



Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Social Sciences

BPSC - 105
INTRODUCTION TO
COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT
AND POLITICS



**INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE
GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

**School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

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* Adapted from EPS-09 Comparative Government and Politics

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INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Comparative Government and Politics is an important sub-field of the discipline of political science. What distinguishes this subfield from others such as political theory or international relations is its emphasis on comparison. But comparison as a method is neither new (as it has been at the heart of the disciplines since the time of Aristotle) nor unique to political science (as the methodology has been adopted by number of disciplines in social sciences and humanities). Scholars who specialize in comparative studies insist that comparison is fundamental to human thought and that it is very difficult to describe or explain anything without comparison. The tentacles of comparison are difficult to escape- comparison with other similar political actors, structures, institutions, ideas etc. or even with their past. The introductory units of this course bring the ambiguities, pitfalls and challenges in undertaking comparative study of politics and government. But this should not deter us from undertaking comparison. After all, knowledge of the self is gained through the knowledge of the others.

What then distinguishes Comparative Politics? First, it is the focus on the systematic comparison of countries, with the intention of identifying, and eventually explaining, the differences or similarities between them with respect to the particular phenomenon which is being analysed. Secondly, as Peter Mair points out, comparative politics is focused on the method of research. It is “concerned with developing rules and standards about how comparative research should be carried out, including the levels of analysis at which the comparative analysis operates, and the limits and possibilities of comparison itself”.

This introductory course on Comparative Government and Politics will touch upon some key issues, methodologies and areas of comparative analysis in the study of government and politics. It will introduce you to some of the important approaches and methods in comparative politics. Secondly, given the growing integration of the political and economic systems, it becomes important to understand the context in which modern governments function. Three units of this course, therefore, dwell on the challenges of states in the capitalist, socialist and developing world. The course also deals with the institutions and traditions that have been the subject of comparative analysis. In dealing with such themes as classification of forms of governments based on the separation and division of powers, party systems, as well as challenges of developing states in the world system, matching each of these themes with a case study from an advanced democracy (the United Kingdom), a centrally planned socialist system (Peoples Republic of China), an industrialising society (Brazil) and a developing country (Nigeria).

After going through this course, you should be able to understand, contextualize and explain major concepts, theories and methods in comparative politics; apply these concepts, theories and methods in comparative politics to analyse political regimes, governments, political institutions and states and improve your analytical presentation and writing skills.

All units of this course have a uniform structure. Each unit begins with Objectives to help you find what you are expected to learn from the unit. Please go through these objectives carefully. Keep reflecting and checking them after going through a few sections of the unit. Each unit is divided into sections and sub-sections for ease of comprehension. In between these sections, some Check Your Progress Exercises have been provided. We advise you to attempt these as and when you reach them. This will help you assess your study and test your comprehension of the subject studied. Compare your answers with the answer or guidelines given at the end of the unit. Some key words, unfamiliar terms and ideas have been provided as box items or at the end of each Unit.

While the units in this course are carefully designed and written by specialists, it must however be added that the units are by no means comprehensive. For deeper understanding of the themes dealt with in this volume, you are advised and encouraged to read as much of the books, chapters and articles listed in the Suggested Readings given at the end of this course book.



BLOCK -I

Understanding Comparative Politics

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THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

BLOCK –I

UNDERSTANDING COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Comparison is probably the oldest and the most widely used method of acquiring scientific knowledge about any phenomena. We frequently use it in our everyday lives. For example, when we say that China is economically stronger than India or that US president is stronger than the Indian president or that Pakistan is less democratic and secular than India, we are using the comparative method. Similarly, when we highlight the contrast between the Unitary and Federal forms of government or parliamentary system and the presidential system, we are using the comparative method. Since the mid-20th century, comparative method has acquired great rigor and sophistication. In fact, with the passage of time, newer and newer ways and more refined techniques of comparing political systems have emerged.

The use of comparative method in comparative politics has broadly speaking three important components which are closely related to each other. I) What do we compare? ii) How do we compare? and iii) why do we compare? This block addresses itself to these three questions or dimensions of comparative method in comparative politics. The first two units of this block address the first question (what do we compare?). They will give you some idea about the nature, scope and significance of comparative politics.

The second question (how do we compare?) deals with various approaches. For example, we can compare the constitutions of two or more countries or the patterns and forms of governments in them or we can compare their political institutions or we can compare the dynamics of their political processes and political behaviour (that is, how their political institutions actually function. We can also compare their party systems and the nature and role of their pressure groups. It is also possible to compare their political cultures, their agents of political socialisation, their methods of interest articulation and interest aggregation, their styles of political recruitment and their ways of decision making. We can also compare politics of different countries by analysing class structure of their societies. We can even compare their modes of production (feudal, capitalist, etc) to understand the class character of their elite and the political ideology (conservative, liberal or radical) to which they are committed. This block will discuss three important approaches-the institutional approach, the systems approach and the political economy approach.

The third question in comparative method is: Why do we compare? It will give us some idea about how each approach enriches our understanding. It also enables us to evaluate the utility of each approach as well as its limitations.

UNIT 1 NATURE, SCOPE AND UTILITY OF COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICS*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Comparative Study of Politics: Nature and Scope
 - 1.2.1 Comparisons: Identification of Relationships
 - 1.2.2 Comparative Politics and Comparative Government
- 1.3 Comparative Politics: A Historical Overview
 - 1.3.1 The Origins of Comparative Study of Politics
 - 1.3.2 The Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
 - 1.3.3 The Second World War and After
 - 1.3.4 The 1970s and Challenges to Developmentalism
 - 1.3.5 The 1980s: The Return of State
 - 1.3.6 The Late Twentieth Century: Globalisation and Emerging Trends/Possibilities
- 1.4 Comparative Study of Politics: Utility
 - 1.4.1 Comparing for Theoretical Formulation
 - 1.4.2 Comparisons for Scientific Rigour
 - 1.4.3 Comparisons Leading to Explanations in Relationships
- 1.5 Let us Sum Up
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

We often compare ourselves with others knowingly or unknowingly; what others think, what they do or how they live and so on. Comparing with others and comparing things around enable us a deeper understanding of our own conduct vis-à-vis those of others. Such a process of comparison shapes a large part of who we are. Such a process of comparison takes place at the collective level too. Within the field of Political Science, we do engage in the activity of comparing different political systems, institutions, process, activities, etc. across countries.

*Prof. Ujjwal Kumar Singh, Dept. of Political Science, University of Delhi. Adopted from EPS-09 : Comparative Government and Politics.

This introductory unit is designed to enable you to be theoretically and methodologically informed about comparative study of politics. We shall focus on the major aspects—nature, scope and utility—of comparative study of politics. After going through this unit, you should be able to

- Explain the meaning and scope comparative study of politics;
- Define and describe major concepts of comparative study of politics;
- Explain the purpose of the comparative study of politics;
- Explain the significance and relevance of the comparative study of politics;
- Describe the historical background of the comparative study of politics; and
- Identify and explain key concepts used in the comparative study of politics

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Comparative study of politics is about comparing political phenomena. Its primary goal is to encompass the major political similarities and differences between countries around the world. The emphasis is on how different societies cope with various problems by making comparisons with others. Although ‘comparative methods’ and ‘methods of comparisons’ are widely used in other social sciences disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Economics etc., it is the substance of comparison—i.e., its subject matter, vocabulary, perspective, and concepts—which gives comparative politics its distinctiveness both as a ‘method’ and as a sub-field of the study of ‘comparative politics’.

The nature and scope of comparative politics has been determined historically by changes in the (a) subject matter (b) vocabulary and (c) political perspective. To understand *where, why* and *how* these changes took place we have to look at what is the focus of study at a particular historical period, what are the *tools, languages* or *concepts* being used for the study and what is the *vantage point, perspective* and *purpose* of enquiry. Thus in the sections which follow, we shall look at the manner in which comparative politics has evolved, the continuities and discontinuities which have informed this evolution, the ways in which this evolution has been determined in and by the specific historical contexts and socio-economic and political forces, and how in the context of globalisation, radical changes have been brought about in the manner in which the field of comparative politics has so far been envisaged.

1.2 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICS: NATURE AND SCOPE

As we saw, the comparative method is commonly used in other disciplines as well and that what distinguishes comparative politics from other disciplines which also use comparative methods is its specific subject matter, language and perspective. In that case, one may well ask the question, is there at all a distinct field of *comparative political* analysis or is it a *sub-discipline* subsumed within

the larger discipline of Political Science. The three aspects of subject matter, language, vocabulary, and perspective, we must remember, are inadequate in establishing the distinctiveness of comparative politics within the broad discipline of Political Science, largely because comparative politics shares the subject matter and concerns of Political Science, i.e., democracy, constitutions, political parties, social movements etc. Within the discipline of Political Science thus the specificity of comparative political analysis is marked out by its *conscious use of the comparative method to answer questions which might be of general interest to political scientists.*

1.2.1 Comparisons: Identification of Relationships

This stress on the *comparative method* as defining the character and scope of comparative political analysis has been maintained by some scholars in order to dispel frequent misconceptions about comparative politics as involving the study of 'foreign countries'. Under such an understanding, if you were studying a country other than your own, (e.g., an American studying the politics of Brazil or an Indian studying that of Sri Lanka) you would be called a comparativist. More often than not, this misconception implies merely the gathering of information about individual countries with little or at the most implicit comparison involved. The distinctiveness of comparative politics, most comparativists would argue, lies in a *conscious and systematic* use of comparisons to study two or more countries with the purpose of *identifying*, and eventually *explaining differences or similarities* between them with respect to the particular phenomena being analysed. For a long time, comparative politics appeared merely to look for similarities and differences, and directed this towards classifying, dichotomising or polarising political phenomena. Comparative political analysis is, however, not simply about identifying similarities and differences. The purpose of using comparisons, it is felt by several scholars, is to ultimately study political phenomena in a larger framework of relationships. This, it is felt, would help deepen our understanding and broaden the levels of answering and explaining political phenomena (Mohanty, 1975).

1.2.2 Comparative Politics and Comparative Government

The often-encountered notion that comparative politics involves a study of governments arises, asserts Ronald Chilcote, from conceptual confusion. Unlike comparative government whose field is limited to comparative study of governments, comparative politics is concerned with the study of all forms of political activity, governmental as well as non-governmental. The field of comparative politics has an 'all encompassing' nature and comparative politics specialists tend to view it as the study of everything political. Any lesser conception of comparative politics would obscure the criteria for the selection and exclusion of what may be studied under this field (Chilcote, 1994:4).

It may, however, be pointed out that for long comparative politics concerned itself with the study of governments and regime types and confined itself to

studying western countries. The process of decolonisation especially in the wake of the Second World War, generated interest in the study of 'new nations'. The increase in numbers and diversity of units/cases that could be brought into the gamut of comparison was accompanied also by the urge to formulate abstract universal models, which could explain political phenomena and processes in all the units. At around this time, along with the increase and diversification of cases to be studied, there was also an expansion in the sphere of politics so as to allow the examination of politics as a total system, including not merely the state and its institutions but also individuals, social groupings, political parties, interest groups, social movements etc. Certain aspects of institutions and political process were especially in focus for what was seen as their usefulness in explaining political processes, e.g., political socialisation, patterns of political culture, techniques of interest articulation and interest aggregation, styles of political recruitment, extent of political efficacy and political apathy, ruling elites etc. These systemic studies were often built around the concern with nation-building i.e., providing a politico-cultural identity to a population, state-building i.e., providing institutional structure and processes for politics and modernisation i.e., to initiate a process of change along the western path of development. The presence of divergent ideological poles in world politics (Western capitalism and Soviet socialism), the rejection of western imperialism by the newly liberated countries, the concern of these countries with maintaining their distinct identity (very well reflected in the rise of the non-aligned movement) and the sympathy among most countries with a socialist path of development, gradually led to the irrelevance of most modernisation models for purposes of global/large level comparisons. Whereas the fifties and sixties were the period where attempts to explain political reality were made through the construction of large-scale models, the seventies saw the assertion of Third World-ism and the rolling back of these models. Then in the eighties we saw constriction in the level of comparison to narrow or smaller units. With globalisation, however, the imperatives for large level comparisons increased and the field of comparisons has diversified with the proliferation of non-state, non-governmental actors and the increased interconnections between nations with economic linkages and information technology revolution.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) How is comparative government different from comparative politics?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.3 COMPARATIVE POLITICS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The nature and scope of comparative politics has varied according to the changes which have occurred historically in its subject matter. The subject matter of comparative politics has been determined both by the *geographical space* (i.e. countries, regions) which has constituted its field as well as the *dominant ideas* concerning social reality and change which shaped the approaches to comparative studies (capitalist, socialist, mixed and indigenous). Likewise, at different historical junctures, the thrust or the primary concern of the studies kept changing.

1.3.1 The Origins of Comparative Study of Politics

Comparative politics has a long intellectual pedigree, going back to Aristotle and continued by thinkers like Niccolo Machiavelli, John Locke, Max Weber etc. The Greek philosopher Aristotle studied the constitutions of 150 states and *classified* them into a *typology of regimes*. His classification was presented in terms of both descriptive and normative categories i.e., he not only *described* and *classified* regimes and political systems in terms of their types e.g., democracy, aristocracy, monarchy etc., but also distinguished them on the basis of certain *norms of good governance*. On the basis of this comparison, he divided regimes into good and bad - ideal and perverted. These Aristotelian categories were acknowledged and taken up by Romans such as Polybius (201-120 B.C.) and Cicero (106-43 B.C.) who considered them in formal and legalistic terms. Concern with comparative study of regime types reappeared in the 15th century with Machiavelli (1469-1527) who compared different types of principalities (hereditary, new, mixed and ecclesiastic ones) and republics to arrive the most successful ways to govern them.

1.3.2 The Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The preoccupation with philosophical and speculative questions concerning the 'good order' or the 'ideal state' and the use, in the process, of abstract and normative vocabulary, persisted in comparative studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was a period when liberalism was the reigning ideology and European countries enjoyed overwhelming dominance in world politics. The rest of the world of Asia, Africa and Latin America were either European colonies or under their sphere of influence as ex-colonies. Comparative studies taken up during this period, for instance, James Bryce's *Modern Democracies* (1921), Herman Finer's *Theory and Practice of Modern Governments* (1932), Carl J. Friedrich's *Constitutional Government and Democracy* (1937), Roberto Michels', *Political Parties* (1915) and Maurice Duverger's *Political Parties* (1950), were largely concerned with a comparative study of institutions, the distribution of power, and the relationship between the different layers of government. These studies were 'Euro-centric' i.e., confined to

the study of institutions, governments and regime types in European countries like Britain, France and Germany. It may thus be said that these studies were in fact not genuinely comparative in the sense that they excluded from their analysis a large number of countries. Any generalisation derived from a study confined to a few countries could not legitimately claim having validity for the rest of the world. It may be emphasised here that exclusion of the rest of the world was symptomatic of the dominance of Europe in world politics. All contemporary history had Europe at its centre, obliterating the rest of the world (colonised or liberated from colonisation) (a) as 'people without histories' or (b) whose histories were bound with and destined to follow the trajectories already followed by the advanced countries of the West. Thus, the above-mentioned works manifest their rootedness in the normative values of western liberal democracies which carried with it the baggage of racial and civilisational superiority, and assumed a prescriptive character for the colonies/former colonies.

1.3.3 The Second World War and After

In the nineteen thirties the political and economic situation of the world changed. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, brought into world, Socialism, as an ideology of the oppressed and, as a critical alternative to western liberalism and capitalism. With the end of the Second World War, a number of significant developments had taken place, including the declining of European (British) hegemony, the emergence and entrenchment of United States of America as the 'new hegemon' in world politics and economy, and the bifurcation of the world into two ideological camps viz. (western) capitalism and (eastern) socialism. The majority of the 'rest of the world' had, by the time the Second World War ended, liberated itself from European imperialism. For a period after decolonisation the notions of development, modernisation, nation-building, state-building etc., evinced a degree of legitimacy and even popularity as 'national slogans' among the political elite of the 'new nations'. Ideologically, however, these 'new nations', were no longer compelled to tow the western capitalist path of development. While socialism had its share of sympathisers among the new ruling elite of the Asia, America and Latin America, quite a number of newly independent countries made a conscious decision to distance themselves from both the power blocs, remaining non-aligned to either. They evolved their own specific path of development akin to the socialist, as in the case of *Ujjama* in Tanzania, and the mixed-economy model in India which was a blend of capitalism and socialism.

It may be worth remembering that the comparative study of governments till the 1940s was predominantly the *study of institutions*, the legal-constitutional principles regulating them, and the manner in which they functioned in western (European) liberal-democracies. In the context of the above stated developments, a powerful critique of the institutional approach emerged in the middle of 1950s. The critique had its roots in behaviouralism which had emerged as a new movement in the discipline of politics aiming to provide scientific rigour to the discipline and develop **a science of politics**. Known as the 'behavioural

movement', it was concerned with developing an enquiry which was quantitative, based on survey techniques involving the examination of empirical facts separated from values, to provide value-neutral, non-prescriptive, objective observations and explanations. The behaviouralists attempted to study social reality by seeking answers to questions like 'why people behave politically as they do, and why as a result, political processes and systems function as they do'. It is these 'why' questions regarding *differences in people's behaviours* and their implications for *political processes* and *political systems*, which changed the focus of comparative study from the legal-formal aspects of institutions. Thus in 1955 Roy Macridis criticised the existing comparative studies for privileging formal institutions over non-formal political processes, for being descriptive rather than analytical, and case-study oriented rather than genuinely comparative (Macridis, 1955). Harry Eckstein points out that the changes in the nature and scope of comparative politics in this period show sensitivity to the changing world politics urging the need to reconceptualise the notion of politics and develop paradigms for large-scale comparisons (Eckstein, 1963). Rejecting the then traditional and almost exclusive emphasis on the western world and the conceptual language which had been developed with such limited comparisons in mind, Gabriel Almond and his colleagues of the American Social Science Research Council's Committee on Comparative Politics (founded in 1954) sought to develop a theory and a methodology which could encompass and compare political systems of all kinds—primitive or advanced, democratic or non-democratic, western or non-western.

