

Discourse on Elite

S. N. Chaudhary

Recent years have seen a great amount of empirical research on elites aiming to property the nature of either particular specialised elites or the degree of integration displayed by a national elite. Such research seeks to replace the assertions of elite theorists by some hard data to test, where possible, hypotheses suggested by the grand theories. The methodologies adopted in these investigations can, with few exceptions, be brought under four broad headings i.e. the study of institutional positions, the examination of the social back ground and recruitment patterns of elites, the reputational elite approach and the decision making / event analysis / pluralist approach. However, the present paper restrict itself to the analysis of the latter two approaches. An examination of these two approaches in particular is essential primarily because even in the democratic societies like ours the organizations, both formal and informal, maintains hierarchy. It is the elites who have greater say in the decision making process than the followers. Both the power holders and the dependents may have categorisation on the basis of their dominance but in this article we restrict our analysis to the elites of the dominant sections.

Reputational Approach

Reputational is one of the pre-conditions to get and retain the sources of dominance. It can be required either by holding formal and informal positions of power and authority. Since the source of reputation as well as reputation itself are culture specific phenomena, therefore, over the time there is fluctuation in degree and magnitude of the reputation holders. Perhaps Hunter (1953) was the first man who perceived reputation as precondition for elite formation at the community level. In order to identify community level elites and their functioning he followed different stages. In the first stage Hunter intend preliminary list of leaders in regional city which were constituted by civic organisations, the chamber of commerce, the league of women voters and by newspaper editors and other civic leaders. These lists named 175 leaders. The list were partly derived from formal positions held in politics, business of a fairly large size and civic organizations. They were also partly based on reputation of leadership in the eyes of those who nominated them.

In the next stage a panel of four experts or judges were selected who were apparently representative of religious, business and professional people. The panel balanced young and old, male and female, Negro and white.

S. N. Chaudhary is Reader in Sociology, Barkatullah University, Bhopal -462024 (INDIA)

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In the third stage the panel was asked to select the top leaders from each of the lists. The judges reduced the leaders from each of the lists. The judges reduced the leaders from 175 to 40. There was a fair degree of agreement amongst the judges as to the topmost men on each list. By this stage the attribution of power rests on the reputation of the leaders in the eyes of the judges.

In the next stage hunter interviewed 27 of the 40 leaders, who were asked to name the top 10 leaders amongst the 40. Again there was a large measure of agreement. A large supplementary questions elicited answers as to which leaders could push a decision through, and one was the biggest man in town. In order to discover the degree of cohesiveness amongst the leaders, each was asked how well he knows other leaders, whether he was related to them, how frequently he attended committee's meetings with them and so on.

These questions did uncover evidence which might support Mosca's argument that the minority as such is always better organised than the majority. The top leaders indicated that most of them knew one another well and that most had worked together on committees. Also, as inner group of twelve leaders nominated one another as friends, acquaintances and fellow committee members more frequently than the other leaders. There was a sharp drop in the frequency of interaction among the leaders when the group of professional and civil workers immediately below the leadership was considered. This was taken to indicate real gulf between the leadership stratum and the professional administrators. On this basis Hunter concluded that a clearly defined group of decision makers dominated the public life of "Regional City". The leaders were not undivided but nevertheless it was their backing that was decisive to any major project.

At least half of Hunter's leaders were businessmen. Plural and interlocking directorships to mean that there was a cohesive economic institution in Regional city whose members exerted the major influence in the power relationships in the community. These business leaders were discovered to be active in a number of policy decisions which Hunter examined, including the plan of Development, Traffic control and the introduction of Sales Tax. The topmost leaders formulated big policy on such questions, leaving the task of putting the policy through to, in the main, lesser figure who were either professionals, such as lawyers, or minor businessmen. Hunter said that top leaders in the committee are the representatives of the policy making businessmen.

Hunter's conclusion was that Regional city is ruled by what is called three "Cs" i.e., a cohesive, conscious, and conspiratorial elite of businessmen. The elite decides the major policies which the city will subsequently follow even though its members do not necessarily intervene overtly in the city's affairs. The elite has, according to Hunter, contacts in most departments of Regional city's public life. The politicians of the legislature are themselves frequently businessmen who are controlled by or acknowledge the supremacy of the economic elite. In short, the economic institution dominates, and as Hunter represents, it deposes specialists within it to oversee all the sectors of policy making from the relation between the city policy and the sales tax (Hunter, 1953).

