

**SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCIENCE I**  
**COURSE: BA LLB SEMESTER I**  
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**MODULE: MODULE II, APPROACHES TO POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**Structure:**

- Traditional Approach

**APPROACHES TO POLITICAL SCIENCE**

In the sphere of social sciences the terms 'method' and 'approach' are applied rather loosely, and sometimes even interchangeably. To be precise, as far as possible, in their usage, distinction may be drawn between the two. Method is a more general term which denotes a particular way of doing something. In a systematic study, method may be defined as the procedure of inquiry by which reliable knowledge could be obtained and reliable conclusions could be drawn. Examples of method are: scientific method, inductive method, deductive method, comparative method, etc. On the other hand, approach is a wider term which comprehends not only the method (i.e. *how* to inquire) but also the focus of our study (i.e. *what* to inquire) in order to understand the given phenomenon. It may be observed that an approach is usually wedded to a particular method while a method is not always wedded to a particular approach. That is why an approach suggests the relevant method also. Thus behavioural approach is wedded to scientific method (because behaviour of several actors in a political situation is capable of scientific study) while the normative approach is wedded to philosophical method (because norms and values can only be determined philosophically, not through scientific method). Then, philosophical approach and historical approach suggest the use of philosophical method and historical method respectively although they also point to their respective focus of study. Again, empirical approach to the study of politics leads us to 'political analysis', and several models of political analysis (e.g. systems analysis, structural-functional analysis and decision-making analysis) in fact point to several methods adopted under this approach (although these are loosely referred to as 'political system approach', 'structural-functional approach' and 'decision-making approach' respectively).

Accordingly approaches to the study of political science may be classified under two categories: the traditional approach and the modern approach.

## A. TRADITIONAL APPROACH

The traditional approach is value based and lays emphasis on the inclusion of values to the study of political phenomena. The adherents of this approach believe that the study of political science should not be based on facts alone since facts and values are closely related to each other. Since the days of **Plato** and **Aristotle** “the great issues of politics” have revolved around normative orientations. Accordingly there are a large number of traditional approaches like legal approach, philosophical approach, historical approach, institutional approach etc.

### **(i) Philosophical Approach**

In the first place, the philosophical approach is concerned with the clarification of concepts used in a particular discipline. Secondly, the philosophical approach aims at evolving "standards of right and wrong" for the purpose of a critical evaluation of the existing institutions, laws and policies.

Philosophical approach to the study of political science could be traced in the writings of ancient philosophers like **Plato** and **Aristotle**. **Leo Strauss** who was one of the ardent supporters of this approach believed that “the philosophy is the quest for wisdom and political philosophy is the attempt truly to know about the nature of political things and the right or good political order.” This approach lays stress on ethical and normative<sup>1</sup> study of politics and is idealistic<sup>2</sup> in nature. It deals with the problems of nature and function of state, issues of citizenship, rights and duties etc. Its themes are generally concerned with moral reasoning which cannot be subjected to scientific test

### **(ii) Historical Approach**

Historical approach believes that political phenomena could be understood better with the help of historical factors like age, place, situations etc. Political thinkers like **Machiavelli**, **Sabine** and **Dunning** believe that politics and history are intricately related and the study of politics always should have a historical perspective. Sabine is of the view that Political Science should include all those subjects which have been discussed in the writings of different political thinkers from the time of Plato. Every past is linked with the present and thus the historical analysis provides a chronological order of every political phenomenon.

The term 'historical approach' to politics may be used in two senses. Firstly, it may denote the process of arriving at the laws governing politics through an analysis of historical

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<sup>1</sup> Normative means establishing, relating to, or deriving from a standard or norm, especially of behaviour.

<sup>2</sup> It is characterized by idealism; unrealistically aiming for perfection.

events, that is events of the past, as exemplified by the theories propounded by Hegel and Marx. In the second place, historical approach stands for an attempt at understanding politics through a historical account of political thought of the past, as exemplified by **George H. Sabine's** '*A History of Political Theory*'.

Critics of the historical approach point out that it is not possible to understand ideas of the past ages in terms of the contemporary ideas and concepts. Moreover, ideas of the past are hardly any guide for resolving the crises of the present-day world which were beyond comprehension of the past thinkers.

### **(iii) Legal Approach**

Legal approach stands for an attempt to understand politics in terms of law. It focuses its attention on the legal and constitutional framework in which different organs of government have to function, inquires into their respective legal position, their powers and the procedure which makes their actions legally valid.

For instance, legal approach to Indian politics will proceed to analyse legal implications of various provisions of the Indian Constitution, duly documented by the decisions of the Supreme Court of India as well as by the opinions of legal luminaries, procedure of formation and legal position of the two Houses of the Indian Parliament and State legislatures, procedure of election or appointment, powers and position of the President, Prime Minister, Governors, Chief Ministers, Central and State Cabinets, etc., role and powers of the Supreme Court of India and High Courts, full legal implications of the federal set up, position of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy, etc. Similarly, legal approach to international politics will largely tend to analyse it in terms of the requirements of international law.

Moreover, all political processes to become effective and stable must culminate in legal provisions whether it is an independence movement in a colonized country or an agitation for civil rights or certain concessions for any sections of society. Besides, the study of constitutional law and international law, etc. in spite of its limited use in understanding politics, continues to play a pivotal role in the social and political life of almost every country.

Legal approach regards state as the creator and enforcer of law and deals with legal institutions, and processes. Its advocates include **Cicero, Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, John Austin, Dicey** and **Sir Henry Maine**.

#### **(iv) Institutional Approach**

Institutional approach is closely related to legal approach, yet it is different. Significantly, this approach does not solely bank on other disciplines—philosophy, history or law—for understanding politics. Amongst the traditional approaches it alone gives independent identity to the systematic study of politics.

Institutional approach lays stress on the study of political institutions and structures like executive, legislature, judiciary, political parties, interests groups etc. Among the ancient thinkers Aristotle is an important contributor to this approach while the modern thinkers include **James Bryce, Bentley, Walter Bagehot, Harold Laski**, etc.

Accordingly the upholders of the institutional approach proceed to study the organization and functioning of government, its various organs, political parties and other institutions affecting politics. Classification of governments, starting from Aristotle (monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity and democracy) to modern classification (democracy and dictatorship, parliamentary and presidential, unitary and federal, etc.), identification of levels of government (federal, state and local) as well as branches of government (executive, legislative, judicial), composition and powers of each of these and their interrelationships (largely in legal terms), etc. are the chief concerns of this approach. It aims at giving an elaborate description of facts. Hence it exemplifies a shift from normative to empirical approach, and from a historical to a contemporary concern within the sphere of traditional approaches. However, it relies heavily on description rather than explanation. Hence, it fails to qualify as a contemporary approach.

#### **REFERENCES:**

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