

## DICHOTOMIES IN THE THEORIZING OF POLITICS

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### ABSTRACT

*Theorization of politics is essential as it provides scope for alternative models of best political existence. Both Renaissance and subsequent absolutism in Europe kindled inquisitiveness in the individual to make rational introspection of individual-state relationship. The newly emerged conscious individual learned the art of making resistance either against the Pope or the King to create a space for himself in the society. Evolution of politics from traditional to modern and then to contemporary phases reflected its various shades. The change has not only enriched the tradition but also left the people sometimes confused about its objectives. The interpretation - intuition polarization, cooperation – conflict categorization and fact – value differentiation resulted in making the study difficult for a common man. An attempt has been made here to understand the background which created such contradictions and confusions and to find out the scope for the synthesis of these diversities. Further, the impact of globalization has been analyzed to understand new challenges to politics.*

**KEYWORDS:** *The Impact of Globalization, Concepts and Generalizations, Political Philosophy*

### INTRODUCTION

Theory, in general, is a logical construct which involves deep introspection, penetration, and explanation of the events taking place around us. It is needed by all the disciplines for a logical exploration. Political theory is an endeavor to understand the present political reality and to evolve a mechanism to change the imperfect society in a just order. During the process, it provides alternative models for the realization of best political existence. History has proved that crises provide fertile ground for its growth. But Wolin argues that even during the period of tranquility, the search for a better order helps in the growth of political tradition<sup>1</sup>. Plamenatz believes, “political theory is a study of theories which have historically powerfully influenced men’s images of themselves and of society and profoundly determined their social and political behaviour”<sup>2</sup>. Even though it is the product of a historical condition, it becomes heretical and unrepresentative, as it deals with complex human problems. It is this universal character of political theory which makes it respectable<sup>3</sup>.

The evolution of Political Theory coincides with the growth of Political Thought. It reflects views of thinkers on the individual-state relationship, giving shape to political concepts like Rights, Liberty, Equality, Justice and Political Obligations. David Held rightly summarizes, “it is a network of concepts and generalizations about political life involving ideas and assumptions and statements about the nature, purpose and key features of government, state, society and about the political capabilities of human beings”<sup>4</sup>. As a derivative of Political Thought, Political Theory has two essential components such as concepts and ideologies. The latter is formed in a particular context by linking these concepts. According to Sabine, as the disciplined investigation of political problems Political Theory includes a factual statement

about the present political situation, a causal view on what may happen and a valuational interpretation of what ought to happen<sup>5</sup>. In different ages, Political Theory has been articulated differently from a mere study of Politics to the theorization of 'Political' or from classical to contemporary deliberations. It left wide open the speculation about the dimensions of the subject. It overlaps sometimes with political philosophy and on some other occasions with Political Science. Andrew Hacker rightly portrays it as "dispassionate and disinterested. As Science, it will describe political reality without trying to pass judgments on what is being depicted either implicitly or explicitly. As the philosophy, it will prescribe rules of conduct which will secure a good life for all of society and not simply for certain individuals or classes"<sup>6</sup>.

### Research Objectives

The objective of the paper has been to understand the varieties in Political theory and how these strands of thinking have shaped the political tradition. As globalization is an important development of the century, its impact on theorization needs exploration. Lastly, the paper wants to understand the problems and prospects of theorization politics in India.

### Scope of the Study

The scope of the paper is very comprehensive because the objectives demand to cover the phases and context of the evolution of various shades of politics. It demands an analysis from the Greek to Globalization Period and a comparison between Western and Indian approaches to the study of politics.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Given the comprehensive nature of the paper, a wide collection of literature has been looked into works advocates of classical traditions as that of Sabine, Germino, Wolin, etc. have been made the base of work. The contemporary study of politics by Rawls, Habermas, etc. has been taken in to account to make a comparison between the traditional and rational – analytical perceptions of Political Theory. In between, ideas of Easton, Cobban, and Laswell, etc. have been analyzed to find out the differences. Political writings of Rajini Kothari, Bhikhu Parekh are covered to understand nature of theorization of politics in India.

