Chapter : Concept of State

A. UNDERSTANDING THE STATE

Introduction:

The State is the central political and legal organisation through which society is governed. It exercises public authority over people within a defined territory, makes and enforces laws, maintains order, protects rights and performs functions necessary for collective life.

Why Study It?

The concept explains who exercises authority, over whom, within which territory and on what basis that authority is independent. It also clarifies the relationship between government, people, rights and obligations.

Four Essential Elements

ELEMENT	MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE
People	A permanent population forming a political community; a State cannot exist without people.
Territory	A definite geographical area within which the State exercises territorial jurisdiction.
Sovereignty	Supreme authority internally and independence from external control.
Government	Organised agency through which the will and authority of the State are expressed and implemented.

CONCEPTUAL FLOW

PEOPLE + TERRITORY + SOVEREIGNTY + GOVERNMENT → STATE

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What Is a State?

DEFINITION

A State is a politically organised community permanently occupying a definite territory, possessing an organised government and exercising sovereign authority independent of external control.

Illustration:

India as a State

India has a permanent population, defined territory, constitutional institutions of government and sovereignty in internal and external decision-making. The State continues even when a government changes.

B. STATE, COUNTRY AND NATION

These terms overlap in everyday language but differ in political science.

TERM	MEANING	KEY POINT / EXAMPLE
State	Political and legal entity	People, territory, sovereignty and government; e.g., India.
Country	Primarily a geographical area inhabited by people	Not always equivalent to a fully sovereign State; questions of recognition and statehood can be complex.
Nation	Community sharing a sense of common identity	May be linked by history, culture, language or political aspirations; e.g., Kurdish people.

Nation-State

A sovereign State whose political boundaries broadly coincide with a community sharing a common national identity. Many States, however, contain multiple linguistic, cultural or national communities.

Illustration:

The Kurdish people are commonly described as a nation without an independent sovereign State. India is a sovereign State with diverse communities united through a common constitutional framework.

KEY IDEA: A State is a territorial political-legal organisation; a nation is primarily an identity-based community. Neither requires cultural homogeneity.

C. GOVERNMENT: ORGANS AND RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE

Government is one essential element of the State. It is the agency through which State authority is exercised; in a constitutional democracy, it operates within constitutional limits.

ORGAN	PRIMARY FUNCTION	INDIAN ILLUSTRATION
Legislature	Makes laws and holds the executive accountable	Parliament and State Legislatures
Executive	Implements laws and administers public policies	President, Prime Minister, Council of Ministers and corresponding State institutions
Judiciary	Interprets laws, adjudicates disputes and protects rights through remedies	Supreme Court, High Courts and subordinate courts

STATE → GOVERNMENT → LEGISLATURE (LAW-MAKING) | EXECUTIVE (IMPLEMENTATION) | JUDICIARY (ADJUDICATION)

Relationship Between State, Government and People

RELATIONSHIP	ROLE
State / Government towards people	Maintains order, provides public services, protects rights and acts within the Constitution.
People towards the State	Participate in democratic processes, obey valid laws and fulfil civic and constitutional obligations.

Illustration:

Parliament enacts a law, the executive implements it and courts may provide a remedy when a person's rights are affected. Citizens elect representatives and hold them accountable.

KEY IDEA: The State acts through government, but the State and a particular government are not identical.

D. THE STATE IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution establishes the framework of the Indian State: it describes India as a Union of States, provides for citizenship, creates government institutions, distributes powers and protects rights.

PROVISION	CONNECTION WITH THE CONCEPT OF STATE
Preamble	India is a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic; constitutional goals include justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.
Article 1	India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.

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PROVISION	CONNECTION WITH THE CONCEPT OF STATE
Articles 5–11	Citizenship at commencement and Parliament's power to regulate citizenship by law.
Article 12	Defines "the State" for Part III: Union and State governments/legislatures and specified local or other authorities.
Article 36	For Part IV, "the State" has the same meaning as in Part III unless context otherwise requires.
Article 51A	Fundamental Duties of citizens.

Crucial Distinction: Political State vs Article 12 "State"

Political science uses State for the entity constituted by people, territory, sovereignty and government. Article 12 uses "the State" for the specific constitutional purpose of identifying authorities subject to Fundamental Rights obligations under Part III. These meanings are related but not identical.

Illustration:

If a public authority violates a Fundamental Right, whether it falls within Article 12 may be relevant to the remedy available.

E. KEY TAKEAWAYS — QUICK REVISION

DIMENSION	REMEMBER
State	Continuing political and legal organisation over people in a definite territory.
Four elements	People + Territory + Sovereignty + Government.
Sovereignty	Supreme internal authority and external independence.
Government	Organised agency through which the State acts; governments may change.
Three organs	Legislature makes laws; executive implements; judiciary interprets and adjudicates.
State vs Nation	Political-legal entity versus community of common identity.
State vs Country	Political-legal entity versus primarily geographical description.
Nation-state	State and common national identity broadly coincide.
Constitutional links	Preamble; Articles 1, 5–11, 12, 36 and 51A.
Article 12	Specific meaning of "the State" for Part III, distinct from the political-science definition.

THREE-STEP CONCEPTUAL REVISION

1. PEOPLE + TERRITORY + SOVEREIGNTY + GOVERNMENT → STATE
2. STATE → GOVERNMENT → LEGISLATURE + EXECUTIVE + JUDICIARY
3. PEOPLE ↔ STATE: RIGHTS, PROTECTION, PARTICIPATION AND OBLIGATIONS

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F. UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE

Question 1

Which one of the following best defines the term ‘State’?

(a) A community of persons permanently occupying a definite territory independent of external control and possessing an organized government.
(b) A politically organized people of a definite territory and possessing an authority to govern them, maintain law and order, protect their natural rights and safeguard their means of sustenance.
(c) A number of persons who have been living in a definite territory for a very long time with their own culture, tradition and government.
(d) A society permanently living in a definite territory with a central authority, an executive responsible to the central authority and an independent judiciary.

Exam-Oriented Reminders

- Do not confuse the permanent State with a changing government.
- A nation can exist without an independent sovereign State.
- The term “State” in Article 12 is context-specific, not a replacement for the four-element definition.
- Distinguish the Union of States under Article 1 from the sovereign Indian State.

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