A significant number of scholars have followed Hunter's approach in their studies. Commenting on nature and character of this approach Ricci, Abu-Laban, and Wolfinger categorically premised the occurrence of elites on an organizational theory. It was much more based on a generalised notion that the existence of a stable social order is in some manner attributable to the existence of permanent elite. Possibly, this is implicitly derived from the Hobbesian hypothesis that centralised power is the key to the orderliness of the social world. Hence, they take it as given that someone

governors. It is their task to find out who, when and how (Ricci; 1976, Abu-Laban; 1965, and Wolfinger, 1966) govern.

Identifying those who have power is made complex by the fact that, given that there is high circulation of those observed to make important decisions. For example, with the exception of the Mayor in the five years 1953 to 1958 the decision making elite of New Haven changed completely (see Dalh 1961a p.291 for detailed information). It is implicitly the case that the monolithic elite responsible for social order and stability are not the ones who are immediately visible as decision makers. The latter tend to be those who wield a highly limited governmental institutional power (Blackship 1964, p.208). Those who have real power tend to work behind the scenes. They exert power over others through subtle channels of influence based upon anticipated reactions. When decisions are made by those observed to decide things, who do not have real power, they do so based not on criteria of personal or public interests, but upon their assessment of the anticipated reactions of those with great power resources at their disposal (Ehrlich 1961 p.92). Consequently, the true power elites need not have is well exemplified by a transcript of an interview made in Bigtown by Pellegrin and Coats. "Only a man who is naive would accept invitations to participate in important community affairs without the blessing of Mr. 'A', the top executive in our company. For a man to ignore the usual procedures..... he'd... have to be a complete ass". The company executive does not have to initiate decisions because everyone knows what his / her interests are : interests are : interest which are ultimately reducible to class stratification and are known locally (Abu-Laban 1965 p. 36-39).

Thus, the supports of reputational approach follow the following five steps to identify community leaders. These are; (i) A list is made of those who are considered "likely to know", based on position, what is "going on" in the community. (ii) These individuals are then asked to compile a list of those with power in the community. (iii) the latter are then interviewed in order to obtain information on their level of 'cohesiveness' and who among them has most power. (iv) Finally a certain number are selected as key leaders. The rationale for the reputational approach is that members know their own communities more thoroughly and intimately than any outsider could hope to, and hence are the most trustworthy sources of knowledge concerning those communities. A number of community is perfectly capable of recognizing processors of power, and will accordingly build up, over a long period of time, a reasonably accurate maps an even better indicator which, whatever its deficiencies, may be claimed to be as reliable as any available.

There are, however, strong arguments against this rationale and its trust in second hand reporting. For all that members ought to know their own community well, even the most rudimentary surveys suggest that knowledge of it is superficial, incomplete and variable. Reputationalists themselves acknowledge that different individuals in the same community commonly provide massively divergent account of the distribution of power within it. So a question mark exists against the reputational approach, even if one refrains from asking how everyday actors can be expected to identify power when professional social scientists appear themselves to have no idea of what it looks like. As a result of this several criticisms are levelled against this approach. The two important criticism are related to scope of the decision. Hunter studied the status of the judges who provide the list of reputed leaders. Dahl and his followers have argued that, unlike their own method, Hunter's method fails to distinguish the areas over which several community leaders wield power. The original questions put to the judges asked them to nominate the persons who were

the top leaders or decision makers of the community. The judges were not asked to say over what spheres of activity each nominee exercised power nor what limits there might be to his influence, nor whether he might be powerful in some areas and not in others. Yet statements attributing power to a person may carry little meaning if the area of his power is not specified. Hunter did go on to study particular processes of decision making and describe the elite's involvement in these. It has been less commonly noted in these cases, however, Hunter investigated those issues which the members of the business elite had themselves cited as ones they had been interested in. Such a procedure is circular since it merely measures the degree of involvement of the elite in matters which it has already asserted it was involved in. These were very clearly issues which affected business interests. On non-economic issues the leaders are shown to be divided and unwilling or unable to offer a lead. It is thus a possibility that outside matters affecting business another set of leaders may be more influential.

The reputational method is heavily dependent on the selection of judges at the outset, and it has been a constant criticism that some alternative sample of judge might have set the inquiry on a totally different the nominations of judges who are active in the community and those who participate very little. The politically active judges are more likely than the inactive to nominate men from 'behind the scene's' rather than those in leading public positions. Contrary to this Schultz and Blumberg and Belknap and Smuckler found that varying the nominating panel made little difference to the results (R. O. Schultz and L. U. Blumberg 1957, pp. 290-6). This is not to say that either way of designating leaders is necessarily wrong. It does, however, point to the substantive differences which can arise as a result of the adoption of different research procedures.