The broadening of concerns in a geographic or territorial sense was also accompanied by a broadening of the sense of politics itself, and in particular, by a rejection of what was then perceived as the traditional and narrowly defined emphasis on the study of formal political institutions. The notion of politics was broadened by the emphasis on 'realism' or politics 'in practice' as distinguished from mere 'legalism'. This included in its scope the functioning of less formally structured agencies, behaviours and processes e.g. political parties, interest groups, elections, voting behaviour, attitudes etc. With the deflection of attention from studies of formal institutions, there was simultaneously a decline in the centrality of the notion of the state itself. We had mentioned earlier that the emergence of a large number of countries on the world scene necessitated the development of frameworks which would facilitate comparisons on a large scale. This led to the emergence of inclusive and abstract notions like the political system. This notion of the 'system' replaced the notion of the state and enabled scholars to take into account the 'extra-legal', 'social' and 'cultural' institutions which were critical to the understanding of non-western politics and had the added advantage of including in its scope 'pre-state'/'non-state' societies as well as roles and offices which were not seen as overtly connected with the state. Also, with the change of emphasis to actual practices and functions of institutions, the problems of research came to be defined not in terms of what legal powers these institutions had, but what they actually did, how they were related to one another, and what roles they played in the making and execution of

public policy. This led to the emergence of *structural-functionalism* approach, in which certain functions were described as being necessary to all societies, and the execution and performance of these functions were then compared across a variety of different formal and informal structures.

While the universal frameworks of systems and structures-functions enabled western scholars to study a wide range of political systems, structures, and behaviours within a single paradigm, the appearance of 'new nations' provided to Western comparativists an opportunity to study what they perceived as economic and political change. Wiarda points out that it was in this period of the sixties that most contemporary scholars of comparative politics came of age. The 'new nations' became for most of these scholars [ironically] 'living laboratories' for the study of social and political change. Wiarda describes those 'exciting times' which offered unique opportunities to study political change, and saw the development of new methodologies and approaches to study them. It was during this period that some of the most innovative and exciting theoretical and conceptual approaches were advanced in the field of comparative politics: study of political culture, political socialisation, developmentalism, dependency and interdependency, corporatism, bureaucratic-authoritarianism and later transitions to democracy etc. (Wiarda, 1998).

This period saw the mushrooming of universalistic models like David Easton's *political system*, Karl Deutsch's *social mobilisation* and Edward Shils' *centre and periphery*. The theories of modernisation by Apter, Rokkan, Eisenstadt and Ward and the theory of political development by Almond, Coleman, Pye and Verba also claimed universal relevance. These theories were claimed to be applicable across cultural and ideological boundaries and to explain political process everywhere. The development of comparative political analysis in this phase coincided with the international involvement of the United States through military alliances and foreign aid. Most study in this period was not only funded by research foundations, it was also geared to the goals of US foreign policy. The most symbolic of these were the 'Project Camelot' in Latin America and the 'Himalayan Project' in India. This period was heralded by the appearance of works like Apter's study on Ghana. Published in 1960, *Politics of Developing Areas* by Almond and Coleman, sharply defined the character of the new 'Comparative Politics Movement'. The publication of a new journal in the US entitled *Comparative Politics* in 1969 reflected the height of this trend (Mohanty, 1975). 'Developmentalism' was perhaps the dominant conceptual paradigm of this time. To a considerable extent, the interest in developmentalism emanated from US foreign policy interests in 'developing' countries, to counter the appeals of Marxism-Leninism and steer them towards a non-communist way to development (Wiarda, 1998).

Post-Behaviouralism

Advocates of behavioural revolution who wanted to bring scientific rigor in political science were disappointed that the discipline could not anticipate or study the social and political turmoil of the times: with its new environmental and feminist movements, its anti-war perspective, its civil rights concerns etc. Their efforts to reconcile two forces: making political science more rigorous, and making it more relevant led to the post-behavioural movement. David Easton's Presidential Address to the American Political Studies Associations in 1969 best captures this movement. Easton outlined the 'credo of relevance' with following seven key points which became the hallmark of post-behavioural movement.

- Substance must dominate over technique. What is studied matters more than how it is studied.
- To claim simply to study empirically politics as it exists lends itself to a conservative outlook as it tends to focus on what is rather than what might be.
- Too much sophistication in method obscures the brutal reality of much of politics and prevents political science from addressing pressing human needs.
- Science cannot be neutral: what you choose to study is driven by value judgements, and how that work is used should be steered by values.
- The role of intellectuals is to promote the 'humane values of civilization'.
- To know is to bear the responsibility to act; scientists have a special obligation to put their knowledge to work.
- This commitment to engage should be institutionalized and expressed through associations of scholars and universities. They cannot stand aside: politicization of the professions is inescapable as well as desirable.

1.3.4 The 1970s and Challenges to Developmentalism

Towards the 1970s, developmentalism came to be criticised for favouring abstract models, which flattened out differences among specific political/social/cultural systems, in order to study them within a single universalistic framework. These criticisms emphasised the 'ethnocentrism' of these models and focused on the Third World in order to work out a theory of underdevelopment. They stressed the need to concentrate on solutions to the backwardness of developing countries. Two main challenges to developmentalism which arose in the early 1970s and gained widespread attention were (a) dependency and (b) corporatism. Dependency theory criticised the dominant model of developmentalism for ignoring domestic class factors and

(b) international market and power factors in development. It was particularly critical of US foreign policy and multinational corporations and suggested, contrary to what was held true in developmentalism that the development of the already-industrialised nations and that of the developing ones could not go together. Instead, dependency theory argued, that the development of the West had come on the shoulders and at the cost of the non-West. The idea that the diffusion of capitalism promotes underdevelopment and not development in many parts of the world was embodied in Andre Gunde Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967), Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) and Malcolm Caldwell's *The Wealth of Some Nations* (1979). Marxist critics of the dependency theory, however, pointed out that the nature of exploitation through surplus extraction should not be seen simply on national lines but, as part of a more complex pattern of alliances between the metropolitan bourgeoisie of the core/centre and the indigenous bourgeoisie of the periphery/satellite as they operated in a world-wide capitalist system. The corporatist approach criticised developmentalism for its Euro-American ethnocentrism and indicated that there were alternative organic, corporatist, often authoritarian ways to organise the state and state-society relations. (Chilcote, 1994: 16)

1.3.5 The 1980s: The Return of the State

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, still reflecting the backlash against developmentalism, a number of theories and subject matters emerged into the field of comparative politics. These included bureaucratic-authoritarianism, indigenous concepts of change, transitions to democracy, the politics of *structural adjustment*, *neoliberalism* and *privatisation*. While some scholars saw these developments as undermining and breaking the unity of the field which was being dominated by developmentalism, others saw them as adding healthy diversity, providing alternative approaches and covering new subject areas. Almond, who had argued in the late 1950s that the notion of the state should be replaced by the political system, which was adaptable to scientific inquiry, and Easton, who undertook to construct the parameters and concepts of a political system, continued to argue well into the 1980s on the importance of political system as the core of political study. The state, however, received its share of attention in the sixties and seventies in the works on bureaucratic-authoritarianism in Latin America, especially in Argentina in the works of Guillermo O'Donnell e.g., *Economic Modernisation and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* (1973). Ralph Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) had also kept the interest alive. Attempts to restore the focus on the state began in the late 1970s with the publication of *State, Power, Socialism* (1978) by Nicos Poulantza and *Bringing the State Back In* (1985) by political sociologists Peter Evans, Theda Skocpol, and others.

1.3.6 The Late Twentieth century: Globalisation and Emerging Trends

Scaling down of systems: Much of the development of comparative political analysis in the period 1960s to 1980s can be seen as an ever widening range of countries being included as cases, with more variables being added to the models such as policy, ideology, governing experience, and so on. With the 1980s, however, there has been a move away from general theory to emphasis on the relevance of context. In part, this tendency reflects the renewed influence of historical inquiry in the social sciences, and especially the emergence of a 'historical sociology' which tries to understand phenomena in the very broad or 'holistic' context within which they occur (Theda Skocpol and M. Somers, 1980). There has been a shying away from models to a more in-depth understanding of particular countries and cases where more qualitative and contextualised data can be assessed and where account can be taken of specific institutional circumstances or particular political cultures. Hence, we see a new emphasis on more culturally specific studies (e.g., English speaking countries, Islamic countries), and nationally specific countries (e.g., England, India), and even institutionally specific countries (e.g., India under a specific regime). While emphasis on 'grand systems' and model building diminished, the stress on specific contexts and cultures have meant that the scale of comparisons was brought down. Comparisons at the level of 'smaller systems' or regions, however, remained e.g., the Islamic world, Latin American countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia etc.

Civil Society and Democratisation Approach (es): The disintegration of Soviet Union brought the notion of the 'end of history'. In his article "The End of History?" (1989), which was developed later into the book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), Francis Fukuyama argued that the history of ideas had ended with the recognition and triumph of liberal democracy as the 'final form of human government'. The 'end of history' thesis invoked to stress the predominance of western liberal democracy, is in a way reminiscent of the 'end of ideology' debate of the 1950s which emerged at the height of the Cold War and in the context of the decline of communism in the West. Western liberal scholars proposed that the economic advancement made in the industrialised societies of the west had resolved political problems, e.g., issues of freedom and state power, workers' rights etc., which are assumed to accompany industrialisation. The U.S. sociologist, Daniel Bell in particular, pointed in his work *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the 1950s*, (1960), that in the light of this development there was an ideological consensus, or the suspension of a need for ideological differences over issues of political practice. In the early nineties, the idea of the 'end of history' was coupled with another phenomenon of the eighties, 'globalisation'. Globalisation refers to a set of conditions, scientific, technological, economic and political, which have linked together the world in a manner so that occurrences in one part of the world are bound to affect or be affected by what is happening in another part. It may be

pointed out that in this global world the focal point or the centre around which events move world-wide is still western capitalism. In the context of the so-called triumph of capitalism, the approaches to the study of civil society and democratisation that have gained currency give importance to civil society defined in terms of protection of individual rights to enter the modern capitalist world.

There is, however, another significant trend in the approach which seeks to place questions of civil society and democratisation as its primary focus. If there are on one hand studies conforming to the contemporary interest of western capitalism seeking to develop market democracy, there are also a number of studies which take into account the resurgence of peoples 'movements seeking autonomy, right to indigenous culture, movements of tribes, dalits, lower castes, and the women's movement and the environment movement. These movements reveal a terrain of contestation where the interests of capital are in conflict with people's rights and represent the language of change and liberation in an era of global capital. Thus, concerns with issues of identity, environment, ethnicity, gender, race, etc. have provided a new dimension to comparative political analysis.

Information collection and diffusion: A significant aspect and determinant of globalisation has been the unprecedented developments in the field of information and communication technology viz., the Internet and World Wide Web. This has made the production, collection and analysis of data easier and also assured their faster and wider diffusion, worldwide. These developments have not only enhanced the availability of data, but also made possible the emergence of new issues and themes which extend beyond the confines of the nation-state. These new themes in turn form an important/influential aspect of the political environment of the contemporary globalised world. The global network of social movement organisations, the global network of activists is one such significant aspect. The diffusion of ideas of democratisation is an important outcome of such networking. The Zapatista rebellion in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas used the Internet and the global media to communicate their struggle for rights, social justice and democracy. The concern with issues regarding the promotion and protection of human rights which is dependent on the collection and dissemination of information has similarly become pertinent in the contemporary world.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) Is it possible to say that comparative politics refers only to a method of studying governments?

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- 2) The nature, field and scope of comparative politics had evolved in response to the changing socio-political concerns over different historical periods. Comment.

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1.4 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICS: UTILITY

The question of *utility* of comparative politics is concerned with its usefulness and relevance for enhancing our understanding of political reality. It seeks to know how *comparative* study helps us understand this reality. First and foremost, we must bear in mind that political behaviour is common to all human beings and manifests itself in diverse ways and under diverse social and institutional set ups all over the world. It may be said that an understanding of these related and at the same time different political behaviours and patterns is an integral part of our understanding of politics itself. A sound and comprehensive understanding would commonly take the form of comparisons.

1.4.1 Comparing for Theoretical Formulation

While comparisons form an implicit part of all our reasoning and thinking, most comparativists would argue that a comparative study of politics seeks to make comparisons consciously to arrive at conclusions which can be generalised i.e. held true for a number of cases. To be able to make such generalisations with a degree of confidence, it is not sufficient to just collect information about countries. The stress in comparative political analysis is on *theory-building* and *theory-testing* with the countries acting as units or cases. A lot of emphasis is therefore laid, and energies spent, on developing rules and standards about how comparative research should be carried out. A comparative study ensures that all generalisations are based on the observation of more than one phenomenon or observation of relationship between several phenomena. The broader the observed universe, the greater is the confidence in statements about relationship and sounder the theories.

1.4.2 Comparisons for Scientific Rigour

As will be explained in the next unit, the comparative method gives these theories scientific basis and rigor. Social scientists who emphasise scientific precision, validity and reliability, see comparisons as indispensable in the social sciences because they offer the unique opportunity of ‘control’ in the study of social phenomena. (Sartori, 1994).

1.4.3 Comparisons Leading to Explanations in Relationships

For a long time, comparative politics appeared merely to look for similarities and differences, and directed this towards classifying, dichotomising or polarising political phenomena. Comparative political analysis is however, not simply about identifying similarities and differences. The purpose of using comparisons, it is felt by several scholars, is going beyond ‘identifying similarities and differences’ or the ‘compare and contrast approach’ as it is called, to ultimately study political phenomena in a larger framework of relationships. This, it is felt, would help deepen our understanding and broaden the levels of answering and explaining political phenomena. In other words, the most significant purpose of comparative politics is not simply to be sceptical of others but to question our own system and beliefs in the light of new evidence and arguments.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What according to you is the usefulness of a comparative study of politics?

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2) What are the features that determine the nature and scope of comparative politics?

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- 3) Trace the development of Comparative Politics in the twentieth century bringing out (a) the specificities of the period before and after the Second World War; (b) developmentalism and its critique; (c) late twentieth century developments.

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

The nature and scope of comparative study of politics is related to its subject matter, its field of study, the vantage point from which the study is carried out and the purposes towards which the study is directed. These have, however, not been static and have changed over time. While the earliest studies concerned themselves with observing and classifying governments and regimes, comparative politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was concerned with studying the formal legal structures of institutions in western countries. Towards the end of the Second World War a number of ‘new nations’ emerged on the world scene having liberated themselves from colonial domination. The dominance of liberalism was challenged by the emergence of communism and the powerful presence of Soviet Union on the world scene. The concern among comparativists changed at this juncture to studying the diversity of political behaviours and processes which were thrown up, however, within a single overarching framework. This led to the use of ‘systems’ and ‘structures-functions’ frameworks to study political phenomena. These frameworks were used by western scholars particularly those in the United States to study phenomena like developmentalism, modernisation etc. While the political elite of the newly independent countries found concepts like development, nation-building and state building attractive, in many cases they evolved their own ideological stances and chose to remain non-aligned to either ideological blocs. In the late 1980s focus on studying politics comparatively within an overarching framework of ‘system’ declined and regional systemic studies assumed significance. The focus on state in these studies marked a resurgence of the study of power structures within civil society and its political forms, which had suffered a set-back with the arrival of systems and structures-functions into comparative politics. The petering out of Soviet Union in the same period, provoked western scholars to proclaim the ‘end of history’, marking the triumph of liberalism and capitalism. Globalisation of capital, a significant feature since the late nineteen eighties, that has made itself manifest in technological, economic and information linkages among the countries of the world, has also tended to influence comparativists into adopting universalistic, homogenising expressions like ‘transitions to democracy’, the ‘global market’ and ‘civil

society'. Such expressions would have us believe that there are no differences, uncertainties and contests which need to be explained in a comparative perspective. There is, however, another way to look at the phenomena and a number of scholars see the resurgence of civil society in terms of challenges to global capitalism which comes from popular movements and trade union activism throughout the world.

1.6 KEY WORDS

- Civil society** : The term has contested meanings. By and large it is understood as a part of a country's life that is neither the government nor the economy but, rather, the domain within which interest groups, political parties, and individuals interact in politically oriented ways.
- Control** : Control in scientific research is an important procedure or mechanism of regulation and checking while conducting an experiment to provide a standard set-up or condition.
- Eurocentric** : Refers to the bias (and distorted) view which emerge from the application of European idea, values, beliefs and theories, to other cultures and societies.
- Methodology** : The study of different methods of research, including the identification of research questions, the formulation of theories to explain certain events and political outcomes, and the development of research design.
- Neoliberalism** : An advanced version of classical liberalism in which political economy focused on market individualism and minimal statism.
- Normative** : The prescription of values and standards of conduct, dealing with questions pertaining to 'what should be' rather than 'what is'.
- Theory** : A theory is a set of systematically interrelated ideas, constructs or propositions intended to systematically explain a particular phenomenon, events or behavior. In social science, theories provide explanations of social behaviours, events or phenomena.

