

Classical Tradition of Political Theory

The growth and evolution of political theory can be elaborated in three major streams.

These are:

- (i) Classical political theory
- (ii) Modern political theory
- (iii) Contemporary political theory

Here, under this section we will discuss the characteristics of the classical tradition of political theory.

The principal element which divides the classical or the traditional political theory from the modern political theory is 'science'. Philosophy dominates the classical

tradition of political theory whereas science and its methodology dominate the

modernist. The classical tradition can be traced back to the ancient Greek period. It

flourished in the writings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The classical tradition

from these days lasted up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. A distinctive

aspect of the history of political theory is the large number of classics known for

their comprehensiveness, logical consistency and clarity. These works, rightly

described as 'classics', address both local issues and contain principles of universal

significance. They offer rival conceptual frameworks which enable us to choose

and state our preference. The principal subjects of these classics deal with the

characteristics of human nature, functions and organization of political authority,

political change and stability. During the periods of acute crisis or great transition,

the classics in political theory generally emerge. They usually flourish in an age of transition from one era to another when a great churning occurs and issues are debated and discussed. The crisis by itself does not produce; instead it acts as a catalyst. However, there may be exceptions, for example, Indian society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed tumultuous changes marked by crisis. Therefore, a crisis has to be understood in the context of a framework of political values and institutional arrangements. The quest for a good life and good society, optimism and hope are the major inputs in a worthwhile project in political theory so far as the classical tradition is concerned.