

Basic Concepts of Nation and State

State is an area organised politically in an effective manner such that it is possible to measure its area and population and estimate its resources.

It is inhabited by an indigenous people and its organisation is brought about with the help of a decision-making body (i.e. a government) in order to establish an effective control over the area. If we consider the hierarchy of a political organisation, it can be categorised at three levels, (i) super-state; (ii) state; and (iii) local government.

Characteristics of a State:

A state can be identified with the help of the following characteristics:

1. It has clearly defined boundaries.
2. It has a capital/capitals.
3. There is a person/group of persons to formulate/implement policies.
4. It has centralised/institutionalised legal and tax patterns.
5. It has a well-organised army.
6. Modern education is imparted to its residents.
7. It also exhibits other aspects of organisation.

The State through History:

A brief overview of the state and its development in different regions is given below.

Egypt:

The state under the ancient Egyptians had a pivotal position. It disseminated ideas to the surrounding regions, while the Phoenicians who had commercial links with the Egyptians, took these ideas to Aegian shores. It inspired later civilisations with the use of mercenaries, fortification of cities and subjugated people for productive activities.

Greek/Roman City States:

These included Athens, Sparta, Florence, Genoa, Pisa and the German city states. These city states enjoyed military and economic power and whenever they felt protected from the enemy, these city states tried to expand.

But, these city states could not retain the hinterland because of lack of administrative organisation. The attempts by these city-states at fostering a collective security mechanism turned out to be fragile because there was no attempt at common governance.

Roman Empire:

It was the first empire in the modern sense which had outlying colonies and diverse racial groups. It also had an extensive communication network through roads. It exhibited elements of a federal-unitary system like provision of autonomy to areas west of the Rhine and to the east of the Danube. It lasted upto the fifth century AD.

Feudalism:

During the medieval times, personal aspects of leadership became important under a feudal system of land relations. The allegiance of the populace, in such as system, was only to the chief or the baron.

Dynastic Monarchies of middle Ages:

These represented oppression in the name of divine right. People in these monarchies recognised common interests and boundaries. Where the king and the state were able to bind the people together as a nation, they were able to be seen to represent common or popular interests.

Nation-State:

Political revolutions between mid-18th and mid-19th centuries resulted in the power slipping out of the hands of a privileged few to the people at large. These revolutions (e.g. the French Revolution) were facilitated to a great extent by good communication and good organisation, which helped new ideas to spread effectively.

Superstate/ Supernationalism:

After the Second World War, with a creation of bipolar world, an ideological struggle began. This resulted in changed priorities of the nation-states and a resurgence of nationalism.

Nation:

A nation can be defined as a people inhabiting a particular stretch of territory, tied together by a distinct history and common political institutions. In the words of Bertrand Russell, “a creed or a sentiment is essential for social cohesion, but if it is to be a source of strength it is to be felt deeply and genuinely by a great majority of people”. So a nation has both legal and emotional aspects.

For example, France is a nation while India is more a ‘nation in the making’, while Cyprus is an example of ‘one state, two nations’. In some cases like the Scots, the Basques (in Spain) and the Catalans, some of the minority groups may resist assimilation. In some cases, e.g. France, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark etc., the states came up first, and the nations later.

But nationalism is possible only when certain binding objectives delimit a social group. Some of these objectives are common descent, language, territory, geographical unity and contiguity, political entity, customs, traditions, religion, sense of ethnic kinship, common historical experience and frame of political thought, common area of economic mutuality and, at times, the fear of a common foe.

Evolution of Nation:

The elements of nation can be traced back to the ancient societies of Africa and South America. Even the earliest Homo sapiens always wanted to live in a society organisation. Discussed below are examples from Africa and South America.

Africa: Bushmen of Kalahari:

These were the clans of about sixty tribes, confined to a territory, whose life revolved around sources of water and killing of animals which came to drink water from these sources. These clans could not accommodate or maintain a larger group. There was a rudimentary form of organisation where an elderly person, well acquainted with the territory, took decisions on group activity.

Hottentots:

These were the Bushmen displaced from their rich lands, with better organisation and a more sedentary pastoral lifestyle. They had well-constructed huts, organised means of warfare, higher form of politico-territorial organisation etc. In fact, long before Europe, many African states were ahead of most states of the world in terms of evolution of 'nation' as an organisational concept.

South America: Aztecs:

Geographical factors were responsible for giving rise to Mexico. The valley of Mexico was centrally located and rich in agricultural and other resources. It got expanded by trade, conquests and a tax system. With time, it decayed and fell to the Europeans.

Incas:

The Incas were better organised, integrated and stable and less militaristic than the Aztecs. Their civilisation centred around the fortified temple city of Cuzco. Just like the Roman empire and the later nation-states, they had an advanced system of communication like roads and the kingdom had marked boundaries on ground.

Mayans:

They were located in Yucatan and the adjacent areas. They had well-developed agriculture, a stable government and well-developed science. They later got broken up into tribal states.

Nation-State:

A nation-state is a political unit with a well-defined territory, inhabited by a people who are well-organised, possess sufficient powers and consider themselves to be a nation by virtue of certain binding factors which may be emotional and which are reflected in law and governance.

A state shows greater permanence and stability when it corresponds closely with a nation. State, then, is the mechanism through which the welfare of the nation is safeguarded and its identity is preserved.

In an ideal nation-state, the language problem is almost absent, allegiance to institutions is general and the minorities are very small. The *raison de 'etre* of a nation-state must be based on desires, values and aspirations of the people.

Obstacles to Nation Building:

These can be put into two categories—centrifugal forces and the centripetal forces.

Centrifugal Forces:

Many factors can give rise to such tendencies. These factors have been discussed below.

Physical Factors:

These may be due to difficulty in transportation and communication, because of the size, shape, etc.; for example, in Pakistan, Australia and Ecuador, size and terrain are hurdles in running the administration smoothly.

Tribalism:

This concept is the opposite of nationalism. Here, the allegiance is more to the tribe than to the nation. The greatest challenge in such a situation is how to secure tribal allegiance to the national interests without seeking to attack established tribal traditions and institutions.

Modern Conditions:

Modern conditions have led to many peculiar situations which give rise to centrifugal tendencies. These include situations as in Cyprus where the populace has migrated from two regions, Greece and Turkey, or as in Northern Ireland where the populace is divided on religious lines. But, despite these tendencies, there have been examples where diversities coexist, for instance, in former Yugoslavia under Tito, in Switzerland under a federal set-up and in a multi-racial nation like Brazil.

Centripetal Forces:

These tendencies could be in the form of some idea, concept or a symbol like a chief, king or emperor to justify the existence of a particular state or it could be a set of ideals which a state is seen to represent and safeguard.

Where a *raison de 'etre* does not lie in the desire of a nation to statehood, it is possible for it to be held together by outside forces (e.g. French occupation of Cameroon) or by exigencies of situation (e.g. erstwhile Yugoslavia, Syria) or it may simply come into existence because the powers do not know what to do in the circumstances.

Sub-Nations:

The dominance and final assimilation by a stronger nation over a weaker nation, often by force, while the weaker nation retains its identity as a separate entity, is referred to as sub-nationalism. For instance, absorption of the Bretons by the French, of the Wales by the British, of the

Lusatiao Slavs by the Germans, the Spanish campaign against the Catalans and the Russian campaign against the Baltics.

Sometimes, the common struggle against a dominant power welds the people into a nation, which was the case in the Indian national movement and the Polish struggle against the Russians in the 19th century.