

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Study Materials For PLSG Semester- I

Core course -1 Module -1

BEHAVIOURALISM

The essence of behaviouralist approach to political science is its central focus on “political behaviour”. The term political behaviour is not free from ambiguity. As Heinz Eulau explains, “the study of political behaviour is concerned with the acts attitude, preference and expectations of man in political context”. It is one of the fundamental characteristics of the behavioural approach to political science that the unit of analysis is the individual person in a political situation. Thus the behaviouralist studies the behaviour of individuals whose interactions go to constitute group actions or collectivities. In this sense, “political institutions are behaviour systems or systems of action”. For the first time, “behaviouralism” marked a systematic attempt to integrate political science with other behavioural sciences and there have been deliberate efforts to draw freely from the store of knowledge of these sciences. Initially, the behavioural movement started more as a reform movement intended to purge political science of its traditional role.

Charateristics of Behavioural Approach

1. It “rejects political institutions as the basic unit for research and identifies the behaviour of individuals in political situations as the basic unit of analysis;
2. Identifies “social sciences” as “behavioural sciences” and emphasizes on
3. It advocates the utilization and development of more precise techniques of observing, classifying, and measuring data and urges the use of statistical or quantitative formulations wherever possible;
4. Defines the construction of systematic, empirical theory as the goal of political science.

The intellectual foundations of behaviouralism have been summed up David Easton as 1. Regularities; 2. Verifications; 3. Technique; 4. Quantification; 5. Values; 6. Systematization; 7. Pure science; and 8. Integration.

Criticism of Behaviouralism

Started as a challenge to 'traditional' political analysis the behavioural movement itself has not gone unchallenged. It has been argued that the new movement might have invented jargons and used sophisticated methods and techniques but the concern for systematic and orderly thinking and analysis cannot be said to be the monopoly of the neo-political scientists. The critics of behaviouralism have pointed out that the behaviouralists, in their zeal for scientism, have failed to choose between the important and the unimportant, and many a time their sophisticated methods and languages has been put to use only to study the trivial and the obvious. Another serious criticism has been that the whole effort of the behaviouralists is of dubious significance, since it is not possible to apply the methodology of the natural sciences to the study of human behaviour.

Despite these criticisms, the contribution of behavioural revolution to political science needs to be acknowledged. Starting with a new conception of the discipline as human behaviour in institutional situations, the behavioural approach has set before itself the normal ideals of science such as quest for basic understanding of the political process, methodological innovations in search of dependable, empirical knowledge. For a time, the behavioural movement created a crisis within the discipline of political science. Behaviouralism has proved its worth, yet it has its own limitations as well. Meanwhile, as David Easton points out, there is a 'post-behavioural revolution' underway which is born out of deep dissatisfaction with the attempt to convert political study into a discipline modelled on the methodology of the natural sciences.