Hunter's method of continually narrowing down the number of leaders at each stage interviewing may also appear self-confirming. He began with a provisional list of nominees. He then asked fourteen judges to select the most influential from the original list of 175 leaders. Hunter proceeded to a close examination of the top forty in the judges and reduced the list, although there seems, as Polsby (1961) points out, no clear account as to how the figure forty was arrived at. At the interviewing stage only twenty seven of these forty were questioned, and the subsequent estimates made by the leadership group of the comparative influence of each leader is based on these twenty seven interviews. It is again not clear why only twenty seven were interviewed and then named sixty four additional persons as being as influential as the forty nominees, these sixty four were not examined in any greater detail. Wolfinger raised one of the most pertinent criticisms against this approach. To him Hunter constituted a valid analytic device for assessing as to who had a reputation for holding power but not those who actually had it (Wolfinger). According to Dahl and Polsby too Hunter failed to distinguish between actual and potential power (Dahl, op. cit. Polsby, op. cit.). But Haugaard is of the opinion that the accusation leveled by the pluralists against the Reputational elite theorists, that they failed to distinguish between actual and potential power is in many respects exaggerated (Haugaard, 1992). It has a certain validity as a critique of the methodology used by F. Hunter in *community Power Structure* (1953) but less so with regard to the work of D' Antonio and his followers from the early sixties onwards (for details of the debate surrounding this issue see Polsby, 1960, Wolfinger 1960; and D' Antonio and Ehrlich; 1962).

2. The Decision Making Approach

In order to overcome these Shortcomings of reputational approach the protagonists of decision making continually emphasized the importance of using research methodologies which do not act as self-fulfilling prophecies. The basic assumption of this approach is that those who actually participate in the decision making process are the elites because they have shown their influence in real life situations. Since this approach identifies the elites or the decision makers through issues and events in which they participated, hence, this is also known as “Event Analysis” approach. Dahl is the main champion of this approach who has subsequently been followed by Polsby and Wolfinger. From the very beginning they are primarily focusing on manifestly observable, and hence verifiable phenomena. Dahl said that :

“I do not see how anyone can suppose that he has established the dominance of a specific group in a community or a nation without basing his analysis on the careful examination of a series of concrete decisions” (1958, P.466).

This means that a social scientist must study those who actually participate in community decision making. Also, participation should be defined in terms of success in initiating a policy or vetoing a proposed policy.

According to Dahl (op.cit.) conflict between A and B, as revealed in concrete decision making, is a manifestation of differences of performance between the two actors. A system where there is complete consensus is one in which there is no power conflict or there is no enforced consensus. However, Dahl claims that this level of enforced consensus can be methodologically bracketed when studying power distribution within a democratic system. Polsby said that this does not apply to minor decisions where the inherent cost of engaging in power conflict will make participation not worthwhile. However, he further added that in major issue areas differences in preferences will always manifest themselves in the breaking of consensus through conflict. Hence, any attempt at enforcing consensus, through the exercise of power by A over B, can be studied, as stated by Dahl “by an examination of a series of concrete cases where key decisions are made : decisions on taxation and expenditures, subsidies, Welfare programmes, military policy and so on” (Dahl, 1985, p.469). In other words, as stated by Bachrach and Baratz, the pluralist researcher will tend to identify power with its exercises as manifest through visible conflict in decision making (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, p.943). Like reputational approach, event approach is also based on different stages. These stages are :

- (i) Selection of “Key” in stead of “routine” political decision.
- (ii) Identification of people who took who took an active part in the decision making process.
- (iii) Obtaining a full account of their actual behavior, and;
- (iv) Determination and analysis of the specific outcome of the conflict.

According to Dahl an individual may be powerful in one area but not in another. Therefore, to Wolfinger, general power rankings are misleading. For example, Stemming from his position as University professor, Dahl has power over his students with respect to the issue of what they study. Due to their legal status, the Police Department has power over the parking habits of students at Yale University. Neither Dahl nor the Police Department have power in both areas. Therefore, if an actor wished to have power in both the areas there appears to be no obvious way of achieving this goal. According to Bachrach and Baratz the power resources of University professor and

policeman are inherently non-mutually cumulative (Bachrach and Baratz 1963 p.635). This confirms the statement that the scope of an individual's power can be, and is often, issue specific. Hence, it is meaningless and impossible to assess the power of a given actor without studying the exercise of power in specific different issue areas. In other words, the extent of power can be measured only in an specific area. For, the purposes of their study of New Haven, Dahl and his associates had chosen the issue areas of :

- (a) the making of party nominations, which determines who will hold public office;
- (b) the new Haven Redevelopment Programme, which was the largest per capita in U.S.
- (c) public education, which was the most expensive item on the city's budget. After investigating the patterns of influence in these three issue areas, Dahl concluded that no particular individual exerts a significant amount of direct influence in more than one of the three issues areas studied (Dahl 1961a p.181).

