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## Elitist Perspective of Democracy

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Democracy is said to be the 'government of people, for the people, and by the people'. Truthfulness of such assertion largely depends upon the active participation of people in decision making process. Elitist theory of democracy contradicts the basic assumption of democracy that there can be, in any real sense, government by the people. The government in a democratic system is certainly of the people, it may even be for the people, but it can never be by the people because according to elitism, government is in fact by the ruling class.

Thus elitist perspective of democracy is essential to understand the democratic setup of any nation. It helps us to understand the distribution of power and decision – making authority in the state and society. Elite theory is deep-rooted in classical sociology, especially that of Weber Pareto, Mosca and Michels. The study of elites came to prominence during nineteenth and early twentieth century's with the writings of Vilfredo Pareto (1843-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941). With the formulations of the elitist perspective concerning the nature and structure of ruling classes, the ancient Aristotelian assumption of political classification no longer remained worldwide accepted notion. In this view an attempt has been made in this paper to explain important theories on ruling elites to understand the elitist perspective of democracy that there cannot be, in any real sense, government by the people which is the basic assumption of democracy.

There are two sub-types of elite perspective, the conservative and the radical. The conservative elite theory or classical elite theory was advocated by Pareto, Mosca and Robert Michels. The radical elite theory was propounded by C. Wright Mills and others. In this paper an attempt has been made to explain important theories on ruling elites.

The aristocratic version of elite theory is the classical elite theory which is based on two ideas:

- 1) Power lies in position of authority in key economic and political institutions.
- 2) The psychological difference that sets elites apart is that they have personal resources, for instance intelligence and skills, and a vested interest in the government; while the rest are incompetent and do not have the capabilities of governing themselves; the elites are resourceful and will strike to make the government work. For, in reality, the elites have the most to lose in a failed government.<sup>1</sup> So core of classical elitism is the notion of elite inevitability. Classical elitists used the inevitability of elite rule as a premise to counter argue with political liberalism and Marxism. They claimed that both democracy (as the government of the people or demos) and socialism (as a classless regime) were impossible outcomes because society is necessarily elite driven. In the elitist view, elites could only be substituted by another set of elites, meaning that majority is necessarily ruled by a minority.

The Italian Neo-Machiavellian, Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) is considered to be the pioneer in explaining the socio-political process through Elite behaviour. It is not wrong to attribute Pareto as the father of Elite

theory. To him, every society is ruled by a minority that possesses the qualities necessary for its coming to social and political power.

To Pareto elites are those people who possess in marked degree qualities of intelligence, character, capacity, of whatever kind. More precisely if we grade every individual regardless of any ethical judgment, according to their branch activity and occupation in the society, we find at each grade level there will be a certain amount of individuals, that consists of a class. In this class hierarchy, people who are in the class which is on the top of the other classes are called, "elite".<sup>2</sup>

Elite represents the higher stratum, the other, namely non elites are thought at the lower stratum. He further emphasizes and divides it into sub groups, because for him, there is no one elite stratum. There are various strata in it and all of them constitute the elite stratum. The main strata in elite stratum are (a)governing elite that consists of the individuals who directly or indirectly have a considerable role in government;(b)non-governing elite that consist of rest in the elite stratum;(c)political elite that effectively and particularly, exercise political power. He says that Elites and non –elite are not stable, they are subject to change, new elites rise and takes old elite's place. This change is called the law of circulation of elites by Pareto. According to him "elites" or aristocrats do not last, they live or take position in a certain time. "History", he says, "is a graveyard of aristocracies".<sup>3</sup>

The most noteworthy contribution, however, has been the concept of the "circulation of Elites" which he developed, expanded and propagated. The entire process of circulation of elites connotes that changes in elite composition occurs irregularly but incessantly. He captures this idea in a phrase which both resembles as well as modifies Karl Marx's famous dictum of history. To quote Pareto: "The history of man is the history of the continuous replacement of elite as one ascends, another declines".<sup>4</sup> The outbreak of war tends to extinguish a higher proportion of the elites than the hoi-pollai (i.e., the common people). Elite families also tend to disappear, and disintegrate since they have fewer children than the masses. Both the residues of 'combination' and 'preservation' are made use of by the elite. Elites must sometimes embark on innovative actions and sometimes on consolidating them. When they fail to click, they are replaced. Thus the circulation of elites takes place.

The circulation of elites or the shuffling of elites is almost accompanied by rising religious- humanitarian sentiments, in which the existing elite becomes softer, milder, more humane and less apt to defeat its own power. At that juncture, in case the component of innovators find over representation among the elite, it spells doom for the elite groupings. On the other hand, the rising elite is also subject to speech habits justifying its drive to power (derivations), and these are also molded by the same combination of rising religious sentiments.<sup>5</sup> Once the elite achieve success, it becomes not only more rigid but also more exclusive.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the wheel takes a full turn. Thus the new elite is now established and the process can start de novo.