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Comparative government is the study of different governments through methods of systematic comparison. Comparative politics, on the other hand, is the study of all aspects of politics, government as well as non-governmental. The scope of comparative government is confined to the study of government alone, but the field of comparative politics is all encompassing in nature which extends to almost every aspects of political life. Therefore, comparative politics is often describes as the study of everything 'political' which encompasses state, institutions, individuals, groups, political parties, interest groups, social movements etc.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) No, it's not merely a method of studying governments, it's much broader. The scope of comparative politics encompasses a wide range of issues concerned with governance, policy formulations, political process, institutions, regimes, and so on. It is the study of everything political, which involves all sorts of political phenomena—governmental as well as non-governmental.
- 2) The subject matter, scheme and scope of comparative politics has been evolving through various historical epoch depending upon the changing socio-political context of the time. The evolution and development of comparative politics can be seen both in terms of geographical space as well as ideas and theories. Comparative politics has undergone significant developments throughout the different periods of history.

Check your Progress 3

- 1) Comparative study of politics is useful in the study of political science for many reasons. Through comparison, one can identify and explain the *difference and similarities* between different political process, institutions and phenomena involving two or more political systems. It also helps us in deepening our understanding of different political process, institutions and phenomena involving two or more countries. In a broader sense, comparative politics forms a part of our reasoning and thinking about different political systems and help us in the building of theories, scientific analysis of various political issues, problems, or phenomena.
- 2) The nature and scope of comparative study politics is determined by its specific subject matter, language, vocabulary, and the perspectives concern with the discipline of political science such as democracy, institutions, elections, constitutions, political parties, distribution of power etc.
- 3) Comparative politics as a well-defined and systematic study emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. But prior to WW II, it was highly 'Eurocentric', i.e., confined to the study of European countries like, Britain, Germany, France etc. But with the emergence of newly independent states in the post-WW II period, scholars began to study political systems of other parts of the world. In the 1990s, globalisation led to a tremendous expansion in the scope and domain of comparative study of politics.

UNIT 2 COMPARATIVE METHOD AND STRATEGIES FOR COMPARISON*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction: What is Comparison?
- 2.2 Some Thoughts on Method
- 2.3 The Comparative Method: Why Compare
 - 2.3.1 Social Scientific Research
 - 2.3.2 Integrative Thinking
- 2.4 Methods of Comparison
 - 2.4.1 Experimental Method
 - 2.4.2 Case Study
 - 2.4.3 Statistical Method
 - 2.4.4 Focused Comparisons
 - 2.4.5 Historical Method
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Some Useful Books
- 2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Comparison is a familiar exercise for all of us. Most decisions in our daily lives, whether buying fruits and vegetables from the vendor or choosing a book or an appropriate college and career, involve making comparisons. When comparison is employed, however, to study social and political phenomena, there should be something about 'comparison' as a 'method' which makes it more appropriate than other methods for the purpose. To assess this appropriateness, we first need to know what is the comparative method and how it can be distinguished from other methods, some of which also compare e.g., the experimental and statistical methods. We should also understand as to why, we should use the comparative method rather than any other method. Again, how one goes about comparing or

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planning strategies of comparison, is also important to bear in mind. In this Unit, we will take up these issues.

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

- Explain comparative method and how it differs from other methods;
- List the relative advantages and disadvantages of comparative method over other methods;
- Identify and describe the important methods of comparison;
- Describe the use of comparative method for understanding social and political phenomena; and
- Explain the significance of comparative method in the field of Comparative Politics.

2.1 INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS COMPARISON

In the previous section we noted how comparisons form part of our daily lives. None of us, however, live in a vacuum. Our daily lives are crisscrossed by numerous other lives. In so many ways our own experiences and observations of our environment get shaped and influenced by those of others. In other words, our observation of our immediate world would show that people and events are connected in a network of relationships. These relationships may be close or emotionally bound as in a family, or as the network expands in the course of our daily lives, professional (as in our place of work) or impersonal (as with our co-passengers in the bus in which we travel). These relationships or interconnectedness, however, may show a regularity, a pattern or a daily-ness, and may also themselves be regulated by norms and rules e.g. the daily route of the bus, its departure and arrival timings etc. The idea here is to show that whereas each individual might be seen as having a specific daily routine, there is at the same time a cumulative or aggregate effect, where a number of such individuals may be seen as following a similar routine. The lives of these individuals, we can say, has a pattern of regularity, which is comparable in terms of their similarity. Now, when the similarities can be clubbed together, irregularities or dissimilarities can also be easily picked out. Explanations for both similarities and dissimilarities can also be made after exploring the commonalities and variations in the conditions of their lives. In order to illustrate this, let us imagine a residential colony in which majority of the male resident leaves for work by a chartered bus at 8 AM in the morning and return at 6 PM in the evening. Some residents, however, leave at 9 AM in the morning, in their respective cars, and return at 5 PM in the evening. The residents of the colony thus form roughly two groups displaying two kinds of patterns of behaviour. Explanations for both similarities within each group and dissimilarities between the two groups can be found by comparing individual situations or conditions in each group. While explanations for similarities can be seen in the commonalities in the conditions, explanations of irregularity or dissimilarities between groups

can be explained in terms of absence of conditions which permit the similarity in one group e.g., it may be found that those who travel by bus have a lot of things in common besides going to their offices in the chartered bus such as same office, absence of personal vehicles, more or less similar positions/status in the office, location of offices on the same route etc. Those who travel by their cars, would likewise exhibit similarities of conditions within their group. The explanation for the different patterns between the groups can be seen in terms of the absence of conditions which permit similarities in the two groups e.g., the car group residents may be going to different offices which do not fall on the same bus route; they may be the only ones owning cars; their status in their offices may be higher etc. The explanations could be numerous and based also on numerous other variables like caste, gender, political beliefs etc. On the basis of this observation of similarities and dissimilarities, propositions can thus be made in terms of a causal-relationship e.g. men/women who drive to work do so because there are no chartered buses to their place of work or men/women who own private vehicles are more likely to drive to work than those who do not own vehicles or upper class women are more likely to drive to work etc. Let us move on from this simplistic example to the complex ways in which social scientists use comparisons.

2.2 SOME THOUGHTS ON METHOD

What exactly is a 'method'; and why is it so important? Method as we know from our experiences is a useful, helpful and instructive way of accomplishing something with relative ease. A piece of collapsible furniture, for example, comes with a manual guiding us through the various steps to set it up. While studying a phenomenon, method would similarly point to ways and means of doing things. We may not, however, unlike our example of the collapsible furniture, know the final shape or results of our explorations at the outset. We may not also have a precise instruction manual guiding us to the final outcome. We will simply have the parts of the furniture and tools to set it up in other words, 'concepts' and 'techniques'. These concepts (ideas, thoughts, and notions) and techniques (ways of collecting data) will have to be used in specific ways to know more about, understand or explain a particular phenomenon. Thus, it may be said, that the organisation of ways of application of specific concepts to data is 'method'. Of course, the manner of collection of data itself will have to be worked out. The concepts which are to be applied or studied will have to be thought out. All this will eventually have to be organised so that the nature of the data and the manner in which it is collected and the application of the concept is done in away that we are able to study with a degree of precision what we want to study. In a scientific inquiry much emphasis is placed on precision and exactness of the method. Social sciences, however, owing to the nature of their subject matter, have to think of methods which come close to the accuracy of scientific experiments in laboratories or other controlled conditions. A number of scholars, however, do not feel that there should be much preoccupation with the so called 'scientific research'. Whatever the beliefs of scholars in this regard,

there is nonetheless a ‘method’ in thinking, exploring and research in all studies. Several methods—comparative, historical, experimental, statistical etc.—are used by scholars for their studies. It may be pointed out that all these methods may use comparisons to varying degrees as comparative method is not the monopoly of comparative politics. It is used in all domains of knowledge to study physical, human and social phenomenon. Sociology, history, anthropology, psychology, literature, etc., use it with similar confidence. These disciplines have used the comparative method to produce studies which are referred variously as ‘cross-cultural’ (as in Anthropology and Psychology) and ‘cross-national’ (as in Political Science and Sociology) seeming thereby to emphasise different fields.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of the unit

1) What is method? Why do you think method is an important part of research?

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2.3 THE COMPARATIVE METHOD: WHY COMPARE?

2.3.1 Social-Scientific Research

The comparative method has been seen as studying similarities and differences as the basis for developing a ‘grounded theory’, testing hypotheses, inferring causality, and producing reliable generalisations. Many social scientists believe that research should be scientifically organised. The comparative method, they believe, offers them the best means to conduct ‘scientific’ research i.e., research characterised by precision, validity, reliability and verifiability and some amount of predictability. The American political scientist James Coleman, for example, often reminded his students, “You can’t be scientific if you’re not comparing”. Swanson similarly emphasised that it was ‘unthinkable’ to think of ‘scientific thought and all scientific research’ without comparisons (1971, p. 145).

Whereas, in physical sciences comparisons can be done in laboratories under carefully controlled conditions, precise experimentation in social sciences under conditions which replicate laboratory conditions is not possible. If, for example, a social scientist wishes to study the relationship between electoral systems and the number of political parties, s/he cannot instruct a government to change its electoral system nor order people to behave in a particular way to test his/her hypothesis. Nor can s/he replicate a social or political phenomenon in a

laboratory where tests can be conducted. Thus, while a social scientist may feel compelled to work in a scientific way, societal phenomena may not actually permit what is accepted as 'scientific' inquiry. S/he can, however, study 'cases' i.e., actually existing political systems and compare them i.e., chalk out a way to study their relationship as worked out in the hypothesis, draw conclusions and offer generalisations.

Thus, the comparative method, though scientifically weaker than the experimental method, is considered closest to a scientific method, offering the best possible opportunity to seek explanations of societal phenomena and offer *theoretical propositions* and generalisations. The question you might ask now is what makes comparative method, scientific. Sartori argued that the 'control function' or the system of checks, which is integral to scientific research and a necessary part of laboratory experimentation, can be achieved in social sciences only through comparisons. He goes further to propose that because the control function can be exercised only through the comparative method, comparisons are indispensable in social sciences. Because of their function of controlling/checking the validity of theoretical propositions, comparisons have the scientific value of making generalised propositions or theoretical statements explaining particular phenomena making predictions, and also what he terms 'learning from others' experiences'. In this context, it is important to point out that the nature of predictions in comparative method has a *probabilistic causality*. This means that it can state its results only in terms of likelihoods or probabilities i.e., a given set of conditions are likely to give an anticipated outcome. This is different from *deterministic causality* in scientific research which emphasises certainty i.e., a given set of conditions will produce the anticipated outcome/result.

2.3.2 Integrative Thinking

While some social scientists use the comparative method to develop a scientific inquiry, for others, however, 'thinking with comparisons' is an integral part of analysing specific social and political phenomenon. Swanson, who has argued that 'thinking without comparisons is unthinkable' is representative of this approach. He points out that "no one should be surprised that comparisons, implicit and explicit, pervade the work of social scientists and have done so from the beginning: comparisons among roles, organizations, communities, institutions, societies, and cultures" (Swanson, 1971, p. 145). Emile Durkheim, the renowned German Sociologist also affirms that the comparative method enables (sociological) research to 'cease to be purely descriptive' (Durkheim, 1984, p.139). Smelser also argued that descriptions cannot work without comparisons. He substantiates, simple descriptive words like 'densely populated' and 'democratic' presuppose a universe of situations that are more or less populated or more or less democratic and one situation can be stated/described only in relation/comparison to the other (Smelser, 1976: 3). It is this 'presupposition of a universe' in which a descriptive category can be placed, within a set of relationships, helps us to analyse it better, feel quite a number of

scholars. Manoranjan Mohanty, therefore, seeks to emphasise relationships rather than looking merely for similarities and dissimilarities among phenomena. The latter or the 'compare and contrast approach' as he calls it would ultimately become 'an exercise in dichotomization, an act of polarising'. In other words, such an exercise would lead to classification of likes in groups of isolated compartments so that a comparative exercise would become nothing more than finding similarities within groups and dissimilarities among them. For the identification of relationships of unity and opposition, one must modify one's questions. This would mean that the questions asked should not be such as to bring out answers locating merely similarities and dissimilarities but 'the relationship which exists between them'. Only then shall one be able to understand the comparability of political systems like the United States of America and the United Kingdom, for instance, which differ in their forms of government (Presidential and parliamentary forms, respectively).

The need to look for relationships rather than only indicators of similarity and dissimilarity is also asserted by Smelser. Smelser feels that often a comparative exercise ends up looking for reasons only for differences or 'dissimilarities' and gives explanations which are often 'distortions'. The fascination or preoccupation with the 'new' and the 'unique', in other words, what is seen as different from the rest, has always been part of human nature. Historically there has been a tendency to either praise these differences as 'pure' remainders of a previous age or see them as deviations from what is seen as normal behaviour. Thus, the emphasis on similarities and differences may lead to similarities or uniformities being seen as norms and dissimilarities and variations as 'deviations' from the norm. The explanations offered for such deviations might not only be 'distortions' but often lead to categorisations or classifications of categories in terms of binary oppositions, hierarchies or even in terms of the ideal (good) and deviant (bad). Often, in a system of unequal relationships, the attribution of differences and their reasons, results in the justification of the disempowerment of groups seen as different. We have seen in the history of colonialism that the colonised were deprived of freedom and the right to self-governance. The colonising nation sought to justify this deprivation by describing the subject population as being incapable of self-rule because it had different social structures and religious beliefs. The location of difference here came from the vantage point of power—that of the colonising nations. In such situations, binary oppositions like the *West* and *East* may indicate countries or people not only described as having different attributes but also separate existences even in terms of time. Thus, while the colonising British were seen as having reached a stage of modernisation, the colonised Indians were seen to exist in a state of timelessness, in other words trapped in a backward past. Historically, however, we have lived in a world which is marked by what Eric Wolf calls 'interconnections'. Thus, the appeal to look for relationships is lent weight by Eric Wolf, whose work corrects the notion that the destiny of nations has historically been shaped by European nations while the others were merely quiet spectators. Wolf shows that historically interconnections have been and continue to be a fact in the lives of

states and nations (Wolf, 1982). This means that looking for relationship is not only possible; ignoring such ‘interconnections’ will in fact be historically invalid.

Check Your Progress2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) How do comparisons help achieve the purposes of social-scientific research?

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2.4 METHODS OF COMPARISON

Scholars have used a variety of comparative methods in the study of political science. Some widely used methods of comparison are as follows:

2.4.1 Experimental Method

Although the experimental method has limited application in social sciences, it provides the model on which many comparativist aspire to base their studies. Simply put, the experimental method aims to establish a causal relationship between two conditions. In other words, the objective of the experiment is to establish that one condition leads to the other or influences the other in a particular way. If, for example, one wishes to study/explain why children differ in their ability to communicate in English in large-group setting, a number of factors may be seen as influencing this capability viz., social background, adeptness in the language, familiarity of surroundings etc. The investigator may want to study the influence of all these factors or one of them or even a combination of factors. S/he then isolates the condition/factors whose influence she wants to study and thereby make precise the role of each condition. The condition whose effect is to be measured and is manipulated by the investigator is the independent variable e.g., social background etc. The condition, upon which the influence is to be studied, is thus the dependent variable. Thus, in an experiment designed to study the effect of social background on ability to communicate, social background will be the independent variable and the ability to communicate, the dependent variable. The investigator works out a hypothesis stated in terms of a relationship between the two conditions which is tested in the experiment viz., children coming from higher socio-economic background display better ability to communicate in English in large group settings. The results of the experiment would enable the investigator to offer general

propositions regarding the applicability of her/his findings and compare them with other previous studies.

2.4.2 Case Study

A case study, as the name suggests focuses on in-depth study of a single case. In that sense, while the method itself is not strictly comparative, it provides the data (on single cases) which can become the basis of general observations. These observations may be used to make comparisons with other 'cases' and to offer general explanations. Case studies, however, may, in a disproportionate manner, emphasise 'distinctiveness' or what are called 'deviant' or unusual cases. There might be a tendency, for example, among comparativist to explore questions like why United States of America does not have a socialist party rather than to explore why Sweden along with most western democracies has one. We will study briefly Alexis de Tocqueville's classic studies of 18th century France (*The Old Regime and the French Revolution, 1856*) and 19th century United States (*Democracy in America Vol 1, 1835*) to show how comparative explanations can be made by focussing on single cases. Both his studies seem to ask different questions. In the French case, he attempts to explain why the 1789 French Revolution broke out and in the case of U.S.A. he seems to concentrate on seeking reasons for, and consequences of, conditions of social equality in the U.S.A. While both these works were spaced by more than twenty years, there is an underlying unity of theme between the two. This unity is partly due to Tocqueville's preoccupation in both with similar conceptual issues viz., equality and inequality, despotism and freedom and political stability and instability and his views on social structure and social change. Also underlying the two studies is his conviction regarding the inexorability of the Western historical transition from aristocracy to democracy, from inequality to equality. Finally, and this is what makes these individual works comparative, and according to some, a single comparative study, is the fact that in both the studies the other nation persists as an 'absent' case or referent. Thus, his analysis of the American society was influenced by his perspective on the French society and vice versa. The American case was understood as a 'pure' case of 'democracy by birth', where the social evolution towards equality had 'nearly reached its natural limits' leading to conditions of political stability, a diminished sense of relative deprivation among its large middle class and a conservative attitude towards change. The French case was an aristocracy (a system of hierarchical inequalities) which had entered a transition stage in the 18th century, with conditions of inequality mixing with expectations and desire for equality, resulting in an unstable mix of the two principles of aristocracy and equality, leading to despotism, and culminating in the revolution of 1789. Thus, Tocqueville's unique case study of individual cases was effectively a study of national contrasts and similarities within a complex model of interaction of historical forces to explain the divergent historical courses taken up by France and U.S.A.

