
UNIT-1 INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

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1.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- know the definition of political sociology.
- discuss the origin and development of political sociology.
- recognise the linkage between political science and sociology.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Conflict and cooperation are the two important aspects of human behaviour and these aspects have been experienced by man throughout human history. Conflict gives rise to political situation. The process of making decision by the group of people means politics. The interaction between society and politics is the subject matter of political sociology. In this unit we will get a preliminary idea about the discipline, its origin and scope of study.

1.3 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY:

Political sociology provides a new vista in political analysis. It is the study of interaction and linkages between society and politics; between a political system and its social, economic and cultural environment. It examines social power and focuses on the political attitudes, values and behaviour of people in different societies. It is concerned with problems regarding the management of conflict, the articulation of interests and issues, and political integration and organization. The focal point in all these concerns is the interdependence and the interplay of socio-cultural, economic and political elements.

Definition of Political Sociology

S.M. Lipset defines political sociology as “the study of the interrelationship between society and polity, between social structures and political institutions”.

In the words of R.Bendix, “Political Sociology starts with the society and examines how it affects the state”.

Michael Rush and Philip Althoff define political sociology as “being a subject area which examines the link between social structures and political structures and between social behaviour and political behaviour”.

Giovanni Sartori defines “Political Sociology as an interdisciplinary hybrid”. Robert E. Dowse and John A. Hughes define political sociology “as the study of political behaviour within a sociological perspective framework”.

According to A.K.Mukhopadhaya, “Political Sociology is the product of a cross fertilization between sociology and political science that studies the impact of society on politics and also the reverse, although viewing the substance of politics in a social form”.

Some of the essential features of political sociology are discussed below :

- Political sociology is not political science since, unlike the later, it is not a state discipline or a study of the state craft.

- Political sociology concerned with not only with social but with the political as well.
- Political sociology revolves round the belief that there exists an identify of form between the social process and the political process. Political sociology tries to resolve the traditional dichotomy between state and society.

1.4 NATURE AND SCOPE OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Political sociology in its earlier incarnation came to be identified with the study of social bases of political behaviour and institutions. Political variables such as political factors or variables were deemed to be dependent on sociological variables. Whereas sociological variables such as society, class and status were held as independent factors, political variables such as law, state, constitution and political parties were seen as dependent on them. However in recent years focus shifted from sociological interpretation of politics to politological and sociological approaches interacting with each other. Political sociology is closely linked with issues which have been raised in political philosophy. Political philosophy has a rich and long tradition of political thought that began with the ancient Indian and Greek philosophers. And then it was Karl Marx however, who brought into sharp focus issues concerning the nature of political power and its relationship with social and economic organisation. He is the one who is renowned as founder of sociology of politics.

Political sociology aims at understanding the sources and the social bases of conflict, as well as process of management of conflict. Conflicts are rooted in human nature and social circumstances. As long as diversity of interests and insatiable demands in a world of scarcity persist, there is no escape from conflicts of interests. Political process is a continuous and dynamics process constantly in a state of flux, and there is no final solution to the problem of conflicts. Political process is a way of processing and controlling social conflict so as to achieve the goal of order. But total elimination of conflicts, even if it were feasible, requires a degree of control that would

destroy human liberty. An ordered society is not a totalitarian society that achieves unity and denies diversity, that imposes discipline and destroys dissent, that orders conformity and subverts spontaneity. Order can be achieved instead through the perception of mutual interests and the evolution of consensus, without compromising the canons of popular participation and due observance of the 'rules of the game'.

