lacks common goals or common interests, and is not ready to exercise power, is not treated as powerful. Often people who are in power are able to avoid the surfacing of issues that are of significance to the powerless. They are able to keep at bay the complain of the powerless people that they are not cared for.

At this stage it is important to distinguish power from related concepts:

a) Power and Authority

When power acquires legitimacy or justification it is understood as authority. It may be noted that authority receives voluntary obedience. A person who has authority may exercise command or control over other persons. Take the example of a senior bureaucrat who assigns tasks to his/her subordinates and may even transfer some of them to another city. This is because, the bureaucrat has the authority to do it by virtue of his/her position and status in the government machinery. In formal organisations authority is clearly specified, and dispensed through rules and laws, of the organisations. It may be understood at this stage that the exercise of authority does not necessarily imply the superiority of the person who commands. A teacher may be a

better scholar than the Principal of the school who dismisses him/her. It is simply because of the authority, which vests with the Principal that he/she may suspend a teacher. Power may, therefore, be executed in formal organisations as institutionalised authority and as institutionalised power in informal organisations.

b) Power and Prestige

E.A. Ross (1916) drew attention to prestige as the immediate cause of the location of power. It was said that the class which has more prestige will have most power. Prestige, therefore, is an important source of power. It is not appropriate to associate prestige with power because prestige is usually not accompanied with power. In itself power becomes the basis of prestige i.e., when a person has power, he / she has prestige but when a person has prestige he / she may not have power.

c) Power and Influence

There is a close connection between power and influence. Power commands obedience and submission; influence is persuasive rather than coercive. Power calls for intended control, which is usually executed through sanctions while influence does not involve the use of sanctions or punishment. Influence, is not essentially accompanied with power. Newton, for example was a man of influence but not power. A policeman may have power but not influence. In the same vein, the Prime Minister of the country is a person with both power and influence.

d) Power and Dominance

Power exists and expresses itself in inter-group relations. It is associated with status that people occupy in formal organisations while dominance is associated with one's personality and may be treated as a psychological concept. Power, on the other hand, is associated with the structure of society itself and may be treated as a sociological concept (Bierstedt, 1982).

8.3 Theoretical Considerations

The major theoretical considerations in the context of power focus on (i) its potential to achieve goals, (here power is treated as equivalent to domination enfolding the strategy of exercising power over someone) and (ii) its potential to generate solidarity and collective autonomy (here power is understood in the larger framework of pursuing collective action as enfolded in the strategy of exercising power to achieve common goals). Against this backdrop, the major currents in the sociological conception of power are discussed here.

a) Max Weber: Power and Domination

According to Weber (1914, 1920) 'power' (*macht*) as a general concept is distinct from 'domination' (*herrschaft*) as a specific phenomenon. Power is defined as an actor's chance to impose his/her will on another (even against the resistance of the latter) in social relationship. What is interesting to note is the proposition that the degree of power is dependent on the nature of submission over the one on whom it is being exercised. Stated simply, power is more if the probability of submission to the will of the one who holds it is higher. It may be safely said that the power of an individual(s) is measured in terms of the chance(s) of imposing the will. Here, the basis of power or the basis on which imposition of will is called for is not important.

Scott (1996:22) explains that power is a potential that is realised through the actions in which an actor engages. This potential is determined by accidental or fortuitous circumstances (eg. individual has power over others because of better physique or because he/she has information that is not available to others) as much as by structurally defined opportunities and capacities (e.g. when social distribution of resources improves or worsens the chances of realising his or her will) at the disposal of an individual. Domination or *herrschaft*, on the other hand, presumes the presence of a *herr* or master. The chief difference between power and domination is that the former does not imply the right to command and the duty to obey while the latter implies the probability of gaining willing obedience.

There are two contrasting types of domination. The first kind of domination is one that involves a rational and calculative maneuvering of interests in one's favour. Often the individual who exercises domination of this kind is able to convince the subordinate actors that it is their interest which is being served by allowing him/her do what he/she is doing. This often happens when small companies sell their goods to a monopoly retail outlet. In doing so they subject themselves to the power of the retailer since their livelihood depends on his/her goodwill. The second type of domination is the one which is exercised by virtue of authority. Here, domination is exercised by an individual or group because it is legitimised as authority. Those on whom domination is exercised accept the commands and demands of those who dominate as basis of their own behaviour.