2.4.3 Statistical Method

The statistical method uses categories and variables which are quantifiable or can be represented by numbers, e.g., voting patterns, public expenditure, political parties, voter turnout, urbanisation, population growth. It also offers unique opportunities to study the effects or relationships of a number of variables simultaneously. It has the advantage of presenting precise data in a compact and visually effective manner, so that similarities and dissimilarities are visible through numerical representation. The fact that a number of variables can be studied together also gives the unique opportunity to look for complex explanations in terms of a relationship. The use of the statistical method also helps explain and compare long term trends and patterns and offer predictions on future trends. A study, for example, of the relationship of age and political participation can be made through an analysis of statistical tables of voter turnout and age-categories. Comparison of this data over long periods, or with similar data in other countries/political systems, or with data showing voter turnout in terms of religious groups, social class and age can help us make complex generalisations, e.g., middle class, Hindu, male voters between the age of 25 and 30 are the most prolific voters. Cross national comparisons may lead to findings like, middle class women of the age group 25 to 30 are more likely to vote in western democracies than in developing countries like India. The utility of this method lies in the relative ease with which it can deal with multiple variables. It fails, however, to offer complete answers or give the complete picture. It can, however, be employed along with qualitative analysis to give more comprehensive explanations of relationships and the broad categories which the statistical method uses in order to facilitate their numerical representation.

2.4.4 Focused Comparisons

These studies take up a small number of countries, often just two (paired or binary comparisons), and concentrate frequently on particular aspects of the countries' politics rather than on all aspects. A comparative study of public policies indifferent countries has successfully been undertaken by this method. Lipset distinguishes two kinds of binary or paired comparison—the implicit and explicit. In the implicit binary comparison, the investigator's own country, as in the case of Tocqueville's study of America, may serve as the reference. Explicit paired comparisons have two clear cases (countries) for comparison. The two countries may be studied with respect to their specific aspects e.g., policy of population control in India and China or in their entirety e.g., with respect to the process of modernisation. The latter may, however, lead to a parallel study of two cases leaving little scope for a study of relationships.

2.4.5 Historical Method

The historical method can be distinguished from other methods that it looks for causal explanations which are historically sensitive. Eric Wolf emphasises that any study which seeks to understand societies and causes of human action could

not merely seek technical solutions to problems stated in technical terms. The important thing was to resort to an analytic history which searched out the causes of the present in the past. Such an analytic history could not be developed out of the study of a single culture or nation, a single culture area, or even a single continent at one period in time, but from a study of contacts, interactions and interconnections among human populations and cultures.

Historical studies have concentrated on one or more cases seeking to find causal explanations of social and political phenomena in a historical perspective. Single case studies seek, as mentioned in a previous section, to produce general statements which may be applied to other cases. Theda Skocpol points out that comparative historical studies using more than one case fall broadly into two categories, 'comparative history' and 'comparative historical analysis'. Comparative history is commonly used rather loosely to refer to any study in which two or more historical trajectories of nation-states, institutional complexes, or civilisations are juxtaposed. Some studies which fall in this genre, like Charles, Louis and Richard Tilly's *The Rebellious Century 1810-1930*, aim at drawing up a specific historical model which can be applied across different national context. Others, such as Reinhard Bendix's *Nation Building and Citizenship* and Perry Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, use comparisons primarily to bring out contrasts among nations or civilisations, conceived as isolated wholes. Skocpol herself subscribes to the second method i.e., comparative historical analysis, which aims primarily to 'develop, test, and refine causal, explanatory hypothesis about events or structures integral to macro-units such as nation-states'. This it does by taking 'selected slices of national historical trajectories as the units of comparison', to develop causal relationship about specific phenomenon (e.g. revolutions) and draw generalisations. There are two ways in which valid associations of potential causes with the phenomenon one is trying to explain can be established. These methods laid out by John Stuart Mill in his *A System of Logic* are (a) the method of Agreement and (b) the method of Difference. The method of agreement involves taking up for study several cases having in common both the phenomenon as well as the set of causal factors proposed in the hypothesis. The method of difference, which was issued by Skocpol, takes up two sets of cases: (a) the positive cases, in which the phenomenon as well as the hypothesized causal relationship are present and the (b) the negative cases, in which the phenomenon as well as the causes are absent but are otherwise similar to the first set. In her comparative analysis of the French, Russian and Chinese Revolutions, in *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Skocpol (1979) takes up the three as the positive cases of successful social revolution and argues that the three revolutions reveal similar causal patterns despite many other dissimilarities. She takes up a set of negative cases viz., the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, and selected aspects of English, Japanese and German histories to validate the arguments regarding causal relationship in the first case. Critics of the historical method feel that because the latter does not study a large number of cases, it does not offer the opportunity to study a specific phenomenon in a truly scientific

manner. Harry Eckstein for instance argues that generalisations based on small number of cases ‘may certainly be a generalization in the dictionary sense’. However, ‘a generalisation in the methodological sense’ ought to ‘cover a number of cases large enough for certain rigorous testing procedures like statistical analysis to be used (Harry Eckstein, *Internal War*, 1964).

Check Your Progress 3

Note:i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What is experimental method? How far is this method appropriate for the study of political phenomenon in a comparative framework?

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- 2) What are the different methods of comparison? What are the relative advantages of each in the study of comparative politics?

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

Comparison is a basic human endeavour. Consciously or unconsciously we keep on comparing many things around us. In the discipline of political science, using comparative methods, one can not only explain the general description or characteristics of the institutions, systems or phenomena but also provide a nuanced understanding of the political system—the patterns, similarities and differences.

In the process of using comparison as a method of political enquiry, scholars have used variety of methods such as experimental method, case-study method, statistical method, historical method, etc. These methods are the basic tools and technique employed by comparativists for establishing a scientific and in-depth explanation of political phenomena through the use of empirical data and quantifiable variables. But, it is the task of the researcher (comparativists) to identify the appropriate method for his/her enquiry. When a single method is not

sufficient, one can employ combination of methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding.

2.6 KEY WORDS

- Construct** : A construct is an abstract concept that is specifically created (or chosen) to explain a given phenomenon. A construct may be a simple concept or a combination of set of related concepts.
- Causal Explanation** : A way of understanding something by holding that some fact(s) lead to the appearance of other facts e.g., overpopulation may be the cause of housing problem.
- Method** : A standardised and organised set of techniques for building scientific knowledge or theorising. Methods can be classified into: (a) comparative (using more than one case), (b) configurative (using a single case study) and (c) historical (using time and sequence). Method is more about ‘thinking about thinking’.
- Model** : A representation of the whole or a part of system that is constructed to study the system. A model simplifies the reality by representing the system or phenomena.
- Sampling** : It is a statistical process of selecting subsets called ‘samples’ for the purpose of making observations and statistical inferences. For example, we cannot study the entire population of a country because of feasibility or constraints; therefore, we select representative samples from the population for observation and analysis so that the inference derived from the sample can be generalize to the population.
- Theoretical Propositions:** A statement (like a generalisation) confirming or denying a relationship between two variables. The statement is expected to have a general application.

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2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Method is a useful way and means of doing things or accomplishing something with relative ease. In the field of comparative politics, scholars have employed variety of methods for social and political analysis. Methods are used in generating hypotheses, conceptual innovation, and theory formulation while studying/researching political process, systems or phenomena.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Study with comparison gives enormous significance in social-scientific research. Comparativists have always argued that scientific research can be achieved in social sciences through comparisons. In the discipline of comparative politics, comparativists do not simply compare but compare in order to get an accurate and the best possible picture of political life—the patterns, similarities and differences between and among political institutions, systems or phenomena.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Experimental method is primarily used in comparative politics to establish a causal relationship between two equivalent conditions. Experimental

method enabled the researcher to establish the particular conditions or manner in which one lead to the other or influence the other. A significant aspect of experimental method is that it is the most nearly ideal method for scientific enquiry

- 2) In the study of comparative politics, a variety of methods such as the experimental method, case study method, historical method, statistical method etc. are used all aim at scientific explanations. Each has its specific advantage in different context. Experimental method is usually used to establish the relationship between two conditions, whereas, the case study method is used in the in-depth study of a particular case. On the other hand, statistical method gives certain advantages in cases which involve categories and variables which are quantifiable or can be represented by numbers of data. Another method which can be distinguished from above methods is the historical method which is primarily significant in the study that requires historical explanations.



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UNIT 3 INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH*

Structure

3.0 Objective

3.1 Introduction

3.2 The Institutional Approach

3.2.1 The Institutional Approach: A Historical Overview

3.2.2 The Institutional Approach and the Emergence of Comparative Government

3.3 Institutional Approach: a Critical Evaluation

3.4 The Institutional Approach in Contemporary Comparative Study

3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.6 Some Useful Books

3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall focus on (a) what constitutes the institutional approach (b) the significance of this approach in making comparisons (c) the units of comparisons (d) the specific questions this approach seeks to answer or, what are the questions which this approach can answer? And what are its aspirations and capacities (e) how does this approach explain differences and similarities. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Define the institutional approach.
- Explain its tools of comparison.
- Explain the purposes sought to be served by such comparisons.
- Explain the vantage point of this approach.
- Explain the importance and limitations of this approach.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The institutional approach to comparative political analysis, simply put, is a *comparative study of institutions*. The *nature* (comparative) and *subject matter* (institutions) of study are thus quite evident. If, for example, one was to study the relative significance of the upper houses in parliamentary democracies, one

*Adapted from EPS-09 Comparative Government and Politics (Unit 3)

would study the upper houses in several parliamentary democracies (e.g., the Rajya Sabha in India and the House of Lords in the United Kingdom) and assess their relative significance in each case. One could then, based on this comparative study of such institutions, arrive at a generalised conclusion and explanation about their relevance or even utility in parliamentary democracies. For example, the constitution of upper houses of parliament lacks representative character, or the hereditary character of upper houses erodes the democratic character of legislatures. One could, for example, examine the contexts (social and economic) of the evolution of the two houses of Parliament in the United Kingdom to see why the House of Lords retained a hereditary character. One could also then understand the contexts in which the current initiatives to end its hereditary character. One could also then understand the context in which the current initiatives to end its hereditary character emerged.

For a long time, comparative political analysis was associated primarily with a comparative study of institutions. Historically, the comparative method was first used to study institutions. The study of institutions not only marked the beginning of comparative study, it remained more or less the predominant approach in comparative politics up to the nineteen fifties. Thus, one can propose that traditionally comparative political analysis was confined to the study of institutions and the various ways in which these institutions manifested themselves in the distribution of power and the relationships between the various layers and organs of government.

3.2 THE INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH

It is generally agreed that any approach or enquiry into a problem displays certain characteristics pertaining to (a) *subject matter* (what is being studied) (b) *vocabulary* (the tools or the language) and (c) the choice of *political perspective* (which determines the vantage point and indicates the direction from and to what purposes enquiry is directed at). If the features of the institutional approach were considered against each of these three counts, it might be seen as marked out by (a) its concern with studying institutions of government and the nature of the distribution of power, viz., constitutions, legal-formal institutions of government, (b) its largely legalistic and frequently speculative and prescriptive/ normative vocabulary, in so far as it has historically shown a preoccupation with abstract terms and conditions like 'the ideal state' and 'good order' (c) a philosophical, historical or legalistic perspective.

A characteristic feature of this approach has also been its ethnocentrism. The major works which are seen as representing the institutional approach in comparative politics have concerned themselves only with governments and institutions in western countries. Implicit in this approach is thus a belief in the primacy of western liberal democratic institutions. This belief not only sees western liberal democracy as the best form of government, but it gives it also a 'universal' and 'normative' character. The universal character of western liberal democracy assumes that this form of government is not only the best, it is also

universally applicable. The 'normativity' of western liberal democracies follows from this assumption. If it is the best form of governance which is also universally applicable, liberal democracies are the form of government that should be adopted everywhere. This prescribed norm, i.e. liberal democracy, however, also gave scope to an important exception. This exception unfolded in the practices of rule in the colonies and in the implications: (a) that the institutions of liberal democracy were specifically western in their origin and contexts and (b) that non-western countries were not fit for democratic self-rule until they could be trained for the same under western imperialist rule.

In the following sections, we shall study the origins of the institutional approach from antiquity to the first quarter of the present century when it became a predominant approach facilitating the comparative study.

3.2.1 The Institutional Approach: A Historical Overview

Perhaps the oldest comparative study of governments was made by Aristotle who studied constitutions and practices in Greek city-states. Contrasting them with politics in the so called 'barbarian' states, Aristotle made a typology of governments distinguishing between monarchies, oligarchies and democracy, and between these 'ideal' governments and their 'perverted' forms. The study of comparative politics at this stage was marked by what may be called an *interrelation between facts and values*. At this stage of its origins, a study of institutions did not attempt to analyse the 'theory and practice' of government. There was instead an overwhelming desire to explore 'ideal' states and forms of governments. In other words, there was more emphasis on *speculations*, i.e., on questions about what 'ought' to be, rather than an analysis seeking explanations of what 'is' or what existed.

With Machiavelli (*The Prince*) in the sixteenth century and Montesquieu (*The Spirit of Laws*) in the middle of the eighteenth century, the emphasis on empirical details and facts about the existing state of affairs came to be established. Montesquieu was, however, followed mainly by constitutional lawyers, whose vocation determined that they concentrate more on the contents, i.e., the theoretical (legal-constitutional) framework of governments rather than how these frameworks unfolded in practice. Tocqueville, in many ways, was the torchbearer of the study of 'theory and practice' of governments, which became the essence of the institutional approach in the comparative political analysis in later years. (Refer to Tocqueville's studies of American and French democracies in Unit 2). Bagehot (*The English Constitution*, 1867) made another significant contribution to the development of this element of the institutional approach in his study of the British Cabinet drawing important points of comparison with the American Executive. It was, however, Bryce, Lowell and Ostrogorski, who in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, made important contributions to the comparative study of institutions and by implication to the evolution of comparative governments as a distinct branch of study.

3.2.2 The Institutional Approach and the Emergence of Comparative Government

Bryce, Lowell and Ostrogorski's work towards the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century has radically changed the contents of the institutional approach and thereby the nature and scope of comparative politics. Assessing their contributions, Jean Blondel asserts that Bryce and Lowell were, in fact, the true founders of Comparative Government as it developed as a distinct branch of study in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The *American Commonwealth* (1888) and *Modern Democracies* (1921) were two significant works of Bryce. In *Modern Democracies*, Bryce focused on the theory of democracy and examined the working of the legislatures and their decline. Lowell's works *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe* (1896) and *Public Opinion and Popular Government* (1913) where he undertakes separate studies of France, Germany, Switzerland etc. and a comparative study of referendums and its impacts respectively were equally important. Similarly, Ostrogorski's study *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (1902) which aimed to test the hypothesis, so to speak, of the 'democratic' or 'oligarchical' character of political parties was a pioneering work of the time. It is important now to see exactly how these works augmented and changed the manner in which institutions were so far being studied.

i) **Theory and Practice of governments:** We have mentioned in the earlier section that comparative study of governments tended to be philosophical-speculative or largely legal-constitutional, i.e., they were either concerned with abstract notions like the 'ideal state', or with facts regarding the legal, constitutional frameworks and structures of governments. Based on the *liberal constitutional theory* they studied the *formal institutional structures* with an emphasis on their *legal powers and functions*. The work formed part of studies on 'Comparative Government' or 'Foreign Constitutions'. These works were seen to be relevant to the elites' efforts in institutional-building in various countries. This is why in the newly independent countries; institutionalism acquired some fascination.

