

## **State system and Sovereignty**

### **Meaning and Origin of Nation-State System**

Before we examine the nature and working of the modern nation-state system, it shall be desirable to know about its meaning, origin and development. According to Palmer the nation- state system “is the pattern of political life in which people are separately organised into sovereign states that interact with one another in varying degrees and in varying ways.” These states are involved in conflict as well as co-operation. For the protection of their respective interests these nation states resort to methods of peaceful persuasion, and when these fail they resort to coercive methods. As such, each state tries to build up its national power by organising its coercive resources.

Generally, the scholars trace the origin of state system from the year 1648 when the treaty of Westphalia, which brought the thirty year war to an end, was signed. No doubt even before that the states existed and entered into relations with each other, but they were not sovereign states as their authority was restrained by the Roman Church and the Roman Empire. The peace of Westphalia paved the way for the emergence of the nation-state system by recognising that the Empire no longer commanded the allegiance of its parts and that the Pope could not maintain his spiritual authority every where. In other words, the rulers of a number of countries such as England, France, Germany, Spain, etc., shook off the authority of the Pope in religious affairs and that of the Emperor of Rome in secular matters. Henceforth, the supreme authority came to be identified with the state. This means that each state had the right to utilise the strength of the people and its resources as it liked without any restraint from within or from outside. Though theoretically these states were equal they differed from each other in matters of real powers.

In the course of time the state system underwent further development and changes on account of the rise of representative government, industrial revolution, change in population, growth of international law, development of diplomacy, growing inter-dependence of the states in economic sphere, evolution of methods for peaceful settlement of disputes and the expansion of the state system to non-western World. But the one factor which left most deep impact on the state system was the emergence of nationalism, which created a strong sense of attachment amongst the people towards the state. As a result an average citizen became more deeply involved in the political life of the country. In the light of this development it was no more possible for the statesmen to trade territories on the basis of ancient titles or strategic predecessors is the rise in number of states, great capacity for destruction, vulnerability of states to destruction and subversion and predominant position of influence that has been achieved by three essentially non-European states, the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the United States.

### **Sovereignty**

It implies that the governments are the supreme law making authorities in their respective. Territories. This principle was first established by the Treaty of Westphalia which provided that only sovereign states could enter into treaty relations with each other and a political unit which lacked sovereignty could not become a legal unit in the system. It could not conclude treaties with other states or become member of international

organisations or claim any other rights available to the sovereign states under international law. At present times also a political unit lacking sovereignty has no legal standing among other states. Palmer and Perkins have rightly observed that sovereignty "gives the state unique and virtually unlimited authority in all domestic matters and in relation to other states." It implies that a sovereign state has a right to govern the territory under its control as it deems necessary and there is no external restriction on its authority, except the one which it might have accepted under some treaty. However, in the international context sovereignty would imply only right of self-government and promotion of nation's interests through independent foreign policy. It is noteworthy that for the promotion of their national interests the states have to make several compromises and adjustments with other nations which naturally restricts their absolute sovereignty. The concept of state sovereignty in international relations implies the equality of all nations, big or small, great powers or small powers. Hence, if we take a realistic view, we shall tend to agree with Clyde Eagleton that "Sovereignty cannot be an absolute term. It is just as foolish to say that sovereignty must be surrendered or eliminated as to say that it must be absolute and unrestrained." Despite all the limitations on sovereignty, it cannot be denied that "so long as the nation state system remains the basis of the prevailing pattern of international society, the substance of society will remain."