

Nature and Scope of Political Science

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Objective of this unit:

In this unit, we shall discuss the meaning of Political Science and politics. At the same time, we shall also discuss the nature and scope of Political Science.

Suggested Readings

- **Bhargava, Rajeev and Ashok Acharya: Political Theory, An Introduction, Pearsons Education, 2008.**
- **Heywood, Andrew, Political Theory, (3rd Ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2005**
- **Held David, Models of Democracy, Stanford University Press, 2006.**
- **O P Gauba, An Introduction to Political Theory, Macmillan, 1981.**
- **M P Jain, Political Theory: Liberal and Marxian, Authors Guild, 1985**
- **Amal Ray and Mohit Bhattacharya, Political Theory: Ideas and Institutions, The World Press, 1983**
- **Kapur, A.C. Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2006**
- **Agarwal,R.C.: Political Theory- Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007**

Meaning of Political Science

- Political Science comprises of two words 'political' and 'science'.
- The term 'politics' is derived from the Greek word 'polis' which means the 'city-state' (a generalised form of political organization existing in ancient Greece).
- Science is the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation, evidence and experiment.
- So political science is the branch of knowledge that deals with systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the state and political institutions through scientific analysis.

Meaning of Political Science (Cont....)

➤ The great Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first to use the term 'politics' and is therefore regarded as the 'father of Political Science'. In his famous book, "Politics", Aristotle has asserted: "Man is by nature a political animal and he, who by nature and not by mere accident is without state, is either above humanity or below it".

Definition of Political Science

Traditional definition: These early definitions of political science dealt generally with state and government.

- Paul Janet, “Political Science is that part of social science which treats the foundations of the State and the principles of government.” (Kapur, A.C. Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2006, p.17)
- Dr. Garner, “Political Science begins and ends with the state” (Agarwal, R.C.: Political Theory- Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007, p.3)

(cont...)

➤ Sir John Seeley, “Political Science investigates the phenomena of Government as Political Economy deals with Wealth, Biology with life, Algebra with numbers and Geometry with space and magnitude” (Agarwal,R.C.: Political Theory-Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007, p.3).

➤ Stephen Leacock, “Political Science deals with the **Government**” (Agarwal,R.C.: Political Theory- Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007, p.3).

Modern definition: In the beginning of the 20th century there developed a new way of looking at political science. This new approach is known as **behavioural approach**. The main thrust of the new view is the treatment of politics **as an activity and a process**.

- Harold Laswell: “Politics is the study of influence and the influential” or “the study of the shaping and sharing of power”
- David Easton: “Politics is the authoritative allocation of values.”
- Catlin: “Political Science is the study of the act of human and social control”.
- Andrew Heywood: “Politics can be defined as an activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live.”

(**Source:** Agarwal,R.C.: Political Theory- Principles of Political Science, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007)

Difference between politics and Political Science

Modern writers make a distinction between “politics “and “political Science”

Frederic Pollock, for the first time, broke up the subject into two parts:

- Theoretical politics and
- Practical or applied politics

Difference between theoretical politics and applied politics

- The first portion covers theory of the State and Government, theory of legislation and theory of the State as an artificial person. The subjects under the first category deal with the features of the State and the basic principles of government and do not study actual working of any particular government.
- The second part covers the study of the State and actual forms of government. Working of government and administration. Political action and election. Those who take part in the actual activities of the State are known as politicians. They form political parties. contest in the elections and run the government and conduct the administration of the State. It is known as applied or practical polity, which deals with the actual working of government.

Difference between theoretical politics and applied politics

Theoretical Politics

Applied Politics

Nature of Political Science

- Political Science is a part of social sciences and therefore is different from that of physical sciences like physics and chemistry.
- So the question which concerns the nature of the subject is whether Political Science is a Science or an Art and how the nature of the discipline has undergone changes in the 20th century.

Political Science: An Art

- Science is universal and a systematic body of knowledge, based on accurate and impartial facts, through which observation, comparison and experimentation can be made.
- Apparently, Political Science does not have some of these features. And therefore Earnest Barker (British political thinker), James Bryce (British political thinker), Charles A. Beard (British historian) and others were reluctant to accept Political Science as a science.

Political Science: An Art (Cont.....)

The following are some arguments against the notion of Political Science as a Science:-

- Lack of precise and standard definitions of terms and concepts.
- Complexity of political phenomena due to variation in the nature and habits of people.
- Diversity of 'environments' in which political developments take place.
- Problems of experimentation to arrive at valid conclusions.

Political Science: A Science

- American political thinkers like David Easton tried to establish a scientific basis of Political Science.
- Aristotle called it a Master Science through which civilisation could be saved.

Political Science: A Science (cont....)