Bryce and Lowell, however, emphasised that the existing studies were partial and incomplete. A more comprehensive study of governments should according to them also include the working of the legal-constitutional frameworks of governments. Such a study, they stressed, required not only a study of the theoretical bases or contexts of governments (i.e. the legal-constitutional framework and governmental institutions) but also an equal emphasis on the study of 'practices of government'. To focus just on constitutions, as lawyers do, was insufficient as it would lead to ignoring the problems of their operation and implementation. On the other hand, to focus exclusively on practice, without grounding it in its theoretical (constitutional) framework, would again be an incomplete study, as one may lose sight of the contexts within which the problems of implementation emerge. It was thus, primarily with Bryce and

Lowell that the content of the institutional approach in the comparative political analysis came to be defined as a study of ‘the theory and practice of government’.

ii) **Focus on ‘facts’:** A significant component of these studies was the concern to study ‘practice’ through an analysis of ‘facts’ about the working of governments. To study practice one needs to discover, collect and even ‘amass’ facts. Bryce was emphatic in his advocacy to base one’s analysis on facts, without which, he said, ‘data is mere speculation’: “facts, facts, facts, when facts have been supplied, each of us tries to reason with them”. A major difficulty, however, which collection of data regarding practices of governments encountered was the tendency among governments to hide facts than to reveal them. Facts were thus difficult to acquire because governments and politicians often hid facts or were unwilling to clarify what the real situation is. Nonetheless, this difficulty did not deter them from stressing the importance of collecting data about almost every aspect of political life, political parties, executives, referendums, legislatures etc. This effort was sustained by later comparativists like Herman Finer (*Theory and Practice of Modern Government*, 1932) and Carl Friedrich (*Constitutional Government and Democracy*, 1932).

iii) **Technique:** The search for facts also led Bryce and Lowell towards the use of quantitative indicators, based on the realisation that in the study of government, *qualitative* and *quantitative* types of evidence have to be balanced. Finally, however, Bryce and Lowell felt that conclusions could be firm only if they were based on a wide range of facts as possible. Therefore, their studies extended geographically to many countries which, at the time, had institutions of a constitutional or near-constitutional character. They, therefore, attempted to focus their study on governments of Europe. It was, however, with Ostrogorski’s work that comparative political analysis began to focus on studying specific institutions on a comparative basis. In 1902, Ostrogorski published a detailed study of political parties in Britain and America. Later, significant works on the role of political parties were done by Robert Michels (*Political Parties*, 1915) and Maurice Duverger (*Political Parties*, 1950).

Thereafter, major criticisms of the institutional approach came in the 1950s from ‘system theorists’ like David Easton and Roy Macridis who emphasised the building of overarching models having a general/global application. They attempted to understand and explain political processes in different countries based on these models. These criticisms and the defence offered by institutionalists will be discussed in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

Note:i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the institutional approach in the study of Comparative Politics?

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2) Examine the characteristics of the institutional approach at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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3.3 INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

It is interesting that criticisms of the institutional approach in the comparative political analysis have come in successive waves, in the early part of the twentieth century and then again in the nineteen fifties. There have been after each wave of criticism a resurgence of the approach in a replenished form. Before the study of institutions acquired a comparative character (however limited) at the turn of the century, the approach was criticised: (a) as given to *speculation*; (b) as largely *prescriptive and normative*; (c) concerned only with irregularities and regularities without looking for relationships; (d) *configurative and non-comparative* focusing as it did on individual countries; (e) *ethnocentric* as it concentrated on western European 'democracies' (f) *descriptive* as it focussed on formal (constitutional and governmental) structure; (g) *historical without being analytical*; (h) contributors within this framework were so absorbed with the study of institutions that differences in cultural settings and ideological frameworks were completely ignored while comparing, say, the upper chambers of the UK and the USA (i) methodologically they were accused of being partial/ incomplete and theoretically; it was said they *missed the substance of political life*.

We noted, however, that with Bryce and his contemporaries the nature and content of the institutional approach underwent a significant change, acquiring in a limited way a comparative character, and attempting to combine theoretical contexts with practices of governments. In the nineteen fifties, the institutional approach as it developed with Bryce, Lowell and Ostrogorski, came again under increasing criticism by political scientists like David Easton and Roy Macridis. In his work *The Political System* (1953), Easton made a strong attack against Bryce's approach calling it 'mere factualism'. This approach, alleged Easton, had influenced American Political Science, in the direction of what he called 'hyperfactualism'. While admitting that Bryce did not neglect 'theories', the latter's (Bryce's) aversion to making explanatory or theoretical models, had led, asserted Easton, to a 'surfeit of facts' and consequently to 'a theoretical malnutrition'. (In the next, you will study about 'system building' as the basis of Easton's 'systems approach'. It will not, therefore, be difficult to understand why Easton felt that Bryce's approach had misdirected American Political Science

onto a wrong path.) Jean Blondel, however, defends the institutional approach from criticisms like those of Easton, directed towards its so called 'factualism'. Blondel would argue first that the charge of 'surfeit of facts' was misplaced because there were very few facts available to political scientists for a comprehensive political analysis. In reality, very little was known about the structures and activities of major institutions of most countries, particularly about the communist countries and countries of the so called Third World. The need for collecting more facts thus could not be neglected. This became all the more important given that, more often than not, governments tended to hide facts rather than transmit them. Secondly, the devaluation of the utility of facts regarding institutions and legal arrangements, by the supporters of a more global or systemic approach was, to Blondel, entirely 'misconstrued'. Institutions and the legal framework within which they functioned formed a significant part of the entire framework in which a political phenomenon could be studied. Facts about the former thus had to be compared to facts about other aspects of the political life to avoid a partial study. Facts were, in any case, needed for any effective analysis. No reasoning could be done without having 'facts' or 'data'. This coupled with the point that facts were difficult to acquire made them integral to the study of political analysis.

In 1955 Roy Macridis pointed out the need for a 'reorientation' in the comparative study of government. He emphasised that in its existing form comparative study has been 'comparative in name only'. Macridis described the orientation of institutional approach as 'non-comparative', 'parochial', 'static and monographic'. A good proportion of work was moreover, he asserted, 'essentially descriptive'. This was because the analysis was historical or legalistic and therefore 'rather narrow' (*The Study of Comparative Government*, 1955).

It was, however, realised in the 1950s, and continued to be the concern, that there remained a paucity of facts from which valid generalisations could be made. There was thus, Blondel, asserted a 'surfeit of models' rather than a 'surfeit of facts'. Blondel emphasised that building models without grounding them in facts would result in misinformation. This misinformation, given that facts about some countries were harder to come by, was likely to affect and at times reinforce preconceptions about these countries. Thus, while writing about legislatures in Latin America in 1971, W. H. Agor remarked that there was a tendency to assert that legislatures in that part of the world were very weak. Statements such as these, he said, were based on 'extremely impressionistic evidence' that is, in the absence of 'facts' consciously collected for the study. Thus, the need for collecting and devising ways of collecting facts was stressed emphatically by followers of the institutional approach. The criticisms were, however, followed by works that had a more comparative focus and included non-western countries. Further, there was also an attempt to undertake studies comparing structures not determined by legal-constitutional frameworks e.g. Giovanni Sartori's work on *Parties and Party Systems* (1976), which included in its scope in a limited way Communist countries and those of the Third World, and Francis Castles' study of

Pressure Groups and Political Culture (1967) which dealt with pressure groups in Europe, America as well as emergent nations.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the limitations of the institutional approach by Easton and Macridis?

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2) How does Blondel build up a case in defence of the institutional approach?

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3.4 THE INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH IN CONTEMPORARY COMPARATIVE STUDY

Institutionalism remained the exclusive approach in comparative politics, up to the 1950s. But as discussed in a previous section, the approach became distinctive with the works of Bryce, Lowell and Ostrogorski.

Pioneering work was done in comparative politics by Herman Finer (*Theory and Practice of Modern Governments, 1932*) and Carl Friedrich (*Constitutional Government and Democracy, 1932*). Grounded in liberal Constitutional theory, they studied the formal institutional structures with emphasis on their legal powers and functions. These works formed part of studies on ‘Comparative Government’ or ‘Foreign Constitutions’ and were considered relevant to the elites’ efforts in an institutional building in various countries. In newly independent countries, the institutional approach, appearing as it did to emphasise institution-building, acquired prominence.

The main focus of the institutional approach (i.e. its subject matter) were: (a) law and the constitution, (b) historical study of government and the state to understand how sovereignty, jurisdictions, legal and legislative instruments evolved in their different forms, (c) how the structures of government functioned (theory and practice) which included the study of distributions of power and how these manifested themselves in the relation between nation and state, central and

local government, administration and bureaucracy, legal and constitutional practices and principles.

An underlying assumption of the approach was a belief in the uniquely western character of democracy. It meant, as stated in the earlier section, that democracy was seen as not only western in its origins, but its application elsewhere was imagined and prescribed only in that form. It led to a largely west-centric study, i.e., a concentration on countries of Western Europe and North America. Blondel feels that the decline in the influence of the approach in the 1950s was in part due to its inability to accommodate in its scope of inquiry 'non-western governments' particularly the predominantly Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the newly independent countries of Asia and Latin America. Thus, an approach that prided itself on associating theory with practice found itself unable to modify its framework of inquiry to study facts that did not conform to liberal constitutional democracies. The decline of the institutional approach in the 1950s was due in part also as seen earlier, to the concerns by system theorists to building theories based on inductive generalisations, rather than conclusions derived from facts.

The behavioural revolution shifted the focus of study from political institutions or forms of government to political behaviour of individuals and groups. As many areas in political science became absorbed by the concern with the individual behaviour, comparative politics continued to focus on institution. Some of the important comparative works in the nineteen sixties and seventies were on political parties (e.g. Sartori's *Parties and Party System*, 1976; Budge and H. Keman, *Parties and Democracy*, 1990), pressure groups (Francis Castles' *Pressure Groups and Political Culture*, 1967), judiciary (G. Schubert, *Judicial Behaviour*, 1964), legislatures (M.L. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures*, 1979; A. Korneberg, *Legislatures in Comparative Perspective*, 1973; Blondel, *Comparative Legislatures*, 1973; W.H. Agor, *Latin American Legislatures*, 1971) and the military (S.E. Finer, *Man on Horseback*, 1962).

In the nineteen eighties, institutional approach resurfaced in the form which is called as **New Institutionalism**. Its revival could be traced to the growing interest on institutions among social science disciplines in the late seventies. For many, institutional factors seemed to offer better explanation of why countries pursue different responses to the common economic challenges (such as the oil crisis). At the same time, within the discipline of political science, interest in behaviouralism had begun to wane. In these circumstances, March and Olsen came out with their ground breaking work: *The New Institutionalism: Organisational Factors in Political Life* (1984) which marked the beginning of new institutionalism in political science. They argued that studying individual political behaviour without examining institutional constraints on that behaviour was giving a skewed understanding of political reality. Their call to 'bring the institutions back in' is therefore a part of the postbehavioural approach that had come to prominence.

The new institutionalism combined the interests of traditional scholars in studying formal institutional rules and structures with the focus of behavioralist

scholars on examining the actions of individual political actors. It differed from the earlier institutional approach in (a) broadening the meaning of institutions to include not only formal rules and structures but also informal conventions and coalitions that shape political conduct, (b) taking a critical look at the way in which political institutions embody values and power relationships, and (c) in rejecting the determinism of earlier approaches and accepting that while institutions may constrain individual conduct, they are also human creations which change and evolve through the agency of actors. (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p.29)

Since the nineteen ninties, new institutionalists have been using a variety of methodological approaches to understanding how norms, rules, cultures, and structures constrain and influence individuals within a political institution. While there are a number of strands of new institutionalism (see box item given below), three schools provide an alternative conception of institutions relevant for comparative politics-the normative, the rational choice approach, the historical institutionalism. Normative institutionalism which is associated with March and Olsen conceptualizes institutions as providing sets of norms and rules that shape individual behavior. The rational choice institutionalism whose mainsprings lay in the discipline of economics, sees institutions more as aggregations of incentives and disincentives that influence individual choices. Historical institutionalism, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that institutional rules, constraints, and the responses to them over the long term guide the behaviour of political actors during the policy-making process. Unlike the rational choice approach where the key question for actors is 'how do I maximise my utility in this situation', the key question from an historical institutionalist perspective is, 'what is the appropriate response to this situation given my position and responsibilities?'. We have thus, three alternative institutional approaches on the question of how individuals and structures interact in producing collective choices for the society.

New institutionalism can be seen as having these characteristics: (a) new institutionalism, as the term suggests, retained its focus on the study of theory and practice of institutions, though they differ on the extent to which institutions matter. Without providing an overarching framework within which the institutions may be said to function (as in structural-functional approach) they focus on the way the institutions interrelate and how individuals interact with and within institutions. (b) While refraining from making overarching frameworks, they did not, however, avoid making generalised conclusions. The preoccupation with the collection of facts also did not diminish. In striving for this combination, i.e., an adherence to fact-based study aimed towards making generalised conclusions, however, the institutional approach, was careful: (i) to 'draw conclusions only after careful fact-finding efforts have taken place' and, (ii) to make a prudent use of induction so that one kept close to these facts even when generalising (Blondel, 1999. p.160). The thrust of the approach, has by and large been on what is called 'middle-range analysis' where facts about specific institutions are collected to cover a broader area offering greater scope for

comparison. These facts are, however, analysed without offering inductive models.

Different strands of New Institutionalism

- *Normative institutionalists* study how the norms and values embodied in political institutions shape the behaviour of individuals.
- *Rational choice institutionalists* argue that political institutions are systems of rules and inducements within which individuals attempt to maximize their utilities.
- *Historical institutionalists* look at how choices made about the institutional design of government systems influence the future decision making of individuals.
- *Empirical institutionalists*, who most closely resemble the 'traditional' approach, classify different institutional types and analyse their practical impact upon government performance.
- *International institutionalists* show that the behaviour of states is steered by the structural constraints (formal and informal) of international political life.
- *Sociological institutionalists* study the way in which institutions create meaning for individuals, providing important theoretical building blocks for normative institutionalism within political science.
- *Network institutionalists* show how regularized, but often informal, patterns of interaction between individuals and groups shape political behaviour.
- *Constructivist or discursive institutionalism* sees institutions as shaping behaviour through frames of meaning – the ideas and narratives that are used to explain, deliberate or legitimize political action. 'Post-structuralist institutionalists' go further in arguing that institutions actually construct political subjectivities and identities.
- *Feminist institutionalism* studies how gender norms operate within institutions and how institutional processes construct and maintain gendered power dynamics.

- (Lowndes, Vivien and Mark Roberts, 2013, p.31)

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

1) How does new institutionalism seek to bridge the gap between behavioural and institutional scholarship?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

The institutional approach in its various forms has been an important constituent of comparative political analysis. The study of institutions of governance was at the core of political analysis be it the explorations of the ideal state of Plato's *Republic* or the typology of States proposed by Aristotle in his *Politics*. In the classical and early modern forms, the institutional approach was more philosophical and speculative, concerned with ideal typical states and prescribing the norms of ideal governance. With Montesquieu and his successors, the preoccupation of the approach with legal-constitutional frameworks or structures of democracies became entrenched. The belief in institutions of liberal constitutional democracies, however, did not translate into a study of the way the structures of governance functioned. Often, at least until the end of the nineteenth century, the intricacies of the legal-constitutional structures or the theoretical framework of governance continued to seize the attention of political scientists and legal experts. So far, thus the approach could be said to have been characterised by a preoccupation with constitutions and legal-formal institutions of government and normative values of liberal democracy. This approach was also propagated by colonial regimes to popularise European liberal values in the erstwhile colonies. The works of the institutionalists were also extremely relevant to the elite's efforts in institution building in various countries.

It was, however, only by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that scholars like Bryce, Lowell and Ostrogorski broke new grounds in the study of institutions (a) by combining the study of the theoretical-legal-constitutional framework with facts about their functioning and, (b) giving the study a comparative flavour by including into their works the study of institutions in other countries. Thus, the approach, by the first quarter of the twentieth century, could be said to have acquired a limited comparative character and rigour. In the

nineteen fifties, however, the approach came under attack from system theorists like Easton and Macridis. The latter criticised the approach for (a) overemphasising facts (b) lacking theoretical formulations which could be applied generally to institutions in other countries and (c) lacking a comparative character. These theorists on their part preferred to build 'holistic' or 'global' models or systems which could explain the functioning of institutions in countries all over the world. An important criticism levelled against the practitioners of the institutional approach was their 'western centric' approach, i.e., their failure to take up for study institutions in the countries of the Third World, and communist countries of Eastern Europe. The failure to study these countries emanated in effect from the normative framework of this approach which could accommodate only the theoretical paradigms of western liberal-constitutional democracies. The lack of tools to understand the institutions in other countries of the developing and the communist worlds resulted in a temporary waning of the influence of this approach. It resurfaced, however, in the nineteen eighties, in a form which while retaining its emphasis on facts, did not shy away from making generalised theoretical statements. The new institutionalism uses a variety of methodological approaches to understanding how norms, rules, cultures, and structures constrain and influence individuals within a political institution.

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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The approach is based on the study of various institutions in comparison with each other. This compares similarities and differences in the composition and

functions of similar institutions e.g. executive, legislature etc. and tries to draw conclusions.

2) Comparison of similar institutions; the context of their origin, development and working; drawing conclusions; making suggestions for changes or improvements based on conclusions.

Check Your Progress 2

1) See section 3.3

2) Blonde pointed out the limitations of structural-functional approach and as yet lack of sufficient information about the institutions. He also emphasised the importance of institutions and legal frameworks.

Check Your Progress 3

1) New Institutionalism seeks to study individual behaviour embedded in institutions thus bridging the gap between the traditional and the behavioural approaches.