Box 8.1: Power and Domination

'Weber gave particular attention to those forms of power that involve stable and enduring relationships, and when power is structured in this way he learned it 'domination'. Power is structured in this way he termed it 'domination'. Power is structured into distinctive forms of domination through processes of rationalisation: Power relations that were formerly matters of unreflective custom and habit become more conscious and deliberate social practices. The rationalisation of action involves replacing the unreflective patterns of customary and habitual action by actions that are oriented towards calculations of self-interest and commitment to ultimate values. Weber seems to imply two forms of rationalisation, which may be called, respectively, 'instrumental rationalisation, and 'value rationalisation'. Customary or habitual forms of social order evolve through instrumental rationalisation into forms of social order that are sustained by calculations of expediency. Through value rationalisation they become forms of social order that are sustained by the conception of legitimacy (Weber, 30, cited here from Scott 1996: 22-23).

The Power in this kind of domination emerges from the probability that the command will be obeyed. In addition, Weber distinguished between three kinds of authority, rational-legal authority which is based on norms, ordinances and legality of the offices of those who exercise authority e.g. the authority exercised by the tax collectors, policemen, bosses in the office; traditional authority which is based on a belief in the sacred quality of long-standing traditions and in the legitimacy of those who exercise authority e.g. the domination of the eldest person the family; and charismatic authority which is based on devotion to the sacred quality, heroic strength or exemplary character of a person, e.g. authority of god-men (see Aron 1967).

b) Karl Marx: Class and Power

Marx (1954, 1955) is known for his conception of class and class struggle. More specifically, he identifies two classes: the *bourgeoisie* (or the ruling class) and the *proletariat* (or the working class) in the capitalist society. He says that the proletariat rules and commands obedience from the *bourgeoisie*. The basis of the power of the *bourgeoisie* is control over the capital on the one hand and its hold over the military force and production of ideas. In the words of Bottomore (1964: 24-25), "The lines of conflict are most sharply drawn in the modern capitalist societies, because in such societies the divergence of economic interests appears most clearly unobscured by any personal bonds such as those of feudal society, and because development of capitalism brings about a more radical polarisation of classes than has existed in any other type of society by its unrivalled concentration of wealth at one extreme of society and of poverty at the other, and by its gradual elimination of the intermediate and transitional social strata". The *proletariat*, on the other hand seek to increase the capital for the ruling class. The relationship between the two classes is one of exploitation in which the ruling class gains at the expense of the wage labourers constituting the *proletariat*.

Workers produce commodities for the *bourgeoisie* for which they receive wages. The wages are just enough for their subsistence. Surely, there is a vast difference between the value of the commodity the workers produce and the wages that they get this difference appropriated by the ruling class. The *proletariat* class is perpetually engaged in struggle over its wages and conditions of work. Earlier the struggle was disorganized and ineffective. Modern industry and factory system of production ushered an era of political organisation of class struggle. The class conscious political organisation emerged. Marx opines that some day, the *proletariat* will overthrow the *bourgeoisie* and get liberation from the long standing domination and exploitation.

c) Robert Michels: The Iron Law of Oligarchy

Michels believed that the craving for power is inherent in the nature of human beings. Those who acquire power, seek to perpetuate it. Against this backdrop, he propounds that democracy calls for organisation, which leads to oligarchy. The trend towards oligarchic rule in party organisations is better known as the Iron Law of oligarchy. He agreed that the "democratic currents of history" often "break ever on the same shoal". They are, however, "ever renewed". One of the reasons for the renewal of democracy is that oligarchies were felt to be oppressive and were overthrown. Michel insists that democratic currents will always break the Iron Law (Michels 1959).

It may be understood that the large collectivity of people in an organisation cannot govern or administer their common affairs. Over the period of time, specialisation develops and division of labour evolves. Organisations become increasingly complex. Some people are chosen to represent the masses and execute their will. According to Michels (1927) every organisation however democratic in the beginning develops an oligarchic character. He was convinced that masses await leaders to govern them and take care of their concerns. The leaders derive power from the incompetence of the masses in the domain of political life. The incompetent masses submit to the leaders of whose expertise they are convinced. Oligarchies preserve the stability and longevity of leadership. More importantly, the oppressive conditions in themselves, do not lead to unrest. It is the awareness of those conditions that generates class struggle. The struggles and revolts are often suppressed.

