UNIT 1: POLITICAL SCIENCE: MEANING , NATURE AND SCOPE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- discuss the meaning of Political Science
- explain the meaning of Politics
- explain the nature of Political Science
- discuss the scope of Political Science.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

We all are acquainted with the term 'Political Science'. Ever since man started living an organised social life, Politics has come to play a very important role. As we all know, Political Science is concerned with different political activities of human beings. However, at different stages of history Political Science has carried different meanings and its scope is continuously widening. Though Political Science has been discussed by different political thinkers since ancient time, the history of Political Science as an academic discipline is not very old. 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.

1.3 MEANING OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND POLITICS



Aristotle :
He was an ancient Greek philosopher born in 384 B.C. in Stagira, Ancient Greece. His most important book is "Politics" The three Greek thinkers from ancient Greece, namely, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle laid the foundation for western philosophy.



City-States :
The several hundred more-or-less independent territorial units which together constituted Ancient Greece.

While discussing the meaning of Political Science, it is seen that the term "politics" was first used by ***Aristotle***, the famous Greek philosopher. He called it "the master science." Aristotle, in his famous book, *Politics* has said, "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." (Agarwal,R.C.: *Political Theory- Principles of Political Science*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007, p.1) From this definition, it becomes clear that human beings, by nature, desire to live in a society because it is only a well-organized society that could help them to meet their needs. As a corollary, for well-organized social existence, what is required is a well-governed state which can ensure security of human life and provide for human welfare and progress. At the same time, there needs to be an institutional mechanism in the form of the government for the purpose of exercising political power and governing the state. Accordingly, in its traditional sense, the subject of Political Science is but a scientific study of the State and Government. As a matter of fact, in ancient Greece, the subject dealing with the activities associated with the ***city-states*** or *polis* was described as politics.

Let us examine some important definitions regarding the meaning of Political Science as it is understood in its traditional sense.

- According to American political scientist, 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)
- According to French political philosopher, 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)

- According to German thinker, Garris, "Political Science deals with the origin, development, purpose, and all political problems of the State." (Agarwal,R.C.: *Political Theory- Principles of Political Science*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2007, p.3)
- According to British historian, 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)
- According to British political scientist 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)

From the above definitions, it becomes amply clear that Political Science has been defined by many scholars from the point of view of the State and Government. However, modern political scientists have shifted their focus from the study of the state to the study of what they describe as the Political System. The term political system brings the study of political science closer to the larger social environment.The political system interacts with 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. Accordingly, Political Science today has gone beyond the study of mere formal institutions like the state and government to studying the processes and influences acting upon the political system and vice-versa.

Significantly, one key element in the realm of Political Science today is the concept of Politics. The term "politics" has been gaining much importance in the study of present-day political science. Politics arises out of diversity. Human society is marked by the existence of a wide variety of groups and communities. Each group expresses its own opinions, wants,

needs or interests. In situations where there is complete harmony among all regarding the goals and aspirations to be achieved, there can be no politics. Politics arises only when there is disagreement among the various groups and communities with regard to their respective wants or interests. Each group seeks to achieve its varied legal and constitutional goals to promote different articulated interests at the local, national and international levels.

Politics involves the expression of differing opinions by and competition among opposing groups with regard to their wants and interests. At the same time, politics involves attempts made towards reconciling these competing interests by exploring procedures for the resolution of disagreements among the various contending parties in a way that minimizes disagreements and frictions while creating enough ground for mutual cooperation. Resolution of conflict is thus an important objective of politics. Finally, politics is about taking collective decisions (by the government) which are regarded as binding upon a group of people, aimed at the resolution of conflict. In this context, politics becomes an exercise of power that is legitimate in nature. Harold Lasswell, defined political science "as the study of the shaping and sharing of power". (Dahl. A. Robert and Bruce Stinebrickner : *Modern Political Analysis-sixth edition*, Pearson Education Inc., New Delhi, 2003, p.23).

In the final analysis, Political Science has assumed broad connotations or meanings covering the study of not merely institutional mechanisms like the state and government but the actual dynamics and processes of various political phenomena involving power, influence, rule, authority, bargaining and conflict resolution that take place within the political system in relation to the larger social environment.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: The term "politics" was first used by Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher. (True/False)

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Q 2: What was the subject dealing with the activities associated with the city-states or *polis* in ancient Greece described as?

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Q 3: According to ……....…., "Political Science begins and ends with the state." (Fill in the blank)

Q 4: Who said "Political Science deals with the Government"?

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Q 5: Who defined political science "as the study of the shaping and sharing of power"?

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Q 6: Modern political scientists have shifted their focus from the study of the state to the study of the ……(Fill in the blank)

1.4 NATURE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

We all know the fact that the nature of social science is not the same as that of other sciences. Political Science is a part of social sciences. Being a part of social sciences, nature of political science is different from that of physical sciences like physics and chemistry. In this section, we shall deal with the nature of Political Science and while discussing the nature of Political Science we have to look into a few issues, such as whether Political Science is a Science or an Art and how the nature of the discipline has undergone changes in the 20th century.

1.4.1. Political Science : Science or Art

From the very beginning there has been a debate among the scholars regarding the status of political science whether political science is a science or an art. French political philosopher, Jean Bodin (1530-96) first used the term 'political science'. Later, other thinkers namely, David Hume (British political thinker), Sir Frederick Pollock (British political thinker) and Sir John Seeley (British historian) also preferred its use. But there is disagreement among the scholars about the status of the discipline. Aristotle called it the master science

through which civilisation could be saved. American political thinkers like David Easton tried to establish a scientific basis of Political Science. But 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. To examine this debate, first let us try to define science. 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. Charles A. Beard in 1926 observed that it was neither possible nor desirable that there should be a science of politics. Because Political Science is concerned with society, government, law and human behaviour which vary from place to place.