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UNIT 4 SYSTEMS APPROACH*

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Systems Approach

4.2.1 Geneses of the Systems Approach

4.2.3 Historical Context

4.3 General Systems Theory and Systems Theory

4.3.1 General Systems and Systems Approaches: Distinctions

4.3.2 Systems Analysis: Characteristic Features

4.3.3 Systems Approaches: Concerns and Objectives

4.4 Derivatives of the Systems Analysis

4.4.1 Political System Derivative: Input-Output Derivative

4.4.2 Structural-Functional Derivative

4.4.3 Cybernetics Derivative

4.5 Systems Theory: An Evaluation

4.5.1 Limitations of the Systems Approach

4.5.2 Strength of the Systems Approach

4.6 Let Us Sum Up

4.7 References

4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with one of the modern approaches in the study of Comparative Government and Politics, the Systems approach. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the meanings and evolution of systems approach;
- Defined a system
- explain the objectives, characteristics and elements of systems approach;
- distinguish the political system from other social systems;
- Evaluate the systems theory in its proper perspective.

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the study of Comparative Politics, political scientists adopt various approaches and methods for explaining political phenomena. The approaches used in comparative political enquiry can be broadly classified under two categories; the traditional approach and the modern approach. Traditional approaches are mainly concerned with the traditional view of politics which emphasised on the study of formal political institutions, structures or agencies existing in different political systems such as the judiciary, legislature, bureaucracy, political parties, pressure groups or any other institution which is constantly engaged in politics. Proponents of traditional approach comprise both ancient and modern political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, James Bryce, Bentley, Walter Bagehot, Harold Laski etc. There are various other traditional approaches to the study of politics which includes philosophical (advocated by Plato, Aristotle etc.), historical (Machiavelli, Sabine, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, etc.), legalistic (Cicero, Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, John Austin, etc.) and institutional approaches.

However, traditional approaches have their inherent weakness and limitations. They are also normative and idealistic in the sense that their analysis stressed more on values and norms of politics. Traditional approaches are also considered to be narrow since their analysis and descriptions are primarily confined to the study of western political institutions and systems.

But, despite their limitations, these approaches largely remain popular till the mid-twentieth. It was in this backdrop, various modern approaches to the study of politics were developed aiming to remove the inherent weakness of traditional approaches. These modern approaches, which may include behavioural approach, post-behavioural approach, systems approach, structural-functional approach, communication approach, etc., seek to present scientific, realistic, and analytical perspectives of politics. In this regard, the development of modern approaches is said to have brought a revolutionary change in the study of comparative politics which was, according to Almond and Powell, directed towards; (a) the search for more comprehensive scope, (b) the search for realism, (c) the search for precision, (d) the search for the theoretical order.

In the previous unit, you have studied the use of a very old and important traditional approach of political enquiry called the 'institutional approach' which emphasised on the study of formal political institutions and agencies of the government and the state. In this unit, an attempt shall be made to study, review and examine a popular modern approach to the study of comparative politics called the 'systems approach', also called the systems analysis, which seeks to take the study of politics beyond the formal institutions and structures, and look into other aspects of politics such as functions, processes and behaviours. The unit will deal with the evolution, historical context, characteristics, strengths and weaknesses and various other aspects of systems approach.

4.2 SYSTEMS APPROACH

The Systems approach is the study of inter-related variables forming one system, a unit, a whole which is composed of many facts, a set of elements standing in interaction. This approach assumes that the system consists of discernible, regular and internally consistent patterns, each interacting with another, and giving, on the whole, the picture of a self-regulating order. It is, thus, the study of a set of interactions occurring within and yet analytically distinct from, the larger system. The systems theory presumes:

- the existence of a whole on its own merit;
- the whole consisting of parts;
- the whole existing apart from the other wholes;
- each whole influencing the other and in turn, being influenced itself;
- the parts of the whole are not only inter-related but also interact with one another thereby creating a self-evolving work.

The emphasis of the systems theory is on the articulation of the system and of its components and their behaviours by means of which it maintains itself over time.

4.2.1 Genesis of the Systems Approach

The genesis of systems approach can be traced to the German biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy who introduced the general systems theory in the study of Biology in the 1930s. A system, as defined by Bertalanffy is a set of 'elements formulating in interaction'. This concept is based on the idea that elements within a group are in some way or the other related to one another and in turn, interact with one another on the basis of certain identifiable processes. It was from this general systems theory that the social scientists took the idea and applied it as an important tool for explaining social phenomena in the post-Second World War period. Since the 1960s, systems theory or systems analysis became an important element in the study of political science. David Easton was among the first political scientists to formulate systems approach in political analysis. In his book *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (1965), Easton defined a political system as that 'behaviour or set of interactions through which authoritative allocations are made and implemented for society'. Applying systems approach in political science, he argued that 'each part of the political canvas does not stand alone but is related to other parts' and that 'the operation of one part cannot be fully understood without reference to how the whole system operates'. Other prominent scholars who advocated for a systems approach in political analysis are Gabriel Almond (*Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, 1978), David Apter (*Introduction to Political Analysis*, 1978), Karl Deutsch (*Nation and World: Contemporary Political Science*, 1967), Morton Kaplan (*System and Process in International Politics*, 1957), Harold Lasswell (*Power and Society*, 1950) etc.

4.2.3 Historical Context

The systems approach, like any other modern approach, has evolved in a historical perspective. As the traditional approaches to the study of comparative politics proved futile, the need to understand it in a scientific manner became more important. The influence of other disciplines, both natural and social sciences and their mutual inter dependence gave a new impetus for looking out these disciplines, comparative politics including, afresh and brought to the fore the idea that scientific analysis is the only way to understand politics. The study of political systems became, as times passed on, more important than the study of Constitutions and governments, the study of political processes came to be regarded more instructive, than the study of political institutions. The post-second World War period witnessed, in the USA particularly, a fundamental shift in the writings of numerous American scholars when they began to borrow a lot from other social and natural sciences so as to give new empirical orientation to political studies which helped ultimately to examine numerous concepts, out in the process enriched their findings. The Social Science Research Council (USA) contributed a lot to provide an environment in which scientific analysis in comparative politics could be carried on. Some other American foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Carnegie Foundation provided liberal funds for studies in comparative politics. Thus, it was possible to introduce new approaches, new definitions, and new research tools in comparative politics. All this led to what may be conveniently termed as revolution in the discipline: a revolution of sorts in the definition of its mission, problems and methods' (See Michael Rush and Philip Althoff, An Introduction to Political Sociology).

The introduction of the systems analysis, like other modern approaches, in comparative politics by writers like Easton, Almond, and Kaplan was, in fact, a reaction against the traditional tendency of uni-dimensionalisation, impeding, in the process, the patterns of scientific analysis which make possible the unification of all knowledge. The systems approach is one of the modern approaches that help to understand political activity and political behaviour more clearly than before. It looks at the social phenomenon as a set of interactive relationships. So considered, the systems analysis covers not only the science of politics but also virtually all social sciences.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. The emphasis of the systems approach is on :

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2. State briefly the inherent weakness of the traditional approaches.

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4.3 GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY AND SYSTEMS THEORY

4.3.1 Distinctions between General Systems and Systems Approaches

The systems analysis may have sprung from the general systems theory, but the two are different in many respects. To identify the systems theory with the general systems theory amounts to committing the philosophical error of the first order. While the general systems theory gives the impression of a system as one which is as integrated as the parts of the human body, the systems theory does recognise the separate existence of parts. What it means is that the general systems theory advocates organised unity of the system whereas the systems theory speaks of unity in diversity. That is one reason that the general systems theory has been rarely applied to the analysis of potential and social phenomena while the systems theory has been applied successfully in political analysis. David Easton, for example, has applied the systems theory to politics. Professor Kaplan has brought out the distinction between the general systems theory and the systems theory. He says, "... systems theory is not a general theory of all systems. Although general systems theory does attempt to distinguish different types of systems and to establish a framework within which similarities between systems can be recognised despite differences of subject matter, different kinds of systems require different theories for explanatory purposes. Systems theory not only represents a step away from the general theory approach but also explains why such efforts are likely to fail. Thus the correct application of systems theory to politics would involve a move away from general theory toward comparative theory". Furthermore, it has not been possible to make use of the concepts of general systems theory in social sciences such as political science while the systems theory has been able to provide concepts (such as input-output, stability, equilibrium, feedback) which have been well recognized by the empirical political scientists.

4.3.2 Systems Analysis: Characteristic Features

Systems analysis implies system as a set of interactions. According to O.R. Young, it is "a set of objects, together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes". To say that a system exists is to say that it exists through

its elements, say objects; and its elements (objects) are interacted and they interact within a patterned frame. A system's analyst perceives inter-related and a web-like objects and looks for ever-existing relationships among them. O.R. Young has advocated for an interactive relationship among the objectives. His main concerns are i) to emphasise the patterned behaviour among the objects of the system, ii) to explain the interactive behaviour among them, iii) to search for factors that help maintain the system.

Systems analysis elaborates, for understanding the system itself, a set of concepts. These include system, sub-system, environment, input, output, conversion process feedback, etc. System implies persisting relationships, demonstrating behavioural patterns, among its numerous parts, say objects or entities. A system that constitutes an element of a larger system is called a **sub-system**. The setting within which a system occurs or works is called **environment**. The line that separates the system from its environment is known as **boundary**. The system obtains inputs from the environment in the form of demands upon the system and supports for its functioning. As the system operates, inputs are subjected to what may be called conversion process and it leads to system outputs embodying rules to be forced or policies to be implemented. When system outputs affect the environment so to change or modify inputs, feedback occurs.

The systems approach, therefore, has characteristics of its own that may be summed up as;

- a social phenomenon does not exist in isolation, but numerous parts joined together to make a whole. It is a unit, a living unit with existence and goal of its own.
- Its parts may not be and, are not organically related together, but they do make a whole in the sense that they interact and are inter-related. Specific behavioural relationships pattern them into a living system.
- It operates through a mechanism of inputs and outputs and under/ within an environment which influences it and which, in turn, provides feedback to the environment.
- Its main concern is as to how best it maintains itself and faces the challenges of decay and decline.
- It implies patterned relationships among its numerous parts, explaining their relative behaviour and role they are expected to perform.

4.3.3 Systems Approaches: Concerns and Objectives

Systems analysis is concerned with certain objectives. One of its major concerns is the 'maintenance of the system's integrity' which is, according to Welsh, depends on the system's ability to maintain order. The system evolves a 'regularized procedures' by which resources in the society are distributed so that

members in the system are sufficiently satisfied to protect the system from chaos and collapse.

The second concern of the systems approach is that to how the system meets the challenge of change in its environment. Welsh argued that since changes in the environment are natural, it is natural for the environment to affect the system and that the system has to adapt itself to the realities the environmental changes. The systems approach identifies the conflict between systems necessity of responding to the changes and the already engineered changes as provided by the environment, and also the capacities to remove the conflict.

The third objective of the systems approach is the importance it gives to the 'goal-realisation' as the central aspect of the system. No system can exist over a substantial period without articulating, determining and pursuing some specific identifiable goals. According to Welsh, the pursuance of these goals is an important focus in the systems approach.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below .for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of this unit.

1) Identify the main differences between the General Systems Theory and the Systems Theory.

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2) State two characteristic features of the Systems Approach.

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4.4 DERIVATIVES OF THE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

4.4.1 Political System Derivative: Input-Output Derivative

Political system or the input-output approach is one derivative of the systems analysis introduced by David Easton. He provided 'an original set of concepts for arranging at the level of theory and interpreting political phenomena in a new and helpful way' (Davies and Lewis: *Models of Political Systems*). Easton selects the

political system as the basic unit of analysis and concentrates on the intra-system behaviour of various systems. He defines political system as ‘those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated and implemented for a society’. It would be useful to highlight some of the characteristic features of Easton’s concept of the political system which can be briefly put as:

- Political system implies a set of interaction through which values are authoritatively allocated. This means the decisions of those, who are in power, are binding.
- Political system is a system of regularised persistent patterns of relationships among the people and institutions within it.
- Political system like any natural system is a self-regulating system which can alter, correct, or adjust its processes and structures by itself.
- Political system is dynamic in the sense that it can maintain itself through the feedback mechanism. The feedback mechanism helps the system to persist through everything else associated it may change, even radically
- Political system is different from other systems of environments physical, biological, social, economic, ecological, etc.
- Inputs through demands and supports put the political system at work while outputs through policies and decisions throw back what is not accepted as feedback.

O.R. Young sums up the essentials of Easton's political system, saying: “Above all, the political system is seen as a conversion process performing work, producing output and altering its environment, with a continuous exchange between a political system and its environment based on the steady operation of the dynamic processes. At the same time, the systems approach provides numerous concepts for dealing both with political dynamics in the form of systematic adaptation processes and even with purposive redirection in the form of goal-changing feedback”.

However, Easton’s political system approach has not been free from criticisms. For instance, Professor S.P. Verma regards it as an abstraction whose relation to empirical politics (which is classic) is impossible to establish. Eugene Meehan also said that Easton does less to explain the theory and more to create the conceptual framework. His analysis, it may be pointed out, is confined to the question of locating and distributing power in the political system. He seems to be concerned more with questions such as persistence and adaptation of the political system as also with the regulation of stress, stability and equilibrium and thus advocates only the status quo situation. Therefore, there is much less in Easton's formulation, about the politics of decline, disruption and breakdown in the political system. Despite all claims that the political system approach is designed for macro-level studies, Easton’s analysis has largely focused on western countries. Easton’s political system of the input-output model also deals

only with the present and has, therefore, no perspective of the future and has less study of the past.

However, the merits of the input-output or political system approach cannot be ignored. It has provided an excellent technique for comparative analysis by introducing a set of concepts and categories that have made the comparative analysis more instructive. Easton's analysis is among the most inclusive systematic approach of political analysis. It also laid the foundation for systems analysis in political science which provided a general functional theory of politics.

4.4.2 Structural-Functional Derivative

The structural-functional analysis adopted by Gabriel Almond is another derivative of the systems approach widely adopted in political science, especially in comparative politics. It is primarily concerned with the phenomenon of system maintenance and regulation. The basic theoretical proposition of this approach is that all systems exist to perform functions through their structures. The basic assumptions of the structural-functional derivative of the systems approach are:

- society is a single inter-connected system in which each of its elements performs a specific function and whose basic goal is the maintenance of the equilibrium;
- Society consists of its numerous parts which are inter-related;
- The dominant tendency of the social system is towards stability which is maintained by its in-built mechanism;
- System's ability to resolve internal conflicts is usually an admitted fact;
- Changes in the system are natural, but they are neither sudden nor revolutionary but are always gradual and adaptive as well as adjustive;
- System has its own structure, aims, principles and functions.

The structural-functional derivative speaks of the political system as composed of several structures as patterns of action and resultant institutions with their assigned functions. A function, in this context, means 'purposes served with respect to the maintenance or perpetuation of the system', and a structure means 'any set of related roles, including such concrete organisational structures as political parties and legislatures. The structural-functional analysis, therefore, involves the identification of a set of requisite or at least recurring functions in the kind of system under investigation. It attempts to determine the kinds of structures and their interrelations through which those functions are performed.

Gabriel Almond's *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, 1960, summed up structural-functional analysis as the legitimate patterns of human interactions by which order is maintained; all political structures perform their respective functions, with different degrees in different political systems. The Input functions include:

- a) political socialisation and recruitment;
- b) interest articulation;
- c) interest aggregation;
- d) political communication;

Whereas, the output functions consist of:

- a) rule-making;
- b) rule-application;
- c) Rule-adjudication.

Gabriel Almond, while considering politics as the integrative and adaptive functions of a society based on more or less legitimate physical coercion, regards political system as “*the system of interactions* to be found in all independent societies which *perform the functions* of integration and adaptation by means of the employment or threat of employment of more or less legitimate order-maintaining or transforming system in the society”. He argued that there is interdependence between political and other societal systems; that political structures perform the same functions in all systems; that all political structures are multi-functional; and that all systems adapt to their environment when political structures behave dysfunctionally.

Thus there is a basic difference between Easton’s input-output model and Almond’s structural-functional approach. While Easton emphasised on interaction and interrelationship aspects of the parts of the political system, Almond is more concerned with the political structures and the functions performed by them. And this is perhaps the first weakness of the structural-functional analysis which talks about the functions of the structures and ignores the interactions which are characteristics of the numerous structures as parts of the political system.

Almond’s model suffers from being an analysis at the micro-level, for it explains the western political system, or to be more specific, the American political system. There is undue importance on the input aspect, and much less on the output aspect in his explanation of the political system, giving, in the process, the feedback mechanism only a passing reference. Like Easton, Almond too has emerged as status-quoist, for he too emphasised on the maintenance of the system. While commenting on Almond’s insistence on separating the two terms – ‘structures’ and ‘functions’, Sartori said, ‘the structural-functional analysis is a lame scholar that claims to walk on two feet, but actually on one foot and a bad foot at that’. He cannot visualise the interplay between ‘structure’ and ‘function’ because the two terms are seldom, if ever, neatly disjointed, the structure remains throughout a kin brother of its inputted functional purposes”.

And yet, the merit of the structural-functional model cannot be grossly ignored. It has successfully introduced new conceptual tools in political science, especially in comparative politics. It has also offered new insights into political realities. And that is one reason that this model has been widely adopted, and is being used as a descriptive and ordering framework.