### Traditional Political Theory

The journey of Political Theory began during the Greek period. The initiation of dialectics made people inquisitive and innovation of a clear and exact Greek language helped them to explain and express the political reality. Appreciating the contribution of Greeks Wayper said, "Freedom to discuss the idea of public good and eagerness to discuss it and to apply it are also the essentials and it was left to the Greek to combine the three"<sup>7</sup>. The very assumption of the period that man is a social animal made politics revolved around the city-state. Individual, devoid of a personal space for himself developed an unconditional bonding towards the *polis*. The search for 'Good life' made politics moral and comprehensive. Termed as the political philosophy, it involved preoccupation with essentially ethical, prescriptive and normative questions reflecting a concern with what should and ought<sup>8</sup>. The classical view of politics was revived in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The science of interpretation made a full circle when Hegel claimed, "The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk". Its ugly depiction was reflected in the ideology of nationalism. The society centric dimension of politics was clearly visible in Rousseau who claimed, "the legislator should apply power in a majestic manner to inaugurate that all-inclusive political order, the civil state"<sup>9</sup>. During the medieval period, the obsession for salvation and

the fusion of religion with politics restricted the growth of Political Theory. The consent of renaissance and the emergence of 'state' as a distinct political unit independent of the society gave an institutional outlook and a mechanistic interpretation of the individual – state relationship. Politics took a reverse turn when the fulfillment of individual became the end and the state only the means. It remained mostly institutional and political either as Hobbesian Leviathan exercising raw force or Weberian legitimate authority discharging a vocation. It believed power seeking an attitude of the individual to be a natural instinct. Votaries of the school such as Mosca, Pareto, Mill etc. not only emphasized upon the legitimate use of power by an elite class formed on different criteria but also on policies of hunting of power of the central theme. They made political values to be prisoners of the possessive class following laissez-faire model through a minimal state or affirmative action with the help of a maximal state. Being dominated by liberal perception this trend mostly gave priority to private rather than the political sphere. It believed, "politics is a necessary and important part of human life, but it is not the whole of it and it becomes diseased if it aspires to more than it shares"<sup>10</sup>. Such an interpretation of politics was revived again in the twenty-first century in the writings of Nozick and Berlin, advocating the idea of libertarianism. Last but not the least, the Anarchist version of politics believed in a stateless society led by voluntary groups. Amidst all the variations, Montesquieu tried to develop a science of Government. During all these years Political Theory continued to be normative, formal and Eurocentric.

It was for the first time, on the wake of the Behavioural Revolution, academicians such as Robert Dahl, David Easton, Cobban, Laslett, etc. concluded that the traditional political theory dominated by normative value loaded interpretations, historical analysis, and sheer institutionalism had died<sup>11</sup>. It had become parochial, formal and configurative. But, such a challenge theorization come for the first time from Marx who tried to equate theory with an ideology. Germino says: "Marx produced an anti-theory, offering to humankind the most radical form of messianic and ideological thinking"<sup>12</sup>. Marx argued that he was not keen to interpret the surrounding but to change it through a complete universally applicable theory with a detailed programme. Like the Liberals, he did not say man to be atomized, rather a social being with the totality of social relations. According to him, society as a system of social relations is determined by the mode of production creating two antagonistic classes where one is bound to exploit the other one. Thus, for Marx, Politics was not characterized by consensus but by conflict in which the state would be a party to the process of exploitation. Marx traced the course of history and observed that history world keeps on moving in a 'defined' path as long as the property was not abolished, a class barrier was not removed and state was not withered away. He did not think that politics was an inevitable feature of social existence and expected its end in a communist society. The determinism in Marx had extracted emotion from politics. It initiated the political economy approach to analyze economic and political processes historically and holistically.

