

**COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT
AND POLITICS**

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THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY



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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Comparative Government and Politics is an important sub-field of the discipline of political science. While the nature and scope of comparative politics has undergone change over a period, one political scientist has remarked that ‘everything that politics studies, comparative politics studies; the latter just undertakes the study with an explicit comparative methodology in mind’ (Mahler 2000, p. 3). Well, almost ‘everything’. Comparative politics studies all political phenomena occurring within countries, states, societies, or political systems. The study of political phenomena between countries or states is another sub-field of political science, International Relations. The distinction between Comparative Politics and International Politics is captured in the titles of two well-known books- Joseph La Palombara’s *Politics within Nations* and Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics among Nations*. However, as you will discover in this course, it is not always easy to draw a neat distinction between Comparative Politics and International Politics.

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.

Being an introductory course on Comparative Government and Politics, this course will touch upon some key issues, methodologies and areas of comparative analysis in the study of government and politics. It will begin with approaches and methods in comparative politics and then proceed to examine how comparativists have classified, described and explained political regimes, governments, institutions (political parties, pressure groups and electoral systems) and the origin and functioning of states. 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

INTRODUCTION

Comparison is probably one of the oldest and the most widely used methods of acquiring scientific knowledge about any phenomena. This method has been used since the time of Aristotle who made the first recorded attempt to describe in detail the characteristics of the political system by comparing different regimes and governments of his time. Thereafter, a number of thinkers and philosophers in different periods, such as Roman philosophers like Cicero, Polybius; Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, etc. and many others in the nineteenth century such as Alex de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Walter Bagehot, etc. have used comparative methodology as a convenient and significant means to arrive at comprehensive and holistic understanding about political activities. With 'comparison' as a method of political enquiry gaining wider acceptance in the nineteenth century, comparative politics emerged as a major subfield of study within the discipline of political science.

As in other areas of intellectual endeavour, there has been no consensus among those who study comparative politics concerning the subject matter. In particular, comparativists have found themselves pulled between two poles: that of the area-specialist and that of the social scientist. The two units in this block attempt to explain the subject matter as well as the theoretical and methodological foundations of comparative politics as a means of political analysis. **Unit 1** is devoted to the evolution, development, nature, scope and significance of comparative politics. It will also introduce you to the key concepts, constructs and other attributes associated with comparative politics. **Unit 2** focuses on the operational aspects like methods, tools and methodological techniques used in the study of comparative politics.

UNIT 1 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS - NATURE, SCOPE AND UTILITY*

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 us to be theoretically and methodologically informed about comparative study of politics. In this unit 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. The primary goal of comparative politics 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 disciplines as well e.g., Psychology, Sociology, Economics etc., it is the substance of comparative politics—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 late twentieth century viz, *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 going beyond identifying similarities and differences or the compare and contrast approach, 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?

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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. In its earliest incarnation, the comparative study of politics comes to us in the form of studies done by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. 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., he 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) and 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. A number of them evolved their own specific path of development akin to the socialist, as in the case of *Ujamaa* 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's *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 of 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. With Nicos Poulantzas's *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), and political sociologists Peter Evans, Theda Skocpol, and others *Bringing the State Back In* (1985), focus was sought to be restored onto the state.

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 into currency 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 of the late nineteen eighties, which continues and makes 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 do not in fact remain 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 METHODS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS*

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

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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

Before we begin studying the comparative method, let us first see what exactly a 'method' is; and why it is considered 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 (Swanson, 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*, 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 Benedix'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

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| 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 generalized 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.