

Political culture: meaning and factors



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paper: Political Culture: Meaning and Factors? 1960? paper It was only in the 1960s that the concept of Political Culture became a partly modern political analysis. This term has been popularized by the American political thinkers like Ulam, Beer and Almond and it is now being used frequently to compare the different political systems. This concept has now enabled the different political scientists to distinguish one system from the other not only in terms of its structure but also the political culture in which it grows. It is a political culture which explains satisfactorily the phenomenon why the parliamentary democracy has succeeded so well in Great Britain but not succeeded in most of the countries of Africa and Asia. Political Culture defined and explained: In many countries of Asia and Africa, democratic system was introduced but in some countries it succeeded while in other countries it did not succeed due to different reasons. For example on 15th August, 1947 there was the partition of India and Pakistan was born.

Both India and Pakistan adopted the same political system i. e., democracy but while democracy is flourishing in India, there has been no democratic system in Pakistan virtually from 1959 when Ayub Khan came into power. After the exit of Ayub Khan in 1969, Yahya Khan became the dictator of Pakistan. He was too defeated in Indo- Pak war of 1971 and had to hand-over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who carried on once rigged elections.

Zia-ul-Haq staged a military coup against him on July 5, 1977 Later on one was killed in an aeroplane crash. Now Mrs. Benazir Bhutto is in power, in many countries of Asia and Africa, the plant of democracy has not been able to grow” because of different political cultures. In 1998 Mr. Sharif became the prime Minister of Pakistan. According to Almond and Powell, “ Political

culture consists of attitudes, beliefs, values and skills which are current in an entire population, as well as those special propensities and patterns which may be found within separate parts of that population". In other words political culture consists of attitudes, beliefs, values and skills which are current in an entire population, as well as those special possibilities and patterns which may be found within separate parts of that population.

Political culture is composed of attitudes and orientations which people in a given society develop towards objects within their political system.

These orientations may have three distinct dimensions which are cognitive, affective and evaluative. The cognitive orientations imply the knowledge people have about objects within their political system, the affective orientation refer to their feelings about them-feelings either of attachment and involvement or of rejection-and the evaluative orientations indicate their judgements on them involving the use of values, information and feelings.

The objects towards which these orientations are directed are the following: First is the political system as a whole people have knowledge of, feelings about and judgements on the political system and it is these orientations that condition on the development of national identity. Another object of the cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations is the input process of the political system through which the demands made by society flow to the political system for their conversion into authoritative policies by means of the activities of political parties, pressure groups and media of communication.

The third object is the output process that involves the work of bureaucracy, courts and other political institutions concerned with applying and enforcing

authoritative decisions. Fourthly, an individual's orientations are also directed towards his own self. As he plays a role in the political system, he certainly has knowledge of, attachment to, and also his own evaluation of this role.

Political Culture “ refers not to what is happening in the world of politics but what people believe about these happenings”. It means that collective beliefs in the society are not accidental but rather logical and inter-related. Thus despite difference in political orientation, a distinct political culture exists in every society. Factors Which Mould Political Culture: Politics is such an activity which is carried on in a human environment and is thus the product of the historical background, social set-up, physical location and climate etc. are such characteristics that shall affect the political activity that takes place in a given political unit.

The economic conditions of a particular community also have its bearings on its politics. A particular economy will create particular possibilities. A community living in a highly industrialised economy, for example will develop social relations which will, in its turn, provide a social setting for political activity. The society which comprises of the individuals in which the political system is set, may be categorical according to race, wealth etc. The individual members of the society will have certain values, beliefs, propensities and emotional attitudes. These propensities and attitudes with a multiple of others make up the culture of the community of which political attitudes are a part.

Such social behaviour has its basis in the culture of a society and similarly political behaviour has its basis in the political culture.” Political Culture”,

according to Lucian Pye, is shaped by the general historical experiences of a country as also by the private and personal experiences of the individuals. It is because the individuals first became the members of society and then of the polity.

Political culture is gradually built on the cumulative orientations of the people towards their political processes. Each generation inherits attitudes and beliefs towards politics partly from the earlier generation and partly it is formulated as a reaction to the on-going politics. In other words, political culture is a product of the learning process and the actual experiences of the people. Again, in the words of Pye, political culture can be found only in mans minds, in the pattern of action, feeling and reflection which they have internalised and made part of their very existence". It is true that we cannot deny the importance of political events such as elections, party-competition during the elections, role of pressure-groups, group-behaviour, changing social basis of the elite, governmental performance, stability of Government and working of the political institutions. Consequently, the political culture studies the inter-action between the beliefs, the political events and the governmental structure. If the Constitution of a country is not according to the political culture of a country, it has to be changed.

For example, the Weimer Constitution of Germany failed because it did not coincide with the political culture of that country. Political culture not only affects the Constitution but also the political ideologies. For example, Fascism introduced in Germany and Spain was quite different from Italy. Even the communism as practiced in U. S. S. R. differs from Yugoslavia and China.

According to Almond, “ Every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientation to political action”. For the individual, political culture provides controlling guide?line for effective political community it gives a systematic structure of values and rational considerations. Political culture is the set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and that provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system. It encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity.

Political culture is thus the manifestation in the aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimension of politics. In brief, political culture is to the political system what culture is to the social system. In essence, thus, “ Political culture”, as Sidney Verba points out, “ consists of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values which define the situation in which political action takes place”.

So it covers both the political ideals and operating norms of a polity. Objects of Political Culture: It cannot be denied that political culture touches levels of human awareness and sensitivity. The objects of political orientation include the political system as a whole, particular political roles and specific public policies and issues.

Political culture can thus be examined with reference to the political system as a whole, its input objects, its output objects, and self as an object.

Orientation to the political system as a whole will mean ones understanding of the governmental system, its working and also the historical development of the various political institutions. Orientation to input objects means the

study of those institutions and structures which convey the demands and supports of the people to the decision-makers. These institutions include the government, political parties, party-elites and pressure-groups. Orientation to output objects means the attitudes towards and understanding of the rule-making, rule-application and rule adjudication of the structure of the political system. It involves in a general sense Bureaucracy.

Orientation to self includes ones knowledge of rights and duties, tact™s and strategies and resources to influence the elite.;,?