Michels maintains that it is appropriate to ascertain the limits imposed by oligarchies over individuals. He says that decentralisation does not necessarily give way to enhanced liberty in the hands of individuals; neither does it enhance the power of the rank and file. Usually, it serves as a mechanism by which weak leaders seek to get away from the dominion of the stronger ones. The weaker leaders, however, may establish a centralised authority within their own domains. One oligarchy gives way to many smaller oligarchies each powerful in its own sphere. He laid thrust on developing the spirit of free inquiry, criticism and control of the leaders among the masses. It may be noted that these are imperative in the process of strengthening democracy (Zeitlin 1987).

d) Steven Lukes: Power and Human Agency

Lukes affirms that all power is attributed to individual or collective human agents. Often human agents have several options or alternatives before them from which they choose their course of action. "Human agents exercise their characteristic powers when they act voluntarily on the basis of wants and beliefs which provide them with reasons for so acting. Such an exercise of the power of human agency implies that the agent at the point of action has the power to act otherwise, that is, at the least the ability and the opportunity both to act or not to act, it is in his power to do either; there is 'an openness between performing or failing to perform the action', and there is no set of external circumstances such that in those circumstances the agent will necessarily so act' (Lukes 1977, rpt. 1982: 159). Two conclusions emerge from this perspective: the one who exercises the power had the option or the alternative to act differently; and those on whom the power had the option or the alternative to act differently, if power was not exercised over them.

Lukes's proposition of power accepts that despite the fact that actors operate within "structurally determined limits", they have a certain degree of autonomy and could act in a degree of autonomy and in a different way. In other words, there would be no place for power in a condition of total structural determinism and imposed constraints that determine the options of human agents. He cites the example of an employer who declares some of his workers redundant because he wants to cut costs. In another case, an official government liquidator declares an insolvent company bankrupt which throws the workers out of work. While the first case is a case of simple exercise of power, the second is not because we assume that the liquidator had no alternatives before him. Lukes conclusively says that social life may be properly understood as a dialectic of power and structure, a web of possibilities for agents to make choices and pursue strategies within given limits.

e) Anthony Giddens: Power as Dependency and Domination

Anthony Giddens's concept of power in the context of interaction is rooted in terms of domination. He distinguishes between power in the broad sense and power in the narrow sense. In the broad sense, power is explained as the transformative capacity of human agency. Here, the term capacity refers to the capability of an individual to bring about a change in the course of a series of events through intervention. On the other hand, power in the narrow sense is largely relational. It is the capability to effect results when these outcomes depend upon the agency of others. The basic difference between the two lies in the agency. While use of power in the broad sense

is grounded in the capability of an individual to effect outcomes directly, the use of power in the narrow sense is grounded in the capability to effect outcomes in situations when they depend upon others (Stewart 2001).

More specifically, in the narrow sense, power implies dependency upon the agency of others and the capability of an individual to prevail upon them. The thrust is on domination on the part of the individual who may be said to hold power and compliance on the part of others over whom the individual exercises control. This relationship then, may be understood as one of domination. Thus Giddens (1976: 111) writes, 'It is in this sense that men have power over others; this is power as domination'.

Giddens's basic conception of power has to do with acquisition and use of resources or capabilities expressed in struggles and subordination. In Giddens's own words (1976:111), 'Power in either the broad or restricted sense, refers to *capabilities*. Unlike the communication of meaning, power does not come into being only when being 'exercised', even if ultimately there is no other criterion whereby one can demonstrate what power actors possess. This is important because we can talk of power being 'stored up' for future occasions of use'. Later Giddens (1984) suggests that reproduction of structures of domination leads to generation of power. Power, therefore, depends upon the distribution of resources and the capability of individuals to make the most of them effectively. He upholds that in actual situations everyone does have possibilities of exercising power. An individual in a subordinate position is never completely dependent and is often able to convert the available resources 'into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system' (Giddens 1982: 32). Giddens opines that power is not always oppressive. In fact, power may best be understood as the capacity to achieve outcomes. In fact, power flows smoothly in processes of social reproduction in the larger matrix of structures of domination. More importantly, despite the fact that constraints of power cannot be ignored, power is often a medium for attaining freedom or emancipation.