The following are some arguments in favour of the notion of Political Science as a Science:

- Recently, political theory has developed based on facts and verifiable data, e.g., voting behaviour and theories of election.
- Political experiments are not completely ruled out.
- The government itself is a continuous experiment.

Political Science: A Science (cont....)

- It is possible to make predictions on the basis of social experimentations to a certain extent.
- Broad conclusions can be drawn in Political Science such as—an independent and impartial judiciary and a free press are essential for democracy
- Empirical studies are based on careful observation and classification. Political Science puts a hypothesis or an assumption to empirical verification. Theories are not built on speculation. Political Scientists today employ survey methods, graphs, charts and other scientific tools to arrive at their research conclusions.

- Political Science is thus a science, though not like the physical sciences.
- It is a social science.
- American political scientist, Robert Dahl states that Political science is both a Science and an Art.
- Art refers to practical application of knowledge. Political Science applies the knowledge about political events for creating a good social and political order. Hence it is an art.
- Whenever students of Political Science test their theories against the data of experience by observation, the political analysis can be regarded as scientific.
- When this political analysis is applied for the working of political institutions it becomes an art.

Changing dynamics of the meaning and nature of Political Science

- After the World War II, the meaning and nature of political science have undergone a sea change.
- Now political science is closely related to all aspects of social relations, rather than an activity centred on the institutions of government.
- So the aims and objectives of political science have changed due to factors such as the rise of the power theory and behaviouralism.

New understanding of Political Science

- Political Science has ceased to be merely the science of state-craft.
- Political Science is concerned with all facets of power relations and human behaviour having political implications in the society.
- Politics is portrayed as a process of conflict resolution, in which rival views or competing interests are reconciled for the benefit of all. The new meaning of Political Science includes the dynamics of power and struggle at various levels — local, regional, national and international.
- So the aims and objectives of Political Science have changed due to factors such as the rise of the power theory and behaviouralism.

Scope of Political Science

Political science as a discipline deals with various aspects like:

➤ *Study of state and government*- it deals with the nature and formation of the State and tries to understand various forms and functions of the government.

➤ *Study of associations and institutions*- in organized way the fundamental problems of political science include, first, an investigation of the origin and the nature of the state, second an inquiry into the nature, history and forms of political institutions and third, deduction, therefore, so far as possible, of laws of political growth and development.

Scope of Political Science (Cont...)

- *Study of national and international problems-* modern demands of defense of territory, representative government and national unity have made political science not only the science of political independence but that of state sovereignty also.
- *Study of political behavior of man-* it may be said that the character of political science in all its parts is determined by its basic pre-supposition regarding man.

Scope of Political Science (Cont...)

➤ *Study of the past, present and future of development-* political science attempts to explain the meaning and the essential nature of the state and deals with the laws of its progress and development within itself and in relation to international organizations and other states.

➤ *Study of the concepts of power, authority & influence-* with the behavioural revolution the central topic for study has become the study of power. Consequently the scope has widened to include new aspects like political socialization, political culture, political development and informal structures like interest and pressure groups.

Conclusion

- In the contemporary time, the meaning of Political Science has become more and more inclusive.
- Earlier political science had been defined by many scholars from the point of view of the State and Government.
- But now the term political system brings the study of political science closer to other systems such as the economic system, the cultural system, the legal system and other social systems all of which operate within the larger social environment.

Conclusion

- Regarding the nature of Political Science there is a difference of opinion among scholars whether political science is a science or an art.
- Political scientists have put forward some arguments in favour of the notion that political science is a science, such as –
- political theory has developed based on facts and verifiable data, like, voting behaviour and theories of election;
- in political science there is much scope for experiments, for example the government itself is a continuous process of experiment;
- broad conclusions can be drawn in political science;
- empirical studies are based on careful observation and classification.
- Political scientists today employ survey methods, graphs, charts and other scientific tools to arrive at their research conclusions.

Conclusion

- At the same time another section of political scientists opine that political science is an art and they put forward some argument in favour of this notion, such as—
- lack of precise and standard definitions of terms and concepts;
- complexity of political phenomena due to variation in the nature and habits of people;
- diversity of ‘environments’ in which political developments take place;
- problems of experimentation to arrive at valid conclusions.

Conclusion

- With the passage of time, the scope of political science also keeps on changing.
- In recent times, political science has ceased to be merely the science of state-craft.
- Now political science covers a comprehensive field and it has become dynamic in character.
- Political science deals with each and every aspect of the state and government in relation to their past and present and also focuses upon the probable developments in the future.
- Nowadays, factors like the developments in the arena of human rights and human development and new social movements and upsurges in civil society have also widened the scope of political science.