- 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 takeplace.
  - Problems of experimentation to arrive at valid conclusions.
- But efforts are made to systematise the study of Political Science and to acclaim the status of a science. Here are some of the arguments in favour of this claim:
  - Recently, political theory has developed based on facts and verifiable data, e.g., voting behavior and theories of election.
  - Political experiments are not completely ruled out. The government itself is a continuous experiment.
  - 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.

1.4.2 Changing Dynamics of the Meaning of Political Science

In the contemporary time, the meaning and nature of Political Science have assumed a dynamic character. More particularly 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. Politics is viewed as a phenomenon found in and between all groups, institutions and societies. It is manifested in the activities of cooperation, negotiation and struggle over the limited resources—economic, social or political. So the aims and objectives of political science have changed due to factors such as the rise of the power theory and behaviouralism. 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.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.7: Who used the term 'Political Science' for the first time?

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Q.8: State any two arguments against the notion of political science as a science.

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Q.9: State any two arguments against the notion of political science as an art.

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1.5 SCOPE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

There is a difference of opinion among the political scientists regarding the scope of Political Science. With the passage of time, the scope of the discipline 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. In a simple terms we could say that the discipline of political science has profound influences on every aspect of our day-to-day life. During the second half of the 20th century, the power theorists and behaviouralists also widened the area of study of political science This trend started to focus upon all facets of power relations and human behaviour having political implications in the society.

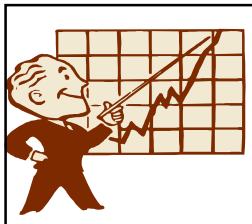
In the first instance, political science makes a survey of the origin and growth of organised political life. Scholars at different stages attempt to draw inferences from the past and draw conclusions about the state, government, law and political behaviour. In this way, various currents of political thought including individualism, socialism and democracy, have emerged which help to understand the present institutions, ideas and processes.

Then, political science investigates the prevailing political concepts, political institutions and phenomena. It analyses the groups and organisations like political party, pressure groups, social movements, executive, judiciary, law and courts which seek power and influence the society. Different forms of government and their working, various international organisations and their role in politics are other aspects of political science. Election studies, opinion polls and voting behavior studies have also become important aspects of the scope of political science.

Moreover, speculation and prediction about the future course of development, and proposals for improvement in the existing political processes and structures have been important aspects of political science since the days of Aristotle. Political science studies the state as it ought to be or the 'ideal form'. Gettell says that political science is a historical investigation of what the state had been, an analytical study of what the state is and a politico-ethical discussion of what the state should be.

In recent times, some writers like Lasswell (American political scientist), Kaplan (American political scientist), Morgenthau (American political scientist), Russell (British scholar) and Foucault (French Scholar) have attempted to make political science the 'study of power'. It is the factor of power that makes the state different from other associations. This new aspect of study enlarged the scope of political science. Apart from this, political science in modern times has become 'policy science', aimed at formulating integrated and comprehensive policies in order to address and solve various problems at different levels. Since the 1990s, the developments in the arena of human rights and human development, new social

movements and upsurges in civil society have also widened the scope of political science.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.10: Mention the names of any two political scientists who had attempted to make political science the 'study of power'.

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Q.11: State the view of Gettell regarding the scope of political science.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

- 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.
- One key element in the realm of Political Science is the concept of Politics. Politics arises out of diversity. Human society is marked by the existence of a wide variety of groups and communities. Politics arises only when there is disagreement among the various groups and communities with regard to their respective wants or interests. Each group seeks to achieve its varied legal and constitutional goals to promote different articulated interests at the local, national and international levels.
- 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 behavior 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.

- 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.
- 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.



1.7 FURTHER READING

1. Agarwal, R.C. (2006). *Political Theory*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.
2. Asirvatham, E & Misra, K.K. (2006). *Political Theory*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.

3. Kapur, A.C. (2006). *Principles of Political Science*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.
4. Sharma, R.K. (2011). M*odern Political Science*. New Delhi: DPS Publications.
5. Mahajan, V.D. (2008). *Political Theory*. New Delhi: S. Chands & Company Ltd.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No. 1: True

Ans to Q. No. 2: Politics

Ans to Q. No. 3: Dr. Garner

Ans to Q. No. 4: Stephen Leacock

Ans to Q. No. 5: Harold Lasswell

Ans to Q. No. 6: Political System

Ans to Q. No. 7: Jean Bodin

Ans to Q. No. 8: (i) Lack of precise and standard definitions of terms and concepts.

(ii) Complexity of political phenomena due to variation in the nature and habits of people.

Ans to Q. No. 9: (i) Political theory has developed based on facts and verifiable data, e.g., voting behavior and theories of election.

(ii) Political experiments are not completely ruled out. The government itself is a continuous experiment.

Ans to Q. No. 10: Kaplan, Morgenthau

Ans to Q. No. 11: Political science is a historical investigation of what the state had been, an analytical study of what the state is and a politico-ethical discussion of what the state should be.



1.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions

Q.1: Who wrote the book “Politics” ?

Q.2: Mention the name of one political scientist who opined that Political Science is both an art and a science.

Q.3: Mention the definition of political science provided by Sir John Seeley.

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in around 150 words)

Q.1: Write briefly about the meaning of Political Science.

Q.2: Write a short note on the changing meaning of Political Science.

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in around 300-500 words)

Q.1: Discuss the nature of Political Science.

Q.2: Explain the scope of Political Science.

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