f) Michael Foucault: Power as Domination

Michael Foucault identifies power with domination in conceptual, methodological and political terms. He distinguishes between the character of modern and classical power within the framework of domination. Disciplinary power as modern form of domination stands out in sharp contrast with sovereign power as pre-modern domination. Firstly, while disciplinary power is constant and completely pervasive, sovereign power is periodic (therefore not constant) and of low social penetration (therefore not all pervasive). Secondly, while domination in the disciplinary model makes the required action happen through political rationalities and technologies of power that seem to be inescapable, domination in the sovereignty model is expressed through prohibition, and if that fails, the punishment for the action which should not have been performed. Thirdly, while in the disciplinary model there is contrasting constitution of actors (subjectivisation in the sense of control and dependence) the sovereignty model is based on the givenness of the actors involved (Stewart 2001).

In the words of Foucault (1982:212) himself, "This (modern) form of power applies itself to everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise

in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power, which subjugates and makes subject to. This implies that the law of truth constitutes the defining criterion of modern form of power. Further, modern form of power is based on relations of domination, hierarchy, asymmetry and control. He maintains that new forms of domination develop and he argues that liberation or freedom (both at the individual level and at the collective level) from the constraints is not possible. According to him, global public-oriented emancipatory politics is not possible. Surely, Foucault has been charged with a kind of fatalism, inherent in the conception of power.

8.4 The Concept of Elite

In a general sense, the term 'elite' was employed to refer to commodities of particular excellence. This restricted usage of the term in the seventeenth century was broadened later to include social groups such as higher ranks of mobility and others that could be treated as superior to the rest of them. It was only in the latter part of the nineteenth century that the term gained currency in sociological writings in Europe. In 1930s sociological theories of elite developed in Britain and America particularly in the writings of Vilfredo Pareto.

Pareto (1935) explained the concept of elite the terms of a class of people with highest indices (referring to sign of capacity e.g a successful lawyer has highest index, one who does not get a client has the lowest index in their branch of activity). This class of people is referred to as the elite. In more simple terms, Pareto defined elite by reference to facts which an outside observer is able to verify. Elite class, therefore, comprises of all those who have succeeded and are considered by their peers and the public as the best. When he spoke of the elite consistently, Pareto did not mean all those who have succeeded but those who exercise the political functions of administration or government and those who influence or determine the conduct of governing machinery though they are nor officials or ministers (see Arnon 1966). There are two categories: the non-elite (who may or may not have a role to play in the government) and the elite. The latter category i.e., the elite is divided into governing elite and non-governing elite. The elite class is divisible into two classes: the governing elite (constituted of people who have some say or who directly or indirectly play a part in the government) and the non-governing elite (constituted of the rest of the elite i.e., those who have to say or no role to play in the government). Pareto argued that the same individuals occupy the same rank in hierarchy for wealth as for other criteria (such as musical talent, level of intelligence and so on) and for the degree of political and social influence. This implies that the upper classes are also the richest and it is these classes that represent the elite. Later Pareto concerned himself with those who have power i.e., governing elite and the masses.

Pareto, however, recognized the element of mobility in the elite class i.e., he did not insist that the elite was a static category, which was constituted once and for all. He propounded the idea of 'circulation of elite'. There are atleast two channels through which the idea of circulation of elite may be explained. Circulation of elite refers to the process in which individuals circulate between the elite and the non-elite groups. It also refers to the

process in which one elite is replaced by another. Pareto's work does incorporate both the conceptions but the former conception referring to the circulation of individuals between elite and non-elite groups predominates. In the context of decay and renewal of aristocracies, Pareto observes "the governing class is restored not only in numbers but – and it is that the more important thing – in quality, by families rising from a lower classes". Apart from this he also makes mention of showing down of this circulation which leads to increase of degenerate elements in the classes which still hold power and increase in the elements of superior quality in the subject classes (i.e., non-elite class). In such a situation social equilibrium becomes unstable. Even a mild shock may be enough to crumble it. A new elite comes to power and establishes a new equilibrium after a conquest or a revolution. Pareto also repeatedly refers to circulation of individuals between the elite and non-elite classes. He suggested that the governing class constituting the elite might induct those people in the lower classes from whom they perceive threat or danger. When such people are inducted into the elite group they change their character completely and adopt the attitude and interests of the established elite.

