Structural – Functional Analysis

list of political functional requisites and divided them into four input and three output

functions. The four input functions are as follows:

1. Political socialization and recruitment

2. Interest-articulation

3. Interest-aggregation

4. Political communication

The three output functions are as follows:

1. Rule-making

2. Rule-application

3. Rule-adjudication

The input functions that are performed by non-governmental subsystems, by society

and the general environment, are looked upon as highly important. The output functions

are performed by traditional governmental agencies like the legislature, the executive,

the judiciary and the bureaucracy.

Almond's classic statement of structural– functional analysis is found in the

introduction to The Politics of the Developing Areas that has been edited by Almond

and Coleman. He is inspired by the desire to develop a more universal and clear analytical

vocabulary for the study of non-Western states, especially of the politics of the 'third

world' countries. He defines politics as the integrative and adaptive functions of a society,

based on more or less legitimate physical coercion. He defines the political system as

' that system of interactions to be found in all independent societies which perform the

functions of integration and adaptation (both internally and vis-à-vis other

societies), by

means of the employment or threat of employment, of more or less legitimate order-

maintaining or transforming system in the society.'

Almond stresses the interdependence between political and other societal systems

and suggests several common properties of all political systems. According to him, there

are political structures that perform the same functions in all systems; that all political

structures are multifunctional; that each political culture is a mixture of the 'traditional'

and the 'modern'. Systems adapt to their environment when political structures do not

behave dysfunctional. Almond's functional categories have already been mentioned,

Almond is aware of the common criticism pointed against his model that it is stability-

oriented and conservative. In his later works, he clarifies that his concept of 'political

system' is one of 'interdependence' but not one of 'harmony'. He also admits that his

framework 'did not permit us to explore development patterns, to explain how political

systems change and why they change'. It might, on the other hand, be observed that

Almond, in his formulation, is primarily concerned with the capabilities of the system and

the problem of system-maintenance.

The structural–functional approach has been very widely adopted in the field of

comparative government and politics because it claims to provide standard categories

for markedly different political systems. Its heuristic value, its influence on the development of comparative politics in several different ways and the success of the

model for comparative political research must be admitted.

Criticism has nevertheless been made of its value orientations, its tautological premises, and its vague and non-operational conceptual units. Neither its conceptual

framework, nor the ranges of derivable propositions for research are as definite as one

would like. What Almond has produced is, at best, as Meehan points out, 'a classificatory scheme, or perhaps a model, a very imperfect and loose model that can be used to order

political data and perhaps standardize observations of political phenomena'. Meehan also thinks that the functional categories he suggests are far too broad to

be of much use. Almond has not produced a theory, of course, nor even as well-articulated

classification scheme. The taxonomy is incomplete and unambiguous. Oran Young has

criticized its tendency to force divergence phenomena into a systematic framework of,

'fallacy of functional teleology', the fallacy deductive functionalism and the postulate of

universal functionalism. When applied to Third World countries, the functional framework

cannot analyse the empirical reality that exists in these societies. The complex political

realities of these societies cannot be effectively explained with the help of the assumptions

on which the theoretical scheme of the functionalists is based.

One great limitation of this analysis, as we have already seen, is that it is basically

a static system. Its stress on the way things are, and can lead to an inclusive

assumption

of stability and incapacity to deal with the challenge of change, particularly of a swift or

violent character. It has a strong favouritism towards status quo and its research tends

to support the existing order of things. Hence, great caution needs to be exercised in

applying these analytical tools, if drawbacks are to be evaded.