SCOPE OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Political sociology is a discipline, which is mainly concerned with the analysis of the interaction between politics and society. The scope of political sociology includes effect of social attitudes on political participation, social class and political attitudes, voting and its political and social implications. The scope of political sociology is very vast. An important concern of political sociology is the decision-making process, it takes into account not only the social forces but also includes the economic factors that are regulated by forces such as money, market and other resources scarcities. Political sociology also analysis whether the person occupying the decision- making process has enough grip over the people on whom they are exercising authority. It includes the concept of political system, which introduces dynamism in political analysis. It not only stress on the study of the major structures of the government such as legislature, courts and administrative agencies, but also encompasses on all the structure in their political aspects such as caste groupings, kinship groups and formal organisations such as parties and interests groups.

Two scholars have discussed the scope of political sociology in two different manners. According to Greer and Orleans, "Political Sociology is concerned with structure of the state; the nature and conditions of legitimacy; the nature of the monopoly of force and its use by the state and the nature of the subunits and their relation with the state. Andrew Effrat another thinker believed that political sociology is concerned with the causes, patterns and consequences of the distribution and process of power and authority 'in all social systems'. Social system has definitely a broader framework for political

study as it includes family, educational institutions, peer groups and political institutions.

Richard G. Braungart claims that political sociology is concerned with (a) Social origin of politics (b) the structure of politics or the political process (c) the effects of politics on the surrounding society and culture.

It is therefore understood that main concern for political sociologists is to investigate the problem of social order and political obedience. It covers following areas for specific study:

- Social Structure- Role of Caste, class, community, regional language in determining polity, and rural urban divide.
- Political Structure – Three organs of the government, political parties, pressure groups, interest groups etc.
- Political life- Power, authority, legitimacy, political development, political modernization, political socialization, political culture, political participation and political communication all play a crucial role in providing insight into the political life.
- Political leadership- Recruitment policy so as to create elites or political leaders or bureaucracy for an efficient functioning of leaders within the prescribed social base.

A significant concern for political sociology is the analysis of socio-political factors in economic development. The problems of administrative expansion, bureaucratic way of looking into a country's native culture and society, the relationship between the bureaucratic officials and the political leaders, and the role of citizens in development activities, are of such practical significance that governments as well as academicians have been forced to take notice of the sociology and politics of development. It is a kindred field that illustrates urban politics where one encounters problems of social change and mobilization, political institutions and popular participation, organization and management of government functions on an increasing scale. Villages and towns are seen as microcosms of nations that are confronted with problems of social change, political participation and administrative management. There is a growing realization that the problems of development are not merely technical or bureaucratic in the narrow sense,

but essentially socio-political in the wider sense, and that political forces must be organized in a way to ensure effective implementation of development plan.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q A) Fill in the blanks

- 1) Villages and towns are seen as..... of nations.
- 2) Political sociology is closely linked with issues which have been raised in.....

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

State and politics are two entwined phenomena and therefore one cannot completely understand the concept of political sociology by considering it as separate entity. Complete understanding of socio-political structures and its implications is possible only with the study of political sociology. The importance of political sociology as a subfield of sociology is that it focuses on the social forces of politics rather than its mechanisms. Political Sociology studies politics at four levels - Political conflict and struggle among nations that is the sociology of international relations. The nature and the role of the state within various societies. The nature and organisation of political movements and parties. The participation of the individual in politics. Other aspects of its study are :

- General nature and functions of the state and its political system.
- Nature of political parties, pressure groups and all other political organisations and movements.
- Patterns of political participation and political behaviour, including non-participation of the people In other words empirical research of popular participation in politics and voting behaviour.
- Power and domination in society, Political elites and masses and the extent to which modern societies can be said to be dominated by a ruling class.

- Comparative analysis on the basis of survey methods has led to cross- national, cross- cultural and cross- societal research of considerable value.

Political sociology studies human being as a socio- political being and his/her behaviour in society. No one denies the fact that human political behaviour in just one aspect of human behaviour in environment, particularly in society. Political behaviour is always influenced by social behaviour, economic well-being and morality. More particularly it is deterministically influenced by the system of social relations and interactions among all the members of a society. Man/Woman is born in a family and gets all his/her initial values and pattern of behaviour and relations. Hence, the study of human political behaviour can be systematically pursued only by studying it in its social context. Political sociology serves this necessity.