Marie Kolabinska (a student of Pareto) identified circulation which takes place between different categories of the governing elite itself, and circulation which takes place between elite and the rest of the population (individuals from lower strata may manage to enter the existing elite class or individuals in the lower strata may form new elite groups which engage in a struggle for power with the existing elite). Kolabinska's work largely devoted to the study of circulation of elite in French society focused between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries (cited from Bottomore 1964).

Gaetano Mosca was the first to draw a distinction between elite and the masses. He explained that in all societies there are two classes of people: one that rules and the other that is ruled. The class which rules performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys all the advantages and privileges that accompany power. The class, which is ruled larger in terms of numerical composition and is governed and controlled by the former class through legal, sometimes arbitrary and violent means. Like Pareto, Mosca was also concerned with elites as groups of people vested with political power. Mosca explained that between the elite and the masses is the category of the sub-elite constituted of the 'new middle class' of civil servants, managers and white-collar workers, scientists, engineers, scholars and intellectuals. The sub-elite provides new recruits to the elite class. The sub-elite itself is a vital element in the government of society. Mosca suggested that the stability of any political system largely depends on the level of morality, intelligence and activity that this second stratum has attained. He accounted for the rise of new elite in part by the emergence of social forces, which represent new interests (e.g. technological or economic interests) in the society (see Bottomore 1964).

8.5 Power Elite and Veto Groups

In the context of power in America, C. Wright Mills (1956) proposed the concept of power elite (explained in terms of a unified power group composed of top government executives, military officials, and corporation directors) while David Riesman (1953) proposed the concept of veto groups (explained in terms of a diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups, each of which is primarily concerned with protecting its jurisdiction by blocking actions of other groups which seem to threaten that jurisdiction).

Kornhauser (1966) compares Mills and Reisman on power in America along five dimensions:

- i) Structure of Power including how power is distributed among the major segments of present-day American society: Mills proposed that pyramid of power may be conceived as formed of three layers. The apex is occupied by power elite, the second layer is occupied by middle levels of power (constituted of diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups) while the third layer is occupied by mass society (constituted of powerless mass of unorganised people who are controlled from above). Reisman, on the other hand, proposed a pyramid formed of two rather than three layers. Reisman did not recognize the presence of power elite. The upper layer is occupied by veto groups. Here, instead of decisive ruling group is an amorphous structure of power centering in the interplay among interests groups that form the veto groups. The lower layer of the pyramid comprises more-or-less unorganised public which cooperates with (and is not dominated) the interest groups in their maneuvers against actual or threatened encroachments on the jurisdiction each claims for itself.
- ii) Changes in the structure of power including how the distribution of power has changed in the course of American history: Mills lays emphasis on increasing concentration of power and the ascending of power elite, while Reisman lays emphasis on increasing dispersion of power and the tendency toward the dispersal of power among a plurality of organized interests.
- iii) Operation of the structure of power including the means whereby power is exercised in American society: According to Mills, the power elite lays down all important public policies particularly foreign policy. The power elite manipulates the people at the bottom. Reisman, on the other hand, denied what Mills asserted. He said that who determines the policy largely depends on the issue about which policy is being laid out. Groups constituting veto groups are largely inoperative on several issues. Most of them become active in making decisions and laying out policies about issues that concern them or are of interest to them. This implies that there are as many power structures as the spheres of policy.
- iv) Bases of the structure of power including how social and psychological factors shape and sustain the existing distribution of power: It is understandable that power is shared among who share common interests: For Mills, the power elite represents a body of people with common interests, for Reisman, the veto groups have diversity of interests.
- v) Consequences of the structure of power including how the existing distribution of power affects American society: Mills said that, (a) the interests of the major institutions (corporations, armed forces, executive branch of government) whose leaders constitute the power elite are greatly enhanced in the existing power arrangements; (b) because of concentration of power in the hands of select few and manipulation for exercising power, there is decline of politics as public debate; (c) concentration of power has taken place without a corresponding shift in the bases of legitimacy of power. Power is supposed to reside in the hands of public and its elected representatives while in reality it lies in the hands of those who direct the key bureaucracies. Consequently, men of power are neither responsible nor accountable for their power; and (d) if power trends to a small group which is not accountable for its power, and if politics no longer involves genuine public debate then

there will be a severe weakening of democratic institutions. Conversely, Riesman said that no one group or class is favoured in a major way over others; politics has declined in meaning for many people which is not essentially due to the ascending of veto groups; there is growing discrepancy between the facts of power and images of power. Power is more widely dispensed than is generally believed; and power in America is situational and mercurial, it is amorphous because of which there is decline of effective leadership.