4.4.3 Cybernetics Derivative

Another important derivative of the systems analysis is the ‘communication approach’ which Karl Deutsch called as ‘Cybernetics’. Cybernetics, as defined by Deutsch is the *science of communication and control*. It focuses on the systematic study of communication and control in organisations of all kinds. The idea of Cybernetics suggests that ‘all organisations are alike in certain fundamental ways and that every organisation is held together by communication. Deutsch’s Cybernetics approach viewed ‘governments’ as organisations where information-processes are communicated through channels. Information, according to Cybernetics, is a patterned relationship between events; communication means the transfer of such patterned relations; and channels are the paths through which information is transferred. Deutsch rightly says that his book *The Nerves of Government* (1966) deals less with the bones or muscles of the body politic and more with its nerves...its channels of communication. The political system, according to Deutsch, is nothing but a system of decision-making and enforcement, as a network of communication channels.

Drawing largely from the science of neurophysiology, psychology and electrical engineering, Deutsch perceived the similarities in processes and functional requirements between living things, electronic machines and social organisations. According to him, organizations in the society have the capacity to transmit and react to information (Davies and Lewis, *Models of Political Systems*, 1971).

The characteristic features of the cybernetics model of the systems analysis can be, briefly, stated as under:

- Feedback constitutes a key concept in the cybernetics model. It is also called a servo-mechanism. By feedback, Deutsch means a communications network that produces action in response to an input information;
- All organisations, including a political system, are characterised by feedback mechanisms. It is feedback that introduces dynamism into what may be otherwise a static analysis.

Thus Deutsch’s model of Cybernetics deals with *communication, control* and *channels* against Easton's input-output model of interactions and Almond’s structural-functional analysis of *structures* and their *functions*. All these seek to explain the functioning of the system – its ability to adapt itself amidst changes and its capacity to maintain itself over time.

However, Deutsch’s Cybernetics model has numerous drawbacks: it is essentially an engineering approach which explains the performance of human beings and living institutions as if they are machines. The cybernetics is also ‘quantity-oriented’ rather than ‘quality-oriented’ which makes the understanding of political phenomena complex. But, as a derivative of the systems approach, cybernetics contributed its bit in explaining political phenomena concerning

human behaviour. In this sense, cybernetics model has indeed expanded our effort in understanding the political system.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of this unit.

1) Give the three characteristic features of Easton's input-output model.

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2) What are the limitations of Deutsch's cybernetics theory?

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4.5 SYSTEMS THEORY: AN EVALUATION

The introduction of systems approaches in political studies provides a broader and better understanding of not only the political activities, behaviours, process of a given political system but also politics at large. This is so because the systems approach takes into account the political phenomena as one unit, a system in itself, not merely the sum-total of its various parts, but all parts standing in interaction- with one another.

The systems theorists have drawn much from biology and other natural sciences and have equated the organic system with social system. Indeed, there are similarities between the two systems, but analogies are only and always analogies. Any attempt to extend the argument amounts to falsification. To relate a hand to human body is not when we relate an individual to the society or a legislature to the executive organ of the government. The systems theorists have only built an extended form of organic theory which the individualists had once argued.

All the systems theorists have committed themselves to building and maintaining the system. Their concern has been only to explain the system as it exists. What they have, additionally, done is to state the causes which endanger its existence and factors which can strengthen it. They are, at best, the status-quoists who have little knowledge about past and perhaps no concern for the future. All the

concepts that systems theorists have developed do not go beyond the explanation and understanding of the present. The entire approach is rooted in conservation and reaction. (Verma, 1966).

The systems theorists, in Political Science or in the field of Comparative Government and Politics, have substituted political system in place of the state by arguing that the term political system explains much more than the term state. Indeed, the point is wide and clear. But when these theorists come to highlight the characteristics of political system, they do not say more than the political power or force with which the conventional word 'state' has been usually associated.

What the systems analysts have done is that they have condemned the traditionalists for having made the political analysis descriptive, static and non-comparative. What they have, instead, done is that they have introduced the numerous concepts from both natural and other social sciences in Political Science or Comparative Politics so as to make the discipline more interdisciplinary. The claim that the systems theorists have evolved a scientific and empirical discipline is too tall.

4.5.2 Strength of the Systems Approach

If the idea behind the systems approach is to explain the concept of system as a key to understand the social web, the efforts of the systems theorists have not gone waste. It is important to note that the influence of the systems analysis has been so pervasive that most comparative politics research makers use of the systems concepts. It is also important to state that the systems approach has well addressed and well-directed itself to numerous meaningful questions – questions such as the relationships of systems to their environment, the persistence of the system itself and overtime, stability of the system, function assigned to the structures as parts of the system, dynamics and machines of the system.

Professor S.N. Ray has summed up the merits of the systems theory very aptly, saying that, 'it (the system theory) gives us an excellent opportunity for fusing micro-analytical studies with macro-analytical ones. The concepts developed by this theory open up new questions and create new dimensions for investigation into the political processes. It often facilitates the communication of insights and ways of looking at things from other disciplines. It may be regarded as one of the most ambitious attempts to construct a theoretical framework from within political sciences.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Systems approach is one of the modern approaches adopted in the study of Political Science, especially in Comparative Governments and Politics. It viewed the political system as a set of interactions, interrelations, patterned behaviour among the individuals and institutions, a set of structures performing their

respective functions and one that seeks to achieve certain goal and attempts to maintain itself amidst vicissitudes.

The systems approach though claims to provide a dynamic analysis of the system, remains confined to its maintenance. It claims to have undertaken an empirical research, but has failed to provide enough conceptual tools for investigation. It has not been able to project system, particularly political system more than the state. The approach is, more or less, conservative in so far as it is status-quoist.

Yet the systems approach is unique in many respects. It has provided a wider scope in understanding and analysing social behaviour and social interactions. It has drawn a lot from natural sciences and has very successfully used their concepts in social sciences. It has been able to provide a degree of methodological sophistication to the discipline of political science.

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4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. The systems approach primary emphasized on (a) on the articulation of the system (b) on the articulation of the components of the system (c) on the behaviour by means of which the system is able to maintain itself.
2. The traditional approaches are largely historical and descriptive. They are also normative and idealistic. They lack explanatory power.

Check Your Progress 2

1. The General Systems Theory has been rarely applied to the social sciences while the systems theory has been successfully applied (b) The General Systems Theory, developed as it is from natural sciences (biology particularly) treats the systems as more or less organically integrated from within while the systems theory lays emphasis on the interactions aspect of the elements of the system.
2. The characteristics of systems approach are; (a) it viewed social phenomena as a unit (b) it regarded the system as a set of interactions of various elements.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Easton's input-output provided an excellent technique for comparative politics. Its significance is that it has provided a set of concepts and categories which has helped in comprehending the system more clearly.
2. Its engineering approach equating individuals and society with machines. Moreover, its concern with quantity rather than quality of communication poses a challenge to understanding political phenomena.

UNIT 5 POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Development as Modernisation
- 5.3 Development as Underdevelopment and Dependency
- 5.4 World-System Analysis
- 5.5 Articulation of Modes of Production Approach
- 5.6 Class Analysis and Political Regimes
- 5.7 State Centred Approach
- 5.8 Globalisation and Neo-Liberal Approach
- 5.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.10 Key Words
- 5.11 Some Useful Books
- 5.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The political economy approach to the study of comparative politics affirms that there exists a relationship between politics and economics and that this relationship works and makes itself manifest in several ways. This approach provides the clue to the study of relationships between and explanations of social and political phenomena. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the various attributes of political economy as a concept;
- explain how the concept has become relevant for the study of comparative politics; and
- trace the evolution of the political economy approach and
- identify the different theoretical strands within the political economy approach formed the basis of studying relationships between countries and social and political phenomena over the past years.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Political economy refers to a specific way of understanding social and political phenomena whereby, economics and politics are not seen as separate domains. It is premised (a) on a relationship between the two and (b) the assumption that this relationship unfolds in multifarious ways. These assumptions constitute

*Adapted from EPS-09 Comparative Government and Politics (Unit 5).

important explanatory and analytical frameworks within which social and political phenomena can be studied. Having said this, it is important to point out that whereas the concept of political economy points at a relationship, there is no single meaning which can be attributed to the concept. The specific meaning the concept assumes depends on the theoretical, ideological tradition. e.g., liberal or Marxist, within which it is placed, and depending on this positioning, the specific manner in which economics and politics themselves are understood.

Interestingly, the appearance of economics and politics as separate domains is itself a modern phenomenon. From the time of Aristotle till the middle ages, the concept of economics as a self-regulating separate sphere was unknown. The word 'economy' signified in Greek 'the art of household management'. As the political evolution in Greece followed the sequence: household- village- city-state, the study of the management of the household came under the study of 'politics', and Aristotle considered economic questions in his *Politics*. Among the classical political economist, Adam Smith considered political economy as 'a branch of the science of statesman or legislator'. As far as the Marxist position is concerned, Marx (1818-1883) himself, generally spoke not of 'political economy' as such but of the 'critique of political economy', where the expression was used mainly with reference to the classical writers. Marx never defined political economy, but Engels did. Political economy, according to the latter, studies 'the laws governing the production and exchange of the material means of subsistence' (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*). The Soviet economic theorist and historian Issac Illich Rubin suggested the following definition of political economy: 'Political economy deals with human working activity, not from the standpoint of its technical methods and instruments of labour, but the standpoint of its social form. It deals with production relations which are established among people in the process of production' (1928). In this definition, political economy is not the study of prices or scarce resources, it is rather, a study of culture seeking answers to the questions, why the productive forces of society develop within a particular social form, why the machining process unfolds within the context of business enterprise, and why industrialisation takes the form of capitalist development. Political economy, in short, asks how the working activity of people is regulated in a specific, historical form of economy.

In the years after decolonisation set in, the understanding of relationships between nations, and specific political and social phenomena, was informed by various approaches, viz., institution, political sociology and political economy. These were geared primarily towards examining how social values were transmitted and also the structures through which resources were distributed. All these would eventually form the bases or standards along which different, countries and cultures could be classified on a hierarchical scale of development, and could be seen as moving along a trajectory of development and change. Several theories were advanced as frameworks within which this change could be understood. Among these was the modernisation theory, which emerged in the historical context of the end of Japanese and European empires and the beginning of the Cold war.

5.2 MODERNISATION THEORY: DEVELOPMENT AS MODERNISATION

The theory of modernisation was an attempt by First world scholars to explain the social reality of the 'new states' of the Third world. This theory is based upon separation or dualism between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies. The distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies was derived from Max Weber via Talcott Parsons. A society in which most relationships were 'particularistic' rather than 'universalistic' (e.g. based on ties to particular people, such as kin, rather than on general criteria designating whole classes of persons) in which birth ('ascription') rather than 'achievement' was the general ground for holding a job or an office; in which feelings rather than objectivity governed relationships of all sorts (the distinctions between 'affectivity' and 'neutrality'); and in which roles were not separated - for instance, the royal household was also the state apparatus ('role diffuseness' vs. 'role specificity'), was called 'traditional'. Other features generally seen as characteristic of traditional societies included things like a low level of division of labour, dependence on agriculture, low rates of growth of production, predominance of local networks of exchange and restricted administrative competence. A 'modern' society, on the other hand, is seen as displaying the opposite features. Modern society was defined as a social system based on achievement, universalism and individualism, as a world of social mobility, equal opportunity, the rule of law and individual freedom. Following this 'opposition' of the two categories, 'modernisation' referred to the process of transition from traditional to modern principles of social organisation. This process of transition was not only seen as actually occurring in the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, but also seen as the goal these countries had set for themselves to achieve. In other words, the purpose of modernisation theory was to explain and promote the transition from traditional to modern society.

Modernisation theory argued that this transition should be regarded as a processor traditional societies 'catching up' with the modern world. The theory of modernisation was most clearly elaborated in the writings of W.W. Rostow (*The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, 1960), who argued that there were five stages of development through which all societies passed. These were: (i) the traditional stage; (ii) the preconditions for take-off; (iii) take-off; (iv) the drive toward maturity and (v) high mass consumption. Third World societies were regarded as traditional, and so needed to develop to the second stage, and thus establish the preconditions for take-off. Rostow described these preconditions as the development of trade, the beginnings of rational, scientific ideas, and the emergence of an elite that invests rather than squanders its wealth. The theory argued that this process could be speeded up by the encouragement and diffusion of Western investment and ideas. Scholars in this tradition also argued that industrialisation would promote Western ideas of individualism, equality of opportunity and shared values, which in turn would reduce social unrest and class conflict.

As we have mentioned earlier, modernisation theory developed in the context of the Cold War and at times it is unclear whether (a) modernisation theory was an analytical or prescriptive device, (b) whether modernisation was occurring or whether it should occur, and (c) whether the motives of those promoting modernisation was to relieve poverty or to provide a bulwark against communism? The two factors are connected, but the subtitle of Rostow's book – ‘*A Non-Communist Manifesto*’ - suggests that the latter may have been considered more important than the former.

To conclude, we can say that modernisation theory was based on an evolutionary model of development, whereby all nation-states passed through broadly similar stages of development. In the context of the post-War world, it was considered imperative that the modern West should help to promote the transition to modernity in the traditional Third World.

5.3 DEVELOPMENT AS UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND DEPENDENCY

Dependency theory arose in the late 1950s as an extended critique of the modernisation perspective. This school of thought is mainly associated with the work of Andre Gunder Frank, but the influence of Paul Baran's (*The Political Economy of Growth*, 1957) work is also very important. Baran argued that the economic relationships that existed between western Europe (and later Japan and the United States) and the rest of the world were based on conflict and exploitation. The former took part in ‘outright plunder or in plunder, thinly veiled as trade, seizing and removing tremendous wealth from the place of their penetration’ (Baran 1957: p.141-2). The result was the transfer of wealth from the latter to the former.

In the 1960s, Frank examined Third World countries at close hand, and criticised the dualist thesis (of the modernisation school), which isolated ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ states, and argued that the two were closely linked (*Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution?* 1969). He applied his critique to both modernisation theory and orthodox Marxism, replacing their dualism by a theory that argued that the world has been capitalist since the Sixteenth century, with all sectors drawn into the world system based on production for the market. The ties of dominance and dependence, Frank argues, run in a chain-like fashion throughout the global capitalist system, with metropolises appropriating surplus from satellites, their towns removing surplus from the hinterland and likewise.

Frank's central argument is that the creation of 'First' world (advanced capitalist societies) and the 'Third' world (satellites) is a result of the same process (worldwide capitalist expansion). According to the dependency perspective, the contemporary developed capitalist countries (metropolises) were never underdeveloped as the Third world (satellites) but were rather undeveloped.

Underdevelopment, instead of being caused by the peculiar socio-economic structures of the Third World countries, is the historical product of the relations (relations of imperialism and colonialism) which have obtained between

underdeveloped satellites and developed metropolises. In short, development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin, two poles of the same process—metropolitan capitalist development on a world scale creates the ‘development of underdevelopment’ in the Third World. According to Frank, Latin America’s most backward areas (e.g., north-eastern Brazil) were precisely those areas which had once been most strongly linked to the metropole. Institutions such as plantations and *haciendas* (Spanish landed estates), regardless of their internal appearance, have since the conquest been capitalist forms of production linked to the metropolitan market. Economic development, according to Frank, was experienced in Latin America only in those times when the metropolitan linkages were weakened—the Napoleonic wars, the depression of the 1930s and the two World Wars of the Twentieth century—and it came to an end precisely as the metropolises recovered from these disruptions and recovered their links to the Third World.

Dependency theory was indeed a powerful advance over modernisation theory, but it suffered from peculiar weaknesses of its own. First of all, it suffered from a certain historical character, viewing change within the Third World countries as an outcome of its undifferentiated dependent status. As Colin Leys put it, dependency theory “...concentrates on what happens to the underdeveloped countries at the hand of imperialism and colonialism, rather than on the total historical process involved, including the various forms of struggle against imperialism and colonialism which grow out of the conditions of underdevelopment” (*The Underdevelopment of Kenya*, 1975, p.20). Secondly, dependency theory tends to be economistic. Social classes, states and politics appear as derivatives of economic forces and mechanisms and often receive very little attention. Classes, class projects and class struggles appear neither as the prime movers of historical change nor the prime foci of analytic attention. Thirdly, critics have alleged that the concept of development is obscure in dependency theory. Given that it is frequently argued that ‘development’ occurs in the Third World when the metropolitan-satellite linkages are weakened, does ‘development’ imply autarchy? Since ‘development’ is an attribute of capitalist development in the metropolises, is the debate in the ultimate analysis again about the Third World’s ability to replicate this path? Finally, the assumptions of the dependency theory fail to provide explanations for the various so-called ‘economic miracles’ of the Third World. Thus, while marking an advance beyond the myths of modernisation, dependency theory did not fully escape its imprint. While modernisation theory argued that ‘diffusion’ brought growth, dependency theory would seem to argue in a similar vein that dependence brought stagnation.

5.4 WORLD SYSTEM ANALYSIS

Immanuel Wallerstein further developed the idea of the world capitalist economy in his ‘world-system analysis’. Wallerstein argued that the expansion of Europe starting in the Sixteenth century signalled the end of pre-capitalist modes of production in those areas of the Third World incorporated within the world

capitalist market. According to this theory, dualism or feudalism does not exist in the Third World. The modern world-system is unitary in that it is synonymous with the capitalist mode of production, yet disparate in that it is divided into tiers - core, semi-periphery, and periphery - which play functionally specific roles within the system as a whole. World-system theory places a new emphasis on the multilateral relations of the system as a whole (core-core and periphery-periphery relations become important to the analysis as do core-periphery ones), rather than on the unilateral relations of the system of metropole and satellite characteristic of dependency theory.