### **Modern Political Analysis**

The second blow to the traditional Political Theory came during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from the Logical Positivists. This group led by the Vienna Circle was a revitalized form of positivism of August Comte. While rejecting the philosophical approach, positivism emphasized upon the unity of science to integrate both natural and social science to develop a single system of knowledge on the basis of observation and logical analysis. On the other hand, logical positivism was more radical for restricting observation to sensation and adding the component of verification into the analysis of social science. Linguistic philosophy was also highly critical of traditional politics. It called such type of analysis 'Second order study' for engaging itself in the conceptual inquiry<sup>13</sup>. It was more flexible towards metaphysical

experience. All these developments became the starting point of a new orientation of Political Theory in America. It was led by eminent personalities such as Charles Merriam, Graham Wallas, and Arthur Bentley. Their endeavors resulted in Behavioral Revolution in America. The new ethos criticized the traditional approach as mere historicism<sup>14</sup>. Emphasis was changed from introspection to observation of reality in order to make the discipline relevant and as scientific as natural science. The unit of analysis called the political behavior was defined as, “an area of the study within political science concerned with those aspects of human behavior that take place within political contexts, that is, within a state or other political community, for political purposes or with political motivation. Its focus is the individual person.... rather than the group or the political system”<sup>15</sup>. The major credo of Behavioral Revolution was Regularities, Verification, Techniques, Quantification, Empiricism (value), Systematization, Pure Science, and Integration. Politics became a mechanism to make ‘authoritative allocation of values’ to remove differences on societal issues<sup>16</sup>. The new responsibility includes (1) making and execution of decisions with decision making as the unit of analysis (2) Policy-making, involving a discussion of both policy content and political process and (3) determination and attainment of society’s goal. Laswell’s “Politics: Who Gets What, When, How” became a milestone in an empirical approach. Politics became comprehensive as the new format of analysis replaced institution with the system. Almond linked it with the capabilities of the political systems. The aim of the political system became an empirical analysis of public policy making and implementation. The traditional concepts of Rights, Liberty etc. started losing ground. Much later, the empirical analysis put the foundation of new institutionalism, advocating the study of structure in relation to behavior and Rational Choice Theory demanding inclusion of preference of an individual.

The mindless empiricism made by the supporters Behavioralism resulted in making the study of politics dull and drab. David Easton realized the failure in extracting value from a subject and rectified himself through the Post Behavioral Revolution<sup>17</sup>. In course of making revision, he laid more stress on the public responsibilities of the discipline than the scientific method. Others such as Christian Bay questioned the legitimacy of empiricism. He agreed with Easton’s definition of politics as consisting of “all the processes by which values are promoted and distributed by means of power and authority”, but challenged the absence of any reference to the relatedness of politics to human needs and problems. He was critical of the tendency in research of not trying to relate behavioral data meaningfully to normative theories of democracy<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the attack on modern political analysis revolved around the fact-value dichotomy, motivating a new breed of political theorists to conclude that without value, the theorization of politics would be inadequate. There was a realization that empirical analysis was dependent upon classical political philosophy. David Mayhew argued, “Classical Political Philosophy has emphasized particular aspects of political life and in so doing, has shaped the preoccupations of political scientists conducting empirical research to this very day. Classical political philosophy has provided an assemblage of problems that deepen, enliven and guide our empirical investigations”<sup>19</sup>.

### **Contemporary Deliberations**

Thus, there has been a trend of ‘revivalism’ of the earlier traditional form of political theory in some way or the other. Persons such as Thomas Kuhn, associated with the ‘New Philosophical Science’ needs special attention here. He had pointed out the flaws of the positivist model on the ground that it would be erroneous to separate science as a form of human activity from the interpretative endeavor of an individual, because every paradigm needed for scientific evaluation was grown in a context<sup>20</sup>. Kuhn seemed to have moved beyond Popper’s notion of ‘falsification’ introduced to refute the existing knowledge and the science of determinism to open up a new horizon of growth. Encouraged by Hume,

Popper questioned the legitimacy of verification. He believed that the formulation of hypothesis and use of scientific techniques in a controlled condition in social science would affect the search for truth as every form of knowledge was supposed to be 'provisional'<sup>21</sup>. Further, he was of the opinion that the selection of hypothesis and formulation of paradigms to test were always influenced by prior experience. Weber also highlighted the defects of empirical work and emphasized upon the 'value related' inquiry<sup>22</sup>.

