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BOOK REVIEW

VARMA, S. P. (1975) *Modern Political Theory*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Private Limited. Pages: 464.

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The book *Modern Political Theory* authored by S.P. Varma is divided into 3 major parts, part one and two are sub divided into 4 (four) chapters each while part 3 is divided into 3 chapters. Like the author commented in his preface, the book was not really written in a hurry, the book critically examined the contemporary issues of political theory, making an assessment of the achievement and limitations of the "Behavioural Revolution" in its entirety and was able to review objectively the major paradigms and conceptual frameworks adopted by the discipline the salient features of the conceptual models, he took time to operate from different dimensions.

As the book affirms, traditional approach developed greater knowledge about the working of political institutions than during the last several centuries, however, there was paradigm shift and emphasis was on the scientific study of human behaviour in politics. Some of the major contributors of the behavioural revolution were Arthur Bentley, Charles Merriam among others. The book emphasized that behaviouralism gained popularity among political scientists because of its positive and negative impacts, however popular behaviouralism seemed to be, it received great challenges in the sixties, thus emerged post-behaviouralism, the advocates of this new order disagreed vehemently on the study of political actors but laid emphasis on values, issues of justice, freedom and equality however, they did not deny the importance of technical proficiency, they also did not see the need for scientists to cut themselves apart in the search for basic knowledge or understanding.

The author gave a good account of the nature and scope of political science in part one. In chapter two of the part one, he tried to trace back the concept of general systems theory which has its origin in the work of Ludwig, a biologist in the 20's. For him, the central and guiding concept in the general systems theory is the concept of systems. In pp 39 *he defined system as a set of elements standing in inter-actions*. According to the author, the basic concepts developed under the broad framework of the general systems theory can be divided into three this, that which is descriptive by nature which highlights the factors responsible for regulating and maintaining the systems and that which focuses on dynamics of or changes the system.

One might agree with the author that with the help of the second category of concepts, we can understand what factors are responsible for regulating and maintaining the various systems. With this, we can see the introduction of notions of stability, equilibrium and homeostatic - he argued that system approach makes a research more precise and rigorous, stability may depend on equilibrium which in itself may be stable or unstable. He further explained that system analysis will help in understanding of systems changes or breakdown though the behavioural political scientists have not so far paid much attention to the problems of the system. In chapter two of part one, one could be convinced with the author's explanation that the method of analysis used in political science as a result of the impact of the general system theory is functionalism "structural functionalism" which revolves round certain concepts (functions and structures).

He argued that there may be patterns of action which are functional for the overall social system but dysfunctional for many individuals or groups. The book in quoting some scholars tried to draw a difference between traditionalism and behaviouralism but was to agree that the traditionalists are prepared to regard the behavioural approach as useful to a point. Can one say today that the state of political theory is in the decline or resurgence? The book asserts that Easton was inclined to attribute the decline of political theory also to the growth of the relativistic attitude towards values. This he called moral relativism. He also attributed the political theory decline is the wrong way in the usage of science and theory.

Another contributor to the decline of political theory is Cobban who admits that in neither the western world nor in the communist countries, the army is yet the matter of the civil power. Like Easton and Cobban, Germino also believes that political theory had a period of decline in the greater part of the 19th century. According to the book, political theory from other scholars cannot be seen to be on the decline but has only changed its form. Political theory, even in the sense of political philosophy is not dead, nor even in a state of decline. The advocate of this view is Isaiah Berlin, he challenged the view that they can be any one kind of society - technocratic or Utilitarian, Thomist or communist or platonic or anarchist. The book also identified the three elements of political theory according to Easton which he explained as pure or causal theory and value theory.

In chapter four, the last in part one of the book, the author is explaining the nature and scope of political science, citing Aristotle's idea of pure democracy which include "national politics, municipal and international politics, patriarchy, ecclesiastical policy and the structure of trade unions and employee organisations. The book introduced what might be called "The New Science of Politics" proponent of such idea was a prolific writer Eric Voegelin, the only side effect of his idea is that he did not draw distinction between political theory and political science. Voegelin is strongly of the view that we never had the materials available and the intellectual climate suitable for great advances in the theoretical analysis as at of now. The "new science of politics" as expounded by Voegelin, is maximalist in conception and accommodates both traditional and behavioural approaches to political study and activity, believing that each approach has to be understood as partial and not exhaustive.

