

BEHAVIOURALISM

Partly as a reaction against the traditional approaches and partly in search of more “scientific knowledge” about politics, political scientists have in recent times come out with a variety of approaches, the first breakthrough came with the emergence of “Behaviouralism” in Political Science.

Behaviouralism is one of the most significant modern approaches to the study of political science. Behaviouralism is an approach in political science which seeks to provide an objective, quantified approach in explaining and predicting political behaviour. Its emergence in politics coincides with the rise of the behavioural social sciences that were given shape after the natural sciences. Behaviouralism is mainly concerned in examining the behaviour, actions, and acts of individuals rather than the characteristics of institutions such as legislature, executive, and judiciary. Behaviouralism seeks a systematic inquiry of political behaviour.

Behaviouralism is a movement in political science which insists on analysing only observable behaviour of political actors. The main contention of the behaviouralism is that the techniques, tools and methods of science can be used to understand, interpret, explain and predict political phenomena, events and occurrences. Behaviouralism is also an exercise in ensuring a value-free study of the discipline of politics. It is usually argued that by the proponents of behavioural approach that political science should be studied in manner similar to the study of natural sciences. In this context, the supporters of behavioural approach insist that the main role of a political scientist is to collect and analyse factual data in an objective manner.

Origin and Evolution:

Though it is generally held that behaviouralism or political behaviour or behaviouralism in politics is the product of Second World War, its true origin can be traced further back to the First World War with the publication in 1908 of the works of two political scientists, Graham Wallas (Human Nature in Politics) and

Arthur Bentley (The Process of Government). However, behaviouralism as an approach in political science emerged in the 1930s in the United States as a result of dissatisfaction of the then existing approaches; therefore it represents a sharp break of previous political science approaches. This is because it emphasized an objective, quantified approach to explain and predict political behavior. Following the Second World War through until the 1960s, behavioralism was a source of controversy. It was the site of discussion between traditionalist and new emerging approaches to political science. The origins of behavioralism is often attributed to the work of University of Chicago professor Charles Merriam, who emphasized the importance of examining political behavior of individuals and groups rather than only considering how they abide by legal or formal rules. Prior to the 'behavioralist revolution', political science was primarily qualitative and normative, and it lacked a scientific method necessary to be deemed a science. Behaviorists thus used strict methodology and empirical research to validate their study as a social science. The behavioralist approach was innovative because it changed the attitude of the purpose of inquiry. It moved toward research that was supported by verifiable facts. David Easton, one of the most important proponents of behaviouralism states that "Behavioural research seeks to elevate the actual human being (individuals) to the centre of attention or the centre of analysis. Its premise is that the traditionalists have been focusing on institutions and virtually looking at individuals as entities apart from the components". The behavioural approach is an attempt to improve understanding of political science using systematic method with emphasis on empirical data, so that political process could be interpreted scientifically. Behaviouralist adopt a science oriented approach in studying political science and try to favor an interdisciplinary approach in analyzing and predicting political phenomena.

According to David Easton, there are seven assumptions to behaviouralism.(The Intellectual Foundations of Behaviouralism

1. Regularities: It means that though individuals behave differently under different circumstances there are certain observable uniformities in the political behaviour of the individuals. In other words, in a particular situation the political behavior of

individual may be more or less similar (people uniformly react to certain circumstances). These regularities (uniform observable behaviour) can be observed and general conclusions can be framed which can further be expressed in generalization or theories in order to explain and predict political phenomena. The behaviouralists assert that regularities of behavior can help the researcher to analyze a political situation as well as to predict the future political phenomena. Study of such regularities makes political science more scientific with some predictive value.

2. Verification: Second assumption is that generalisations drawn by observing regularities should be verified and tested. The behaviouralists do not accept everything as granted. Therefore, they emphasize testing and verifying everything. According to them what cannot be verified is not scientific.

3. Techniques: The behaviouralists put emphasis on the use of scientific tools, methods and techniques to study political phenomena. They put emphasis on the use of those research tools and methods which generate valid, reliable and comparative data.

4. Quantification: The behaviouralists contend that the data should be quantified (deduced to numbers) so that it can be measured and conclusions can be drawn in a scientific way.

5. Values: This refers to the standards of behavior. In earlier times, political behaviour was associated with normative judgment—that is, everything was judged in the perspective of values and norms. The behaviouralist put utmost emphasis on separation of facts from values. They believe that to do objective research one has to do be value free, meaning, that empirical judgment and value judgment are not mixed together. In other words, the researcher should not have any pre conceived notion or a biased view.

6. Systematisation: According to the behaviouralists, research in political science must be systematic. Collection of data and facts, research, analysis, building up conclusions and everything else are closely related. This is systematisation.

Further, theory and research should go together and the researchers must see that their work must be theory-oriented and theory-directed. The researcher of political behaviour must proceed in his analysis quite systematically which means that the purpose of research is to arrive at truth or to build up general principles. All these will, in turn, supply materials for building up a structure of theory.

7. Pure Science: The behaviouralists claim that their approach as well as conclusions is based on the principles of pure science. Even their research conforms to the basic principles of pure science. Behaviouralism believes that the study of political science should be verified by evidence. Thus, they adopt the methods and techniques of pure science. Naturally, they attach great importance to research and to the conclusions built up by them. The behaviouralists claim that their dependence on pure science has enhanced the acceptability and prestige of their conclusions.

8. Integration: Integration is another hallmark of behaviouralism. According to the behaviouralists, political science should be studied in consonance with other social science disciplines like History, Sociology, and Economics etc. This approach believes that political events are shaped by various other factors in the society and therefore, it would be wrong to separate political science from other social science disciplines. In other words, political science must be studied in consonance with other social sciences so as to get a holistic understanding of the discipline.

Behaviouralism came to accord primacy to higher degree of reliability vis-à-vis higher degree of generality. It, therefore, focussed on questions that could be answered reliably on the basis of the methods available in short it focussed on micro-level situations rather than attempting macro-level generalizations.

Criticism:-

Started as challenge to traditional political analysis, the behavioural movement itself has not gone unchallenged. The critics have pointed out that in their zeal for scienticism the Behaviouralist have failed to choose between the important and

the unimportant. Another serious criticism has been that the whole effort of the Behaviouralist is of dubious significance, since it is not possible to apply the methodology of the natural sciences to the study of human Behaviour. Besides, the objects of study – humans are not passive nor are they fully understandable through the study of apparent and observable behaviour. Despite criticism, the contribution of Behaviouralism needs to be acknowledged in certain specified areas – voting studies, enquiry into political process, study of political personality etc.