The study of interpretation became prominent in the writings of Strauss, Arendt, Oakeshott, and Germino. They were the 'foundationalists' who like Kant and Hegel had faith in the construction of the ultimate foundation of knowledge. Strauss believed that the aim of Political Theory was to search for universal knowledge which contributed to the resolution of problems, considered to be fundamental to all forms of political organizations. Oakeshott argued, "The understanding of politics as an empirical activity is inadequate because it fails to reveal a concrete manner of activity at all. And it has the incidental defect of seeming to encourage the thoughtless to pursue a style of attending to the arrangements of their society which is likely to have unfortunate results: to try to do something which is inherently impossible is always a corrupting exercise"<sup>23</sup>. The focus of the new breed of academicians was to provide 'substance' to politics through their philosophical, moral and value loaded interpretations. It got further shape when Gramsci, through his Structural Marxism challenged the concept of 'determinism'. Deviating from Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat, articulated to organize the exploited lot to move on a pre-determined path, Lukacs for the time talked about 'reification' or objectification of human being during the process of exploitation. It was further given a new shape by Gramsci who wanted to revise orthodox Marxism, termed as 'vulgar Marxism'. According to him, it was not the material force or sub-structure, but the ideology embedded within the superstructure, developed by the organic intellectuals was capable of showing new direction through the creation of 'praxis' (consciousness).

A rise of feminism and environmentalism gave a new dimension to the value – loaded politics. While attaching patriarchy, sex-gender difference and public-private dichotomy, it broadened the scope of individual- state relationship. It manifested itself through various shades and learned the art of reinventing issues such as justice, liberty, power, etc. through its journey from the public domain to a personal arena. The very conviction of Radical feminist about 'personal is political' revealed the expansion of politics. The green political thought of modern era challenged the earlier anthropocentrism or human-centric approach of John Locke. There might have been exceptions such as Rousseau otherwise up to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century environment was made secondary to individual's interest. The school of deep ecology came out with an eco-centric approach to redefine politics from the perspective of the environment.

The authoritarianism of Stalin and oppression by Fascist leaders created deep value crisis in Europe. It was argued that at the advanced stage of industrial growth a country's socio-economic organizations were determined by the level of its development, not by any ideology. Daniel Bell in his 'End of Ideology' predicted that the future would be guided by piecemeal technological adjustment of the extant system. Such a conviction initiated refusal of grand theorization made by the foundationalists. Berlin, a libertarian argued that political philosophy could be pursued in a pluralist society only<sup>24</sup>. He advocated the idea of individuality and human diversity. Such a line of thinking was in existence in the form of classical pluralism advocated by Bentley, Dahl, and Truman. They believed politics to be competition between organized pressure groups. They focused more on procedures than on substance. On the other, the radical form of pluralism apprehended dominance of a particular group in the society and supported 'identity politics' where a group would form its identity in relation to others<sup>25</sup>.

This period marked the true beginning of post-foundationalism which refused all from of metanarratives. It also led to the beginning of interpretative theory (hermeneutics) or science of interpretation. It focused upon language. Its supporters argued, “political practices are expressed and constituted by the language that is lodged in them and language gets its meaning from the form of political practices. When language becomes the constitutive reality, then the explanation of political life must go beyond the empirically observable behavior”<sup>26</sup>. It appeared to be different from Oakeshott who was engrossed with historical events, but hermeneutics aimed at understanding social and political systems. The anti-metanarrative version of politics gave birth to postmodernism which attacked the universal rationality as a product of Enlightenment. It believed in analysis through deconstruction which should be devoid of prior experience. It focused upon glorification of identity generated through cultural practices rather than the individual as an atomized self.