Gaetano Mosca was the first to make a systematic distinction between "elite" and masses-though using other terms- and to attempt the construction of a new science of politics on this foundation. Mosca expressed his fundamental idea in these words: "Among the constant facts and tendencies that are to be found in all political organisms, one is so obvious that it is apparent to the most casual eye. In all societies- from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawning of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies-two classes of people appear-a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first, in appearance at least, with material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essentials to the vitality of the political organism."<sup>7</sup>

Mosca explains the rule of the minority over the majority by the fact that the former is organized "...the dominion of an organized minority, obeying a single impulse, over the unorganized majority is inevitable. The power of an minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority, who stands alone before the totality of organized minority. At the same time, the minority is organized for the very reason that it is minority"-and also by the fact the minority is usually composed of superior individual-"...members of a ruling minority regularly have some attribute, real or apparent, which is highly esteemed and very influential in the society in which they live."<sup>8</sup>

Mosca says that below the highest stratum in the ruling class there is always, even in autocratic systems, another that is much more numerous and comprises all the capacities for leadership in the country. Without such a class any sort of social organization would be impossible. The higher stratum would not in itself be sufficient for leading and directing the activities of the masses. Therefore the stability of any political organism depends on the level of morality, and intelligence of this second stratum. Any intellectual or moral deficiencies in this second stratum represent a graver danger to the political system.<sup>9</sup>

The members of the ruling class should be recruited almost entirely from the dominant, majority group in the society. If the societies has a number of minorities and if this rule is not followed due to weakness of dominant group, political system can meet serious political crises. The same thing occurs when there are considerable differences between in the culture, and in customs of the ruling class and subject classes.<sup>10</sup>Weakness of dominant group in society and isolation of lower classes from the ruling classes can lead to political upheaval in the country and as a result of this upheaval subject classes' representatives can have places in the ruling class. Because when isolation takes place, another ruling class emerges among the subject classes that often hostile to the old ruling class.<sup>11</sup>Furthermore, due to reciprocal isolation of classes, the character of upper classes change, they become weak in bold and aggressiveness and richer in "soft" remissive individuals. On the same track, when there is fragmentation in the society, new groups form and each one of them makes up of its own leaders and followers. Besides these revolutions are another source of replacement of ruling class.<sup>12</sup>

So in Mosca's theory, an elite does not simply rule by force and fraud, but represents in some sense, interests and purposes of important and influential groups in the society. The very intention of Mosca's The Ruling Class was to refute Rousseauistic myth of the popular sovereignty. The Government in a democracy was certainly of the people, it might even be for the people, but it was never by the people but only by the ruling Class. Mosca not only showed that elite domination was inevitable even in modern democratic societies, but he also showed that the elite would be composed of the middle class but in his later work he concluded that majority have certain control over government policy through its representatives.

The central assumption underlying this intellectual discourse is that in any society there is a distinction between those who rule and those who do not. It encompasses all aspects of society, not just in the political sphere which makes for ready analysis and investigation. The theory of elites makes no pretense to being a theory of all historical change, but rather a means or method to enhance historical understanding regarding social, economic, and political change. It has, by narrowing the historical perspective under inquiry, facilitated the understanding of social change in the complex interdependent fashion that it entails in the analysis of any society.

C.Wright Mills in his Power Elite Theory asserts that elite are simply those who have the most of what there is to have like money, power and prestige-as well as all the ways of life to which these lead.. Mills in his study of American Society finds that in American Society, major national power resides in the economic, political, and military domains. All the religious, educational and family institutions are subordinated to these three. So according to him power in modern society is institutionalized.

The elite who occupy the command posts may be seen as the possessors of power and wealth and celebrity; they may be seen as members of the upper stratum of a capitalist society. They may also be defined in terms of psychological and moral criteria, as certain kinds of selected individuals. So in Mills term. "The elite, are people of superior character and energy"<sup>13</sup>

Between the masses and the elite Mills saw a middle level of power. Composed of local opinion leaders and special interest groups, they neither represent the masses nor have any real effect on the elite. Mill saw the American Congress and American political parties as a reflection of this middle- level of power.

The positions of the power elite enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences. Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal positions: their failure to act, their failure to make decisions, is itself an act that is often of greater consequences than the decisions they do make. For they are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of the state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. So the elite is the product of, in Mills' term 'the institutional landscape' of the society.

A German Sociologist Robert Michels has propounded the theory of 'iron law of oligarchy'. Iron law of oligarchy postulates that any complex organization self generates its own elite, an oligarchy that has disproportional influence on the decisions made in the organization. This theory stands in stark opposition to pluralism and suggests that participatory democracy is a utopian ideal and that democracy is always limited to very narrow strata of existing oligarchy. It also stands in opposition to state autonomy theory.<sup>15</sup> According to Michels elite is an organized minority which always outmaneuver and outsmart the rank and file of the particular organizations (unorganized majority). Robert Michel's observations were based on the fact that the socialist parties of Europe, despite their democratic ideology and provisions for mass participation, were completely and irrevocably dominated by their leaders, just as the traditional conservative parties. Generalizing this phenomenon, he stated that all forms of organizations, regardless of how democratic or autocratic they may be at the start, will eventually and evolve into oligarchies.<sup>16</sup> The law of oligarchy which he formulated on the basis of the 'facts of experience' was 'inevitable' and 'an essential characteristic of all human aggregate' and 'historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measure that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy'.<sup>17</sup>

After going through the elitist perspective on democracy it can be concluded that elite rule in every society is inevitable. Each and every society is divided into two groups: the elite and the masses where the elites govern over the masses. The political elites, particularly the governing elite, enjoy widespread influence and power. They occupy key positions and control the decision making mechanism. The study also reveals that elite structure of the society is subject to change, a, there is circulation of elite. In a democratic setup, the political elites are the representatives of the people and it is through the process of election that they establish the legitimacy of their authority and popularity in society

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