1.6 DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Development of political sociology started since the distinction between social and political was established. Contributions of certain scholars, have led to the emergence of this discipline, With the increase in scientific technology and industrialization, political scientists began to look into political realities from a scientific perspective or perhaps in an empirical manner. This process attracted them towards sociology, which had already established itself as a positive and scientific discipline and had begun to adopt principles to make political science more scientific in its outlook. With the growing realization that problems of development are not merely technical or bureaucratic in the narrow sense, but essentially socio political in the wider sense. It was Karl Marx however, who brought into sharp focus issues concerning the nature of political power and its relationship with social or economic organisation. With his criticism of Hegel's philosophy of state, his materialistic interpretation of history and his conception of class as the basic variable for social or political explanation, started 'Sociology of Politics'. Taking this point into consideration, Runciman correctly identifies the 1840's as the period when this discipline attained a shape.

After Karl Marx, the most significant contribution to political sociology was made by the German sociologist Max Weber. He laid the foundations of political sociology by his original and existing ideas regarding types of authorities, the ideal type of bureaucracy and the concepts of status and party as supplements to that of class. Weber provided brilliant insights into the forces and directions of social and political development, and also offered a liberal modification of the Marxist philosophy of historical materialism. Another important input provided by Weber to the study of political sociology was the concept of legitimacy which authorizes one to exercise power and is widely accepted. Finally Weber also commented on human behaviour, wherein he emphasized that motives and intentions of those involved in the activities must be taken into consideration. However, Weber was also criticized on grounds of lack of historical analysis. Apart from Marx and Weber, who contributed to the growth of Political sociology, there have been other thinkers whose contributions, though not fundamental or stimulating, nevertheless important. One such intellectual was Walter Bagehot, a contemporary of Marx, who examined the links between culture and personality and between political institutions and behaviour. He also distinguished between constitutional theory and practice and claims that the document is a commentary on the parliamentary system of government. Another French sociologist, Gabriel Tarde, stressed that the impact of modern communications in the form of telegraph, telephone, books and newspapers tries to link the individual and the media. The discipline of political sociology was further broadened with inputs from elite sociologist like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca through their works *The Mind and the Society* and *The Ruling Class*, respectively. They claim that the elite need not necessarily have control over the economic forces; in fact, it is only because of the circulation or movement of the elite that there was political and economic change. Later – many scholars emphasized on political parties and their organization. Studies were centred on the process of elections, voting behaviour and electoral statistics. During the 1930's political scientists also examined the role of personality in politics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QB1) Who criticized the material interpretation forwarded by Hegel?

QB2) Name two scholars who had contributed towards the growth of Political Sociology.



1.7 LET US SUM UP

- The penetration of politics into social life is symbolized by growing disposition among social analysts to use political imagery in studying phenomenon that are usually considered to be non politics.
- Sociology of politics studies the state with the methods applied by sociologists by studying human groups, human behaviour and other social institutions.
- Political sociology in short is treated as a branch of sociology that is mainly concerned with the study of interaction between society and politics.
- The aim of political sociology is to study and examine such topics as the relation between political power and class structure. Political sociology involves an ongoing search for a more comprehensive scope, as well as more realistic, precise and theory conscious analysis.
- It has opened new frontiers of research and has experimented with new methods of analysis.



1.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK PROGRESS

Answer to QA1) Microcosms

Answer to QA2) political philosophy

Answer to QB1) Karl Marx

Answer to QB2) Max Weber and Gaetano Mosca



1.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer the questions within 150 words)

- Q1)** State the meaning of political Sociology.
- Q2)** State the significance of political sociology.

Long Questions (Answer the questions within 300-500 words)

- Q3)** Discuss the nature and scope of political sociology.
- Q4)** Explain the development of political sociology.
