

traditional approach

The traditional approach to the study of comparative governments emerged as a response

to historicism of the 19th century. It stressed the historical examination of Western

political institutions from the earliest to the modern times. The traditionalists, either

theoretically philosophized about democracy and other subjects, or made a formal and

legal study of governmental institutions. The analysis was basically configurative and

each system was treated as a unique entity. The approach was heavily descriptive

rather than problem-solving, explanatory, or analytic in its method, and its description

was incomplete and limited to forms of government and of foreign political systems.

Roy Macridis, author of *Modern Political Regimes*, has very systematically and clearly summarized major features of the traditional approach. He briefly points out that

the approach has been essentially non-comparative, descriptive, parochial, static and

monographic. Similarly, Almond and Powell have identified three major premises that

have dominated the criticism of the approach to comparative government feature of the

pre-World War II period. These premises are as follows:

Its parochialism

Its configurative analysis

Its formalism

Harry Eckstein also points out the influence of abstract theory, formal legal studies

and configuration studies that characterize the reaction against historicism in

political
studies.

First, as Macridis points out, the traditional approach addressed itself mainly to Western political systems. The stress was on single-culture configuration, i.e., the representative democracies of the Western world and the study was limited to Britain and the Commonwealth countries, the US, France, Germany, Italy and Russia. Undemocratic Western systems and political systems of Asia, Africa and Latin America were studied by a handful of adventurist researchers. Cross-cultural studies were almost entirely unidentified. The study was limited not only in range, but also in depth; only the isolated aspects of governmental process within the specific countries were analysed.

The study was more often monographic and comparative.

Second, the comparative study of politics was extremely formal in its approach towards political institutions. The study was focused on governmental institutions and their legal models, rules and regulations, or political ideas and ideologies, rather than on performance, interaction and behaviour. It pays no attention to the influence of informal factors on decision-making and also the non-political determinants of political behaviour.

Only formal institutional organs like parliaments, chief executives, civil services, etc., were applicable for institutional and structural– functional comparison. The realities of political action and behaviour within institutional structures were not given any serious thought. The traditional study in this respect was greatly unrealistic.