The logic of postmodernism to analyze individual state- relationship by challenging the age-old modern assumption of rationality was not acceptable to Habermas, the advocate of Critical Theory. He was influenced by Marcuse’s assumption that man had become ‘one dimensional not due to exploitation but because of affluence generated in the capitalist society. Habermas wanted to enlighten the individual for his emancipation not by rejecting but by redefining rationality through the communicative action. According to him, it was the moral cognitive ability of the individual which would help him to use language to reinterpret tradition. It would help to replace the age-old inevitability of class struggle. Besides Habermas, John Rawls also came forward to use hermeneutics or interpretation in giving his theory of social justice. Initially, he appeared to be a foundationalist for his assumption of ‘veil of ignorance’, which refers to the original position of the individual before the creation of the state. Where all individuals were free and equal and were in dark about their status. This apparently universal status motivated them to create a state through a contract for the effective distribution of Primary Goods such as rights, liberty, and equal opportunities. Here Rawls switched over to post-foundationalism through his ‘reflective equilibrium’ to focus upon moral principles by deviating from general assumptions. He hinted upon the formulation of a principle of social justice for the democratic society exclusively<sup>27</sup>. Though he talked about rights and liberty, yet he believed in the moral guidelines which would motivate differently the less advantaged and the most advantaged people to come to terms with the help of the decisive state. This is against foundationalism as normative claims are always subject to review in the light of new understanding. Postfoundationalist like Rawls does not disregard general thinking. But they emphasize the social context from which social values are generated. Thus, as a communitarian. Rawls’s social justice highlights the politics of substance. Kymlicka, the advocate of multiculturalism extended the moral interpretation further. He suggests, “diverse culture offers concrete alternatives: since diverse cultures present diverse projects and systems of external and internal organizations they provide individuals with substantive option and choices that they may explore as they define what is good and desirable”<sup>28</sup>. Thus, the traditional Political Theory and the present normative analytical Political Theory believe in ‘interpretation’. Only the former proceeds against the background of ‘truth,’ the latter, with a greater circumspection, believes in deriving conclusion on the basis of ‘considered judgment’<sup>29</sup>. Both the phases can be differentiated on the basis of their nature of the political inquiry. The journey of politics from one phase to other has been termed as a ‘return of the political’.

Globalization has thrown new challenges to the study of politics for its priority on individual choice. Spread of libertarian thinking, emphasis on market and expansion of communication has supported politics of intervention and subsequent rise of fundamentalism. Internally, a commodification of social life led to the growth of protest culture and rise of social and political movements, which help the marginalized communities to challenge the system of domination and

exclusion. Thus, politics in the west though evolved systematically from traditional to modern than to contemporary one, its roller coaster journey has enriched it over the years. It has provided alternative models to the people for their development. Plamenatz concludes, “the consensus is that empirical analysis and reflections of a logical and moral character can coexist in Political Theory”<sup>30</sup>.

### Indian Theorization

In India, the evolution of politics has been quite steady, with little variations in it. It revolves around only ‘interpretation’ of individual- state relationship as advocated by the foundationalists in Europe. It never advocates a nasty, brutish, solitary Hobbesian individual nor glorifies a Hegelian state as ‘march of God on earth’. It emphasizes upon a moral, tolerant human being who needs a plural society and limited polity for his growth. Beginning with the classical Hindu period down to the modern era, Indian Political Thought has managed to reform a remarkable continuity<sup>31</sup>. The evolution of politics in the modern period which began in a colonial context made the theorization more matured with the due inclusion of concepts like Right, Liberty, Equality, Property, and Nationalism. Defining its nature Rajni Kothari says, “steeped in the tradition of pluralism (as distinct from the mere political pluralism as found in western democracies) and in a conception of unity based on dispersed identities and shared values, endowed with a non-theological religious pedigree, without a fixed doctrine or an official clergy and given its high tolerance of ambiguity and deeply ingrained tradition of scepticism, India may be better placed than most societies to carve out a niche for itself in a world undergoing great transformation”<sup>32</sup>. In the era of globalization, when foundationalism has paved the way to post-foundationalism with a focus on ‘identity politics’, the plural social base of India finds little problem in absorbing the challenge. Bishnu Parekh in case of India admits, “no culture can ever express the full range of human potentialities and each articulates only an aspect of it. Different cultures enable us to experience different ways of living and thinking, and this makes us aware that our cultural horizon is only one of the many that have given meaning to lives of countless men and women. This consciousness of the finitude of our existence prompts us to take a critical look at the beliefs and institutional structures of organization that we have inherited and perhaps accepted”<sup>33</sup>.

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