**NATURE AND SCOPE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

# Definition of Political Science

Political is the adjective of "Politics" which is derived from the Greek word polis meaning the state. Thus, the word "Political" is commonly understood to mean anything that is related to the state. Political Science would then be defined as the science of the state encompassing the government and organisation and theory and practice of the state. Political Science is the scientific designation of the subject of our study, and this name has been accepted by the political scientists drawn from various countries who assembled in a meeting under the auspices of the UNESCO. It covers the whole range of knowledge regarding the political governance of man. According to Paul Janet, Political Science is that part of social science which treats the foundations of the state and the principles of government have their roots in the past and their branches swing towards the future. It is a systematic study which goes deep into the political problems of yesterday for the benefit of today and utilises the wisdom gained there from for the aspirations of better tomorrow.

# Nature of Political Science

Although the central theme of Political Science is the state, excessive attention to it tends to make political analysis static, formalistic and institutional. Also important and relevant areas of study would be left out of the scope of political science, if attention is focused only on the state. For instance, one could make a study of the politics of primitive societies which are yet to evolve the state system. Even within the modern states, diverse social processed, e.g. trade unionism may make significant impact on public policies and actions. The behavior of individuals and group which are not as formal as the state organisation may determine the mode of operation of the state itself. A scientific study of politics can hardly overlook these forced and processes that have an important bearing on the state and its formal apparatuses. Lasswell and Kaplan have defined political science as "the study of shaping and sharing of power." The change of emphasis from state to power has broadened the area of political inquiry and shifted the focus of attention from mere structures and institutions to actions and processes. Lasswel in his book "Politics : who gets, what, when and how:, writes-

"The study of politics is the study of influence and the influential. The science of political states to conditions; the philosophy of politics justifies preferences".

Another definition is given by David Eastan which defines the nature Political Science. According to him, Political Science is concerned with the authoritative allocation of values for a society. It may however be added that resolution of conflicts and allocation of values among competing groups are not the only functions of government. Many of its functions at a point of time in history are undertaken traditionally. Thus, rail, roads, postal services etc. are operated as part of government's long established responsibilities. Even when new services and facilities such as road building, educational and medical benefits etc are provided, these may or may not be the result of conflict resolution.

The definition of political science would thus depend on the meaning attached to the term political. The expression 'political' has been commonly used in relation to the institutions of government. This has been the traditional meaning of the term. A second meaning of the term attaches significance to a distinctive set of processes or relationships irrespective of their manifestation in the governmental or nongovernmental context. These processes or relationships have been called power, conflict or the authoritative allocation of values. Political Science today is concerned with both the formal institutions of government and the processes or relationship in society that shed light on the shaping and uses of authoritative public power.

# Scope of Political Science

The scope of political science is very vast. It includes theories of state origin, sovereignty law, liberty, rights, forms and organs of government, representation, state functions, political parties, presence groups, public opinion, ideologies such as communism, socialism etc. and intentional relations and institutions.

Some of the subjects within it are handed down from past

speculations about the state and political institution, and in spite of the growth of the discipline these have not been excluded from it. In this category could be put many of the older theories of state origin. Secondly, there are a numbers of 'theories' on state functions and limits of state control which are in the nature of philosophising by particular individuals and groups. The ideological discussion and consideration on rights and liberty can be included in this category. Lastly, there are empirically oriented discussion on political institutions and organisations such as those on forms and organs of government, modes representation, international institutions and so on.

# Political Science : Is it a Science

The phrase "Political Science" owes its origins to Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. It was used by Vico and Hume, and the famous works of Sir Frederick Pollock (Introduction to the History of Science of Politics) and Sir John Seelay (Introduction to Political Science) accepted it unhesitatingly. Modern behaviorists seem to be convinced about the 'Science' component of 'politics'.

Still Politics is alleged by some critics to be an unwanted intruder in the domain of science. They have pointed out that politics has miserably failed to act up to the standard of science. G. Mosco says, A science is the product of a system of observations made on a given order of phenomena, with special care, appropriate methods, and so co-ordinated as to raise them to the level of an indisputable truth not apprehensible by ordinary, superficial observation ....... we do not think that political science in its present condition has as yet genuinely entered upon the scientific stage."

In spite of the steady development of the natural sciences in the last two centuries, it remains a last that systematic study of political phenomena has lagged far behind. Comte has ruled out the possibility- whether politics can be elevated to the rank of science- because:

1. there is no consensus of opinion among experts as to its methods, principles and conclusions.
2. it lacks continuity of development.
3. it lacks the elements which constitute a basis of prevision.

Before we consider these obstacles, it will be pertinent to

understand the salient characteristics of science. Systematisation of facts is undoubtedly a characteristic of science. It is generality and verifiability. The purpose of science is to formulate general propositions which explain the behaviors of objects studied and help to make predictions about their future mode of operations it must also be verifiable.

So far as the subject matter of political science is concerned,

there are great difficulties in studying them scientifically, and theory in the scientific sense, it is not always possible to construct.

1. Unlike the natural science, political science has failed, by and large, to evolve a generally acceptable vocabulary of concepts. In most cases, the political scientists are expressing their thoughts with the help of words which have different meanings to different writers.
2. The complexity of political phenomenon stand in the way of scientific explanation for instance, when a political scientist tries to explain the attitude of voters in a constituency he has to select from an infinity number of factors. The voting attitude might be determined by social relations, economic conditions. Personal factors and so on. It may not to easy to select the most significant factors that would explain the situation.
3. General statement about political phenomenon are difficult to establish because of the problem of their verifiability.
4. The uniqueness of political event is often advanced as a major argument against scientific politics. When we try of make a general statement about political facts, we are implicitly comparing them. But such comparison may not yield a generalized proposition, for the events compared might have happened at different times and places. Even if time and place factors were the same, the total environment within which the facts were located, might differ. Thus, each political happening is supposed to be unique and it is futile to establish general theories about political facts.
5. An important obstacle in the development of scientific politics is introduced by the human factor involved in the study of politics. It is always possible that the statement of political scientist will be coloured by his personal prejudices and predictions.
6. Lastly, since general political statements tend to be self-fulfilling or self defeating, these cannot gain the constaning of scientific theories. Once a generalization is made and published, the individuals about whom the generalization has been made may well change their behaviour and thus defeat the generalization.

It may thus be concluded that the 'science' element can

never be achieved. This would of course, reflect an extremely pessimistic attitude. Human behaviour is not altogether whimsical and chaotic. There are substantial uniformities in human actions and motivation which are quite helpful in formulating general proposition about political facts. Hence the possibility of constructing general theories at least in certain areas of political science cannot be altogether ruled out. To the extent imperfections in concepts and methods stand in the way of development of scientific knowledge, the political scientists have to be more, careful and exact in their efforts. Political science can grow by formulating sounder generalization and explanatory propositions about political realities. To ignore this is to arrest the progressive development of the discipline.

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