Wallerstein's basic argument was that the creation of the world capitalist economy in the Sixteenth century led to a new period of history, based on expanded accumulation rather than stagnant consumption. This was attributable to the emergence of three key factors: i) an expansion of the geographical size of the world in question (through incorporation), (ii) the development of variegated methods of labour control for different products and different zones of the world economy (specialisation) and (iii) the creation of relatively strong state machineries in what would be the core states of this capitalist world economy (to assure the transfer of surplus to the core).

In the formation of the world economy, core areas emerge as countries where the bourgeoisie got stronger and landlords weaker. The important relationship that determines whether a country is to be a core or part of the periphery is dependent on the strength of its state. According to Wallerstein, those countries that could achieve the process of 'statism', i.e., the concentration of power in the central authority, became the core countries of the world economy. On the other hand, the strength of the state machineries is explained 'in terms of the structural role a country plays in the world economy at that moment of time'. A strong state enables the country as an entity to get a disproportionate share of the surplus of the entire world economy. The stability of the world capitalist system is maintained due to three factors: (i) the concentration of military strength in the hands of the dominant forces, (ii) pervasiveness of an ideological commitment to the system as a whole, and (iii) the division of the majority into a large lower stratum and a smaller middle stratum. The existence of the semi-periphery means that the upper strata (core) are not faced with the unified opposition of all others because the middle stratum (semi-periphery) is both the exploited and the exploiter. The semi-periphery, however, also constitutes a site for change. New core states can emerge from the semi-periphery, and it is a destination for the declining ones.

Although the world-systems theory has been advanced further by several thinkers like Oliver Cox, Samir Amin and Giovanni Arrighi, it has been widely criticised for its primary focus on the 'system imperative'. Thus, in this theory, all events, processes, group-identities, class and state projects are explained by reference to the system as a whole. Such a reference point implies that all the above-mentioned actors are seen as embedded within the system so much so that they do not act in their immediate concrete interests but always in accordance with the

prescriptions or dictates of the system. Critics have also pointed out that the theory explains the contemporary capitalist world inadequately, since it focuses attention on the market, failing to take into account the processes of production.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What are the core features of the modernisation theory?

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2. From the above analysis, can you work out the lines along which Wallerstein criticised the modernisation theory?

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5.5 ARTICULATION OF MODES OF PRODUCTION APPROACH

From the late 1960s, an attempt was made to resurrect a certain variant of the Marxian approach to the transition process in the Third world in which mode of production was the determining concept. Theorists belonging to this school of development argued that Third world social formations encompass several modes of production and that capitalism both dominates and articulates with pre-capitalist modes of production.

These theorists made a distinction between social formation and mode of production. Social formation refers to a combination of economic, political and ideological practices or 'levels'. Mode of production refers to the economic level that determines which of the different levels is dominant in the 'structured totality' that constitutes the social formation. The economic level sets limits on the other levels, that carry out functions which necessarily reproduce the (economic) mode of production. These non-economic levels, therefore, enjoy only a relative autonomy from the mode of production. The mode of production

or 'economic' level is in turn, defined by its 'relations of production', i.e., the direct relation between the immediate producer of the surplus and its immediate appropriator. Each couplet, slave-master, serf-lord, free labourer-capitalist define a separate mode.

The mode of production perspective takes as its point of departure the production of the surplus product and is able, therefore, to move to an explanation of the division of the world between core and periphery based on the modes of production rather than trade relations. The core, therefore, coincides with the capitalist regions of the world, which are largely based on free wage labour. The periphery, on the other hand, was incorporated into the world economy based on free relations of production (that is, non-capitalist modes of production), which prevented an unprecedented accumulation of capital. Unequal trade relations were therefore a reflection of unequal relations of production. It is for these reasons that the 'advanced' capitalist countries were able to dominate other areas of the world where non-capitalist modes of production existed.

On the face of it, the mode of production perspective appears to constitute at least a partial return to the sectoral (modern and traditional) analysis of modernization theory. The crucial difference, however, is that unlike dualist interpretations, the emphasis here is on the interrelatedness of modes of production. It is argued that the capitalist expansion of the West in the Sixteenth century, encountered pre-capitalist modes of production in the Third World which it did not or could not transform or obliterate, but rather which it simultaneously conserved or destroyed. The relationship between the capitalist mode of production and the pre-capitalist modes of production, however, has not remained static and capitalist relations of production have emerged in the periphery. Capitalism in the periphery is of a specific kind, one that is qualitatively different from its form in core countries. The marked feature of capitalism in the periphery is its combination with non-capitalist modes of production - in other words, capitalism coexists, or 'articulates', with non-capitalist modes. Non-capitalist production may be restructured by imperialist (that is, 'core-capitalist') penetration but it is also subordinated by its very 'conservation'. The mode of production theory is, however, weakened by a functionalist methodological approach. This is because the theory explains social change as a product of the necessary logic of capitalism. This results in circular reasoning. If pre-capitalist modes of production survive then that is evidence of its functionality for capitalism and if pre-capitalist modes broke down then, that too is evidence of capitalism's functional requirement. This approach has also been criticised because it subordinates human agency to structure, and assumes that social phenomena are explained by their functionality for capitalism, rather than by actions and struggles of human beings themselves.

5.6 CLASS ANALYSIS AND POLITICAL REGIMES

In the early 1970s, yet another approach to explaining the socio-political changes taking place in the Third World countries emerged from Marxist scholars.

Prominent contributions came from Colin Leys (*Underdevelopment in Kenya*, 1975) and James Petras (*Critical Perspectives on Imperialism and Social Classes in the Third World*, 1978) who explained the transition process in the developing world not in terms of world imperatives or articulation of modes of production, but in terms of classes as the prime movers of history. The focus here is not on development, i.e., growth, versus stagnation. The key question which surfaces in Petras and Leys work is: development for whom? Petras differs from the 'external' relations of world-system analysis and the 'internal' relations of modes of production analysis. The salient feature of Third World societies, according to him, is precisely the manner in which external and internal class structure cross one another and the various combinations of class symbiosis, and interlock. Capitalist expansion on the world scale has engendered the existence of collaborative strata in the Third World which not only orient production outwardly but also exploit internally. Decolonisation gave these strata access to the instrumentality of the indigenous state and the choice of several developmental strategies based on different internal and external class alliances. To explain different patterns of development strategies, Petras examines (a) the conditions under which accumulation takes place, which includes: (i) the nature of the state (and state policy), (ii) class relations (the process of surplus extraction, intensity of exploitation, level of class struggle, the concentration of workforce), and (b) the impact of capital accumulation on class structure, which includes understanding: (i) class formation/conversion (small proprietors to proletarians or kulaks, landlords to merchants, merchant to industrialist etc., (ii) income distribution (concentration, redistribution, reconcentration of income), and (iii) social relations: labour market relations ('free' wage, trade union bargaining), semi-coercive (market and political/social controls), coercive (slave, debt peonage).

Broadly speaking, Petras suggests that post-independence national regimes in the developing world can choose among three strategies or types of class alliances for capital accumulation. First, there is the neo-colonial strategy wherein the national regime participates with the core bourgeoisie in exploiting the indigenous labour force. Wealth and power under the neo-colonial regime are concentrated in the hands of foreign capital. Secondly, the national regime may undertake a national development strategy based on the exploitation of the indigenous labour force and the limitation or elimination of the share going to imperial firms. In terms of the pattern of income distribution, the major share goes to the intermediate strata (in the form of the governing elite of the periphery). Thirdly, the regime may ally with the indigenous labour force, nationalise foreign or even indigenous enterprise, redistribute income, and generally undertake a national populist strategy as against core capital. Income distribution is more diversified, spreading downward. Although we cannot go into the details over here, Petras has much to say about the interrelations among these strategies and the role of the imperial state in shoring up neo-colonial regimes and undermining the others.

5.7 STATE CENTRED APPROACH

In the field of comparative political economy, a backlash took place against developmentalism in the late 1960s and the early 1970s when the concept of state and power was revived. The contributions to the theory of state came primarily from the Marxist scholarship. In Marx, Engels and Lenin the concept of state is premised on its relationship with the existing class divisions in society. It is the nature of this relationship, however, which has remained a matter of debate among Marxists. One tradition, prevalent in the United States of America, emanated from community studies that identified power along the lines of position and reputation, is associated with works of G.W. Domhoff (*Who Rules America?* 1967; *The Powers That Be*, 1979). Domhoff's main thesis is that there not only exists an upper class (corporate bourgeoisie) in the USA but also that this class, is a governing class. Domhoff's contributions have been seen as a part of instrumentalist tradition within Marxism in which state is seen as an instrument of the ruling or dominant class. This perspective is guided by Marx and Engels's concern expressed in *The Communist Manifesto* that the executive of the state "is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". A careful reading of Domhoff's works, however, suggests that he does not subscribe to the instrumentalist viewpoint and the state in the USA is seen as representing the interests of the corporate class while at the same time opposing the interests of individual capitals or fractions of the business elite.

A second tradition revolved around what has been described as the structuralist view of the state and is found in the writings of French Marxists, notably Nicos Poulantzas. Poulantzas in his early work (*Political Power and Social Classes*,) argued that functions of the state in capitalism are broadly determined by the structures of the society rather than by the people who occupy positions of the state. The state operates in a 'relatively autonomous' manner to counteract the combined threats of working-class unity and capitalist disunity to reproduce capitalist structure. Poulantzas in his later work (*State, Power and Socialism*, 1980) argues that the capitalist state itself is an arena of class conflict and that whereas the state is shaped by social-class relations, it is also contested and is, therefore, the product of class struggle within the state. Politics is not simply the organisation of class power through the state by the dominant capitalist class, and the use of that power to manipulate and repress subordinate groups, it is also the site, of organised conflict by mass social movements to influence state policies and gain control of state apparatuses.

An interesting debate on the state theory in the West figured in the pages of *New Left Review* in 1969-70, in the form of an exchange between Ralph Miliband and Poulantzas. As Poulantzas's view has already been discussed above, we shall briefly examine now the contribution of Ralph Miliband. The debate in *New Left Review* centred around Miliband's book *The State in Capitalist Society: An Analysis of the Western System of Power* (1969) in which he argued that while the state may act in Marxist terms, on behalf of the ruling class, it does not act at its behest. The state is a class state, but it must have a high degree of autonomy

and independence if it is to act as a class state. The key argument in Miliband's work is that the state may act in the interests of capitalist, but not always at their command.

While the above-mentioned debates focussed primarily on the nature of the state in Western capitalist societies, a lively contribution to the debate on the nature of the state in the developing world followed. Hamza Alavi (*The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh*, 1972) characterises the post-colonial state in Pakistan and Bangladesh as 'overdeveloped' (as it was the creation of metropolitan powers lacking indigenous support) which remained relatively autonomous from the dominant classes. The state-controlled by 'bureaucratic-military oligarchy' mediates between the competing interests of three propertied classes, namely the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landed classes, while at the same time acting on behalf of them all to preserve the social order in which their interests are embedded, namely the institution of private property and the capitalist mode as the dominant mode of production.

This theme of relative autonomy was later taken by Pranab Bardhan (*The Political Economy of Development*, 1986) in his analysis of the Indian state, where the state is relatively autonomous of the dominant coalition constituted by capitalist, landlords and professionals. State, however, in Bardhan's formulation remains a prominent actor which exercises 'choice in goal formulation, agenda-setting and policy execution'. The idea of the overdeveloped post-colonial state and the concept of relative autonomy in the context of the relationship between state and class in the context of African societies was carried in the work of John Saul (*The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Tanzania*, 1974). Another perspective came in the work of Issa G. Shivji (*Class Struggle in Tanzania*, 1976), who argued that the personnel of the state apparatus themselves emerge as the dominant class as they develop a specific class interest of their own and transform themselves into 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie'.

The debate on the nature and role of the state have continued in journals like *Review of African Political Economy*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Latin American Perspective* and the annual volumes of *Socialist Register* in light of changes taking place in the forms of economy, social classes and political forces.

5.8 GLOBALISATION AND NEO-LIBERAL APPROACH

In the context of globalisation, the 'neoliberal' modernisation approach has emerged as a dominant paradigm giving explanations for and prescribing remedies for underdevelopment in peripheral states. The neoliberal paradigm proposes that the underdevelopment of peripheral states of the Third World is primarily because of the failure of state-led development strategies particularly import-substitution industrialisation. It believes that these countries can, however, develop and obtain a competitive advantage in an open world economy

by rolling back state-control. At the heart of the neoliberal perspective lies the notion of 'separation' or dichotomy between the state and the market. The paradigm limits the role of the state to providing 'enabling' conditions of 'good governance' in which market forces can flourish unhindered. This enabling role involves the preservation of law and order, the guarantee of private property and contract, and the provision of 'public goods'. Criticising this assumption of a natural dichotomy between the state and market, Ray Kiely (*Sociology and Development: The Impasse and Beyond*, 1995) points out that the separation between the two cannot be taken as natural but historically and socially constituted. The appearance of separate political and economic spaces, he points out, is unique to the capitalist social relations which emerged in England and cannot, therefore, be generalised to the rest of 'advanced' capitalist world or the developing world.

International institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have, however, proceeded to implement this ahistorical neoliberal model onto the developing world, with its accompanying prescriptions regarding structural adjustment and 'good governance'. The World Bank, for example, asserts that the economic problems of the developing world can be attributed to 'too much government' and a subsequent failure of market forces to operate freely. The proposed remedy is, therefore, the encouragement of the private sector and the liberalisation of 'national economies'. To achieve these objectives, three key policy proposals are recommended: (i) currency devaluation, (ii) limited government and incentives to the private sector and, (iii) the liberalisation of international trade. These structural adjustment programmes, however, overlook the socio-economic realities of specific countries and the role played by the state in providing social justice. The withdrawal of the state from this role, to unfetter market forces, means that the state is no longer expected to play a role in balancing unequal resources. This then leads to an increase in the vulnerability of the weaker sections, particularly women and /of the working class, deepening already existing hierarchies within countries.

Similarly, the notion of 'good governance' within the neoliberal agenda of international aid-giving institutions, as providing the enabling conditions within which market forces can flourish, has been viewed with scepticism. Kiley, for example, points out that the World Bank's explanations of the failure of structural adjustment programmes in Sub Saharan Africa, as lack of good governance, fails to specify how 'public accountability', 'pluralism' and the 'rule of law', all of which are cited by the World Bank (*Governance and Development, World Development*, 1992) as important constituents of good governance, can be achieved without the participation of the lower classes of society. The concept of good governance within the neoliberal agenda envisages a condition where democracy and freedom are seen as antagonistic. Freedom involves the preservation of private property, free market, and provision of negative freedoms like the right to speech, associate and move freely, conditions, in other words, which preserve the market economy. Democracy, on the other hand, is seen with suspicion, as belonging to the political realm where demands for participation

and distribution of resources are made. The latter, it is feared may endanger the freedoms essential for the strength of the economic realm. The prioritisation of freedom over democracy, as prescribed by the neoliberal paradigm, fails thus to meet the developmental needs of the people.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What is meant by mode of production? What is the nature of socio-economic, reality in the Third world according to the articulation of mode of production theory?

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2. What are the key elements of the neo-liberal approach?

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5.9 LET US SUM UP

The political economy approach emerged in the wake of decolonisation to understand and explain the relationship between nations and socio-political phenomena. At the basis of this approach was the assumption of a relationship between the domains of politics and economics. The modernisation, underdevelopment and dependency, world systems, articulation of the modes of production, class analysis, state-centred analysis and the neoliberal analysis are dominant among the various explanatory frameworks which have emerged in the last few decades. While the analytical tools of all these frameworks have varied, almost all have ‘development’ as their key problem. In the process of exploring this problem within a comparative perspective, they have inevitably seen the world in terms of a hierarchised whole. They do, however, provide important insights into the intricacies of economic forces and the manner in a symbiosis of economy and polity works within and in connection with external forces.

5.10 KEYWORDS

Class State: A state that works to protect the interests of a particular class. In Marxian terminology, it is used to describe the present liberal states as protecting the interests of the capitalist class.

Mode of Production: It refers to the way goods are produced and distributed in a society. It consists of two major aspects: the forces of production and the relations of production. The forces of production include all of the elements that are brought together in production—from land, raw material, and fuel to human skill and labour to machinery, tools, and factories. The relations of production include relationships among people and people's relationships to the forces of production through which decisions are made about what to do with the results.

Structural Adjustments: Reforms in Economics like currency devaluation, incentives to private sector, liberalisation of international trade etc.

5.11 REFERENCES

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5.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. It is based on based on an evolutionary model of development; whereby traditional societies pass through different stages of development. These stages of development are broadly similar to all nation-states. In the context of the post-War world, it was considered imperative that the modern West should help to promote the transition to modernity in the traditional Third World.
2. Since Wallerstein focussed on world system, he criticises modernisation theory for its focus on the nation state as the only unit of analysis as the role

of transnational structures which constrain local and national development are disregarded. He also rejects the core assumption of the modernisation theory that there is only a single path of evolutionary development for all countries.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Mode of Production means how in a society goods are produced and distributed. It also refers to the economic level which determines which of the different levels is dominant in the structured totality that constitutes the social formation. In the developing countries generally pre-capitalist mode coexists with the capitalist mode of production.
2. Neo-liberal approach is based on the study and evaluation of concepts like good governance, structural adjustments, withdrawal of the State, globalisation etc.



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