8.6 Power in Local Communities

The focus of community power is on decisions that are crucial to the people in a community. The basic question, therefore, is who wields the power to say about things which are important to many people in the community. The concern is with the ability to and/or the practice of deciding what is to be done in, for, by the community. (Spinrad 1965, rpt. 1966).

Box 8.2: Motivation for Decision-Making

'In the relatively pluralistic American Community, power over decision is not an automatic reflection of a prescribed hierarchal role description. A significant variable that emerges from the literature in the motivation to intervene in a particular decision-making process. Such motivation is simply a product of the extent to which that decision is salient to the group and / or the individual (Spinrad, 1965).

Two scholars who have contributed significantly to the subject of community power are Delbert Miller and Robert Dahl (see D. Anotnio and J. Ehrlich 1961). They have initiated a debate based on their own studies and research. The basic issue of contention is, who holds power on local communities. Miller asserts that the business elite makes decisions in local communities. Dahl, on the other hand, argues that rather than being monolithic, power structure is pluralistic. We will discuss the critical features of the two points of view in some detail now.

Delbert Miller chose knowledgeable informants from the community. He asked them to select out of a prepared list of important, well-known people belonging to different organisations and institutions those whom they thought were powerful in getting things done. Now, Miller interviewed the people who were selected by the knowledgeable informants. He also asked them whose help they would seek if they wanted to get something done. This was referred to as the 'reputational technique'. Miller concluded that most of the knowledgeable informants said businessmen were the ones who could get things done. They do influence policy making in local communities to a large extent. Here, local governments are not strong bodies and elected officials are often businessmen, lawyers and politicians of the community, itself. This was true of the 'Pacific City. A study of the 'English City' however suggested on Miller that not businessmen but labour is significant as also leaders from the domain of education, religion, and welfare and status groups. Based on two of the above-mentioned studies, Miller concluded that power pattern is not essentially identical in all American Communities.

Robert Dahl studied New Haven. His methodology of research differed sharply from that of Miller. Dahl found out the specific decisions on specific issues. What is more important is that he looked for specific decision makes in

specific situations two. This Technique was referred to as 'event analysis'. He concluded that the role of businessmen in decision-making was minor in contrast to the assertion of Miller. He explained that while there is no denying that businessmen have lot of resources of their disposal but it is equally true that they have several liabilities by which they are constrained and because of which they cannot emerge as the major contributors in decisions making process. Therefore, not one centre of power but many loci of power exist. Dahl believes that mayors and their staff have increasingly become the initiators and organisers of important community decision. Miller insists that the political leaders are uncertain about themselves and wait for the cues from others, while businessmen have a clearly defined image and act with more assertion (Spinnad 1965, rpt. 1966).

Apart from Miller and Dahl, Edward Banfield (1961) made significant contribution in the domain of community power by studying six specific community problems in Chicago. He reached to the conclusion that surely the businessmen in Chicago occupying top positions in national corporations and regional commercial and banking institutions are endowed with resources that give them unlimited power. Yet, the businessmen do not dominate critical community decisions. The chief reasons for abstaining from this sphere is lack of unity and of interests; and cost entailed in making interventions. They seem to be satisfied and let go of situations if their vested interests are not at stake. On the other hand if their personal interests are threatened or jeopardized, they become excessively involved and use their influence in effecting decisions. Banfield agrees with Dahl in upholding that the chief decisions in Chicago are taken by managers of large organisations, few civic leaders, and the chief elected officials.

Banfield seems to consider the political leaders as potentially omnipotent when they go all out on any question. This calls for using up their limited working capital; and coming into confrontation with other power groups besides national government, businessmen other strong community elements that may be affected and take an opposite stand. They, therefore, are slow to take up issues and often look for compromises (Spinrad 1965, rpt. 1966).

8.7 Conclusion

It is evident that the notion of power so commonly used in day-to-day parlance has many dimensions and operated in many different ways. Sociologists have conceptualised power in terms of domination, as a repressive and oppressive force as also an enabling resource. Power, as we have noted rests both with the elite and with the local community. Power enfolds a dynamism of sorts in its very nature and regulates nearly all relationships in society which makes it of special interest to sociologists.

8.8 Further Reading

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