

WHAT IS POLITICAL

When an organization is designed to regulate the whole community, it takes the character of polity. Polity, therefore, denotes an organization where rules are made and decisions are taken for the whole community, and authority is exercised over each member of the community. The term 'political' refers to something that is 'public', as distinguished from private or something applicable to a limited

number of persons. Sheldon S. Wolin, in his *Politics and Vision* (1960) has beautifully summed up the characteristics of the 'political' as follows: Of all the authoritative institutions in society, the political arrangement has been singled out as uniquely concerned with what is 'common' to the whole community. Certain functions, such as national defense, internal order, the dispensing of justice, and economic regulation, have been declared the primary responsibility of political institutions, largely on the grounds that the interests and ends served by these functions were beneficial to all of the members of the community.

Thus polity or the state enjoys a unique position among social institutions. It is so important that Aristotle (an ancient Greek philosopher) described man by nature a 'political animal'. Living in a state was so natural for a person that he who lived outside the state or who did not need a state was either a beast or an angel!

The terms 'polity', 'politics' and 'political' are derived from the Greek word 'polis' which denoted ancient Greek city-state. The Greek city-states were relatively small communities which were separated from each other by geographical

barriers, like forests, mountains and seas. Each city-state had evolved a compact social life and culture where all institutions and activities were knit together.

These institutions and activities which were aimed at securing 'good life' for the community were regarded to be the part of 'polities'. However, in the present-day society the scope of politics is not regarded to be so comprehensive. Today we draw a distinction between public and private spheres of human life, and

confine the usage of the term 'politics' to the institutions and activities falling in the public sphere. Thus the decisions of cabinet and parliament, election campaigns

and other activities of political parties, people's movements seeking change in law and public policy, etc. belong to politics but the object of our faith and worship, the content of our education, art and culture, etc. do not properly belong to the sphere of politics until some regulation thereof is required to maintain

public order and safety!

SCOPE OF POLITICAL THEORY

After identifying the nature and scope of the 'political', we are now ready to understand the nature of political theory. The term 'theory' stands for a systematic knowledge. Thus 'political theory' denotes a systematic knowledge of political

phenomena. What type of knowledge do we require about the political phenomena in the realm of political theory?

Broadly speaking, political theory is concerned with three types of statements:

(1) Empirical statement, which is based on observation, through sense-experience

alone; (2) Logical statement, which is based on reasoning (e.g. 'two plus two is four'); and

(3) Evaluative statement, which is based on value-judgment (e.g. 'men are born free and equal'). Political science relies only on empirical and

logical statements. It is argued that correct observation and correct reasoning by different persons would lead to the similar conclusion; hence empirical and logical statements are capable of verification. On the other hand, it is alleged that evaluative statements are based on individual or group preferences which differ from individual to individual or group to group; there is no reliable method of determining what is right or wrong, good or bad; one cannot scientifically discover the purpose of the universe or human life. Exponents of 'Logical Positivism' argue that evaluative statements have no empirical content or logical structure; they are expressions of subjective reflection or emotional preference. Likewise,

champions of scientific method for the study of politics insist on a 'value-free' or 'value-neutral' approach.

In any case, political theory cannot be confined to the so-called scientific knowledge. It is equally concerned with determining values which come within the scope of philosophy. We cannot accept the view that values are based on individual or group preferences. On the contrary, values do have a sound logical structure unless we mistake them for biased statements. Upholders of different values can be invited to have a dialogue, to have an opportunity to understand each other's point of view, to convince each other and probably to agree on certain universal principles to judge the validity of values. Determination of values is the basis of a sound public policy or decision. If we abdicate this responsibility, it may fall in irresponsible hands, with disastrous consequences. Hence political theory must comprehend both political science and political philosophy.