Because power is inherently linked to its exercise, the event analysts great emphasis distinguishing potential from actual power . The most important differentiation between actual and potential power is based upon the distinction of power from power resources. There are a number of reasons why power resources are not synonymous with actual power. The first is that, since there is usually a cost associated with converting potential into actual power, there must be a will in order to convert it (Clark 1967a). A good example of this point is given by Land in his examination of middle town. The X family ran middletown through their possession of massive wealth. However, they were not the only wealthy family in the town. There was the Y family who were clannish and absorbed with family affairs, hence demonstrating the ability of great wealth to live in Middletown with a large degree of isolation from the city's central interests. In other words both X and Y family had wealth as a potential power resource but the former, unlike the latter, had the will to use it. In short, as started by Dahl "Individual's with the same amounts of resources in different ways. One wealthy man may collect paintings; another politicians" (Dahl 1961a p. 270). Whether intentions and resources are by themselves sufficient for the realisation of power ? Certainly not. Besides possession of resources one must have requisites level of skill in order to organise and channelise resources appropriately. In this context skill means (a) an ability to perceive which resources are appropriate for power of given scope, (b) political ability and (c) organizational acumen. The importance of skill, the diversity of power resources like money and credit, control over jobs, control over the information of others, knowledge and expertise, popularity, esteem and charisma, legality, constitutionality, officiality and legitimacy, ethnic solidarity, the right to vote, time and personal (human) energy, and the necessity for motivation means that the comparative power of actors is inherently dependent upon a whole variety of contingent factors. Hence, in order to hypothesise that X has more power than Y it is necessary to assess whether or not X and Y have similar resources, level of motivation, organizational ability and an identical interest in the same issue area (Dahl 1961a p.272).

In short, according to the decision making model the elites are those who actually shape the decisions. This approach identifies overt power rather than the power potential and thus it provides a realistic viewpoint of power structure. But this does not mean that this theory is free from criticisms.

According to Bachrach and Baratz (1962 : 948) Dahl and his associates confuse their criteria for the investigation of the distribution of power with the essence of the phenomenon of power itself (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962 : 948). While it is without doubt correct from the point of view of empirical investigation-- that the examination of key decision makers and making leads to the collection of highly scientifically verifiable evidence, this does not imply that the exercise of power is thus confined or restricted in form and nature. In particular, decision making approach fails to take account of the fact that : (a) power may be, and often is, exercised by confining the scope of decision makings to relatively safe issues and (b) the model provides no objective criteria for distinguishing between “important” and “unimportant” issues arising in the political arena.

With respect to point (a) power is also exercised when devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to “A”. In effect, this implies that A can exercise power over B by (and hence point b) defining what is to count as an important issue about which decisions should be made.

Also, there is no scope for understanding the phenomenon of non-decision making process and its consequences in the decision making model. But, according to Bachrach and Baratz (1970) non-decision is also another face of power. Infact it is the process through which the grievances or demands of B are kept outside the system. Bachrach and Baratz and Crenson list a number of ways in which this is done. The principal ones are as follows : (1) most direct and visible is the terrorization of B into acquiescence. (2) just as overt would be threats based upon potential deprivation, (3) a more indirect form is the invoking of procedural norms and rules to make a demand illegitimate. Thus, the discussion of an issue can be branded immoral, unpatriotic or in violation of an established rule or procedure. (4) Most indirect form of non-decision making involves reshaping or strengthening the mobilization of bias in order to block challenges to the prevailing allocation of values. As an illustration, the college administration may establish additional rules and procedures for processing student’s demands for change. Another tactic is to reinforce existing barriers, or construct new ones, against challengers efforts to widen the scope of conflict. For example, the demands of rent-strikers can be blunted or dulled by insisting that tenant -- landlord relations are a purely private matter. (5) The latter can be legitimized by an emphasis on the democratic quality of given institutional procedures. Hence, giving the illusion of a voice to those whose demands are organised out of the decision making procedure.

