

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

Like any other form of evolutionary process, comparative government evolved into its present form over a period of time. When you study the evolution of comparative governments, you study how political systems and procedures vary across countries and

across time periods. The actual evidence of undertaking such a study came to prominence

in the 1950s, but its roots are even older. Aristotle can be called the 'ancestral father' of

the study of comparative politics, since the methods that he used in assigning politics among the sciences and problems and questions that he raised are still prevalent in current political studies.

A comparative study of the diversity of lives among people of different nations is sometimes surprising. Consider the differences in the lives of the people staying in the US and Somalia. Somalia is one of the poorest nations in the world, which is located in the Horn of Africa with an area of around 6,37,657 square kilometres and a population of around 93,60,000 people. Its official languages are Somali and Arabic. Inhabited since

the Paleolithic times, it is a country of pyramidal structures, tombs and ruined cities which hint at an ancient sophisticated civilization. The current circumstances, however,

are far from the realms of sophistication. Most countries have raised themselves from the ashes and remerged after World War II. However, the case of Somalia has not been that good. The communist rule and the Somali Civil War, that followed, were causes of destruction of the nation. These factors disrupted the whole system in many ways and plunged the nation into great adversity. The new coalition government tried to reform the

country with the help of the United Nations and other developed countries, yet the condition is far from normal.

The United States of America, on the other hand, is one of the superpowers of the world. With an area of 98,26,675 km and an estimated population of about 31,07,15,000,

this country has no official language at the federal level. English is the national language.

Following the American revolutionary war, the country gained its independence on 4

July 1776. The after-effects of World War I plunged the nation into a state of great depression. But the country sustained and emerged as a superpower after World War II. It became the first country in the world to possess nuclear weapons. Over the years, the nation and its citizens have progressed by leaps and bounds.

Hence, for a clear output, the study of comparative politics must depend upon conscious comparisons in the study of political experience, institutions, behaviour and

the processes of the different systems of different governments.

Need for the study of comparative governments

It is now generally felt that a pragmatic evaluation of the government and politics or political system of one's own country is made possible by recognizing the governmental

processes of other countries or their political systems. A comparative study of governments

not only streamlines the progress of objective and rational judgement about political systems, but at the same time disperses the dangerously ambiguous form of ethnocentrism,

that one's own country is superior to any other.

The study of governments is a significant part of the study of politics. The structure and behaviour of government makes an exciting and challenging area of concern for the

students of political science. Modern governments are rising more and more as essential

instrumentalities of versatile development, particularly in the developing nations of Asia,

Africa and Latin America. They also act as active forces in the formation of economic, social and environmental conditions.

The world's political systems include a vast variety of institutions, processes and interactions and no two governments, past or present, have been the same. In other words, governments have varied in complexity. Instances can be multiplied at random to

confirm the rather simplistic view that different societies require different kinds of government to realize their particular needs.

Modern courses in the field of political science, thus, almost consistently include surveys of the governmental and political systems. Examples of these are the processes

of Great Britain, France, Germany Italy and the US. Russia, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Latin America, Near Eastern, Middle-Eastern, Far-Eastern and other Asian and African countries are also occasional additions to this category. The decline of some former great powers and emergence of new nations have affected the processes of inclusion and exclusion.

A comparative analysis of political structures and processes, both within and across political systems, is for that reason an essential requirement for the students of political science. If comparative government and politics are broad in range (as they have actually been to include all political systems and reach forces and motives below the surface of governmental institutions) they can encompass nearly the whole of political science. Hence, practically, comparative government is not only the most important subsystem of the discipline of political science, but it is also very nuclear.

The comparative study of government and politics has preoccupied a large number of fine methodical theorists and philosophers. It is well known that Aristotle, in his time, compared and contrasted various political systems and developed an explanatory theory regarding their generation. In a way, Aristotle was certainly the first scholar of comparative government and considered the study of comparative government as the oldest and most significant to attract the attention of mankind. Since then, comparative government has been a flourishing subject.

For centuries after Aristotle, scholars have engaged themselves in the comparative investigation of foreign cultures, with varying degrees of complexity. With the increase in the tension and rivalry between democratic and undemocratic political systems, the impact of the so-called ' Third World' during the Cold War era, the growing importance of informal politics, the utility of synthesis of data and the nature and range of comparison underwent a transformation. The decreasing emphasis of the traditional approach logically

concluded in the so-called ' behavioural revolution' . In the 1950s and 1960s, the study of comparative government was drastically transformed despite consequent reactions against the behavioural tidal wave. It had scaled new heights of precision, firmness and theoretical order. It had also acquired an altogether new style of analysis, which was not known till then. Improvement in concepts and methods, impulses coming from interdisciplinary emphasis on area studies and the growing significance of the politics of developing areas, all combined to bring about an unadulterated ' revolution' in the study of this subject.