Integration of Reputational and Decision Making Approach

After the publication of Hunter’s and Dahl’s work a number of works have appeared which have been deeply influenced by the merits and limitations of these two schools of thought. Few important scholars who have attempted to intergrate he merits of Hunter’s and Dahl’s work in their studies are Robert Agger and Robert Presthus in their named *The Rulers and the Ruled* and *Men at the Top* respectively. While former is a comparative study of two communities in the Western and two in the Southern USA, the latter is a study of two small communities in New York State.

The main objective of these two studies were to examine the images that citizens had of the power structure which were likely to affect the nature and extent of their political participation. Agger discovered potential leaders by asking two independent panels, drawn from leaders of voluntary

organizations and appointed officials in local government, to nominate the men of greatest influence in the community, the second panel was requested to reduce the nominees to around twentyfive. The decisions selected for study were in part chosen by the panels and in part by the authors. The nominees were interviewed to discover the nature of their participation, their attitude to the various decisions reached, and their views of the roles of other participants, in particular whether leadership cliques were formed. Finally, Agger reconstructed the history of each decision to test whether the potential leaders had actually participated, especially at the crucial stage at which the project is accepted or rejected. This decision making approach also established whether the leaders specialised in issue areas, as Dahl had suggested or were "generalists" such as Hunter had discovered in 'Regional City'.

A major point in Aggar's conclusion is that the communities vary considerably in their power structures, some being pluralist and other elitist in tendency. Whether or not the reputational and decision making approaches in isolation led inevitably it would seem that, used in combination, they constituted a neutral methodology capable of a variety of results.

Presthus came to the same conclusion when he applied both the techniques in Men at the Top. Here the two methods were explicitly used as checks upon one another. He admits an original preference for the decisional approach as more "objective" but rapidly discovered that the reputational method led in directions which the case study of decisions could not cover. The decisional approach overemphasized the importance of those in formal position of power, in particular the political leaders. In one of the communities studied a man who participated in four out of five different decisions was, nevertheless, not nominated as an influential either by the sample of citizens interviewed or by the other influentials. The disparity in the conclusions of the two methods pointed to the fact that this person played only a ministerial role in implementing the various decision but was not an initiator of projects. Similarly a leader might appear to be a major participant in a range of decisions simply because his post formally required his imprimatur on policy conclusions already arrived at by others.

Presthus opined that there was a considerable disparity between those identified by the reputational and decisional methods. In part this was due to the recognised failings of the reputational method. It tended to identify as actually powerful those whose resources gave them a high potential for power. Respondents also nominated as influential those they felt should be influential, especially those in their own party and faction and ; minimised the role of opponents. For these reasons Presthus was unable to command the reputational method for use in isolation.

One of the aims of Presthus's study was to construct a elitist -- pluralist continuum on which to place communities and provide a means of ready comparison between them. To achieve this there was not only need to examine the overlapping decision - making amongst the leaders but it also needed research into the degree of individual citizen participation in major decisions, the extent to which citizens joined voluntary organization and how far these organizations were themselves involved in decision making. Presthus found that both his communities were more elitist than New Haven as portrayed by Dahl, but that Edgewood was less elitist than Riverview. In the case of former decision making was shared between the economic elite dominant. In Riverview, two politicians held the diversity of power structures and challenges any implication by either Hunter or Dahl that elitism or pluralism is ubiquitous.

Citizen participation, whether direct or indirect was low in both the communities. The study confirmed the findings of a good deal of other research that individual rank and file participation

in decision making is minimal. Only 10% of the Riverview population and 26% of those in Edgewood took any part in any decision, these figures moreover being inflated by the numbers who merely voted in referenda. The bulk of the population in both communities did not belong to any voluntary organization and though 52% of Edgewood and 25% of Riverview organizations participated in decisions they were very seldom involved in more than one issue area. The vast majority of citizens are therefore non-participants, and the organizations do not in fact perform the linking function which pluralists claim they perform or ought to perform.

In short neither the reputational approach of Hunter nor the issue participation thesis of Dahl and his followers are complete in itself. In isolation it provides incomplete and half-picture. Hence, there is need to identify elites by integrating both these models. Also while identifying the elites there is need to identify those who play the game from behind the curtain. Some of them are neither reputed nor occupy any formal position in the power structure but they also command significant amount of influence. Hence, while identifying the elites there is need to classify the category in terms of its role, origin and importance as well as to employ variety of techniques in an integrated fashion.

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