One excellent thing done by the author is his ability to divide his work into parts and in each part into various chapters. In his part two of the book, modern political analysis; systems and approaches - this part, like the first part is also divided into four chapters. part two, modern political analysis systems and approaches, he identified the theories that were very popular in the united states following the second world war were the Elite theory, Group theory and Power theory. In the theory of the political Elites, scholars believed that every society is ruled by a minority that possesses the qualities necessary for its accession to full social and political power. They identified the elites as those who have excelled in their various occupation.

In the democratic setup, the author explained that there developed a generation of theorists of politics elitism, flourishing across the Atlantic tried to build up a new theory of Democracy that could reconcile with that of the theory of political elites. These theorists evolved a conception of democracy as a political system in which political parties competed for the votes of a mass electorate, the elites were relatively open and were recruited on the basis of merit and the mass of the population were able to participate in ruling the society at least in the sense that it could exercise a choice between the rival elites. In addition, the book provided a philosophical explanation on the theory of participatory democracy. It identified John Dewey as the founder of participatory democracy. His concept of subjective utilitarianism, based on the concept that there is no objective judgmental standard but only a subject conception of self-interest, implies the existence of an "Open Society" the primacy of individual desire and the comprehensive rejection of authoritative values - Dewey posit that "the heart of democracy was a state of affairs in which human choice was primacy. He further explained that a democratic society that is vested on social consensus with regard to human development based on freedom, equality and political participation (PP 157) Dewey behaved in a large measure of social control of economic forces in a planned coordination of industrial development.

One significant issue in this chapter, is the argument of advocates of participatory democracy on the issue of elitist democracy. Their critics name "the creation of a psychological climate in which there could be more or less spontaneous motivation towards change and improvement and the need for a radical social reconstruction leading to real satisfaction and full dignity of democratic citizenship (PP 159) Kenneth Megill in his view expressed that "the primary question of contemporary democratic theory is in the end, the question of the proper organisation of the revolutionary movement. By early twentieth century, developed a group of intellectuals whose attention of political scientists was turned to a pluralist modes in which power instead of being concentrated in the hands of a group or class was turned to a pluralist model. The intellectual roots of the group theory he in the doctrine of pluralism.

One might not want to agree wholehearted with the group theorists because they have failed to answer or provide rational explanation on this societal problem which is "how is it that the system still keeps on running and does not break down on the ceaseless struggle among groups? It can also be seen that group theorists have also failed to give satisfactory definition of the team used by them "group" or what exact kind of relationship constitutes

men into a group or what their number should be, or how intensive their concentration has to be.

The book also highlighted on another type of theory called the power theory of the state, this was first advocated in Germany in the 19th century by Historians like Heinrich and philosopher like Kriedrich Nietzsche and was upheld by so many writers - according to these theorists the primary purpose of the state was the cultivation, not of the mental and moral energies of the nation which wars a by-product but of the highest power. According to Eric Kauffman, the real social idea of the state is not the community of the willing men but victorious war, according to him " In war, the state reveals in its true essence, war is the state's highest performance, in which its special nature reaches its fullest development.

Bertrand Russel, a philosopher, decried the role of power in the strongest terms, he strongly believed that equality of power, secured by its dispersion was a more important condition of human freedom than the equality, or dispersion, of wealth, concentration of political power in the state, whether under capitalism or communism, was as destructive of human initiative as concentration of economic power. Authority in any form was the Chief anti-thesis of liberty. Another scholar George Carlin tried to evolve a systematic theory or conceptual framework for political science in which power was to be placed at the centre.

The book selected the works of Lasswell, Easton and Almond in the study of major theoretical approaches, his choice of Lasswell is justifiable as he is one of the first among modern political scientists and the foremost among the disciples of Charles Merriam at the University of Chicago he has contributed more to methodology of research in the field of special sciences than anyone else; He is a methodologist who has used his methodological apparatus to give a clear-cut political philosophy. Lasswell argues that "the elite preserves its ascendancy by manipulating symbols, controlling supplies and applying violence" (pp 182) Lasswell while disapproving the norms of dialectical and historical materialisms to prove an absolute law of historical prediction, made use of probability hypothesis or developmental constructs.

Lasswell draws two very daring conclusions out of what might be regarded as a very inadequate appreciation of the movement of historical forces. His conception of scientific political theory is that it should proceed from the description to the prediction and ultimately to the control of human behaviour. Lasswell appreciates the significance of propaganda, from the very beginning he seems to have been impressed greatly by the way in which public opinion had been controlled during the war years; but he believed that propagandas had to be unified and therefore directed from above.

The book identified David Easton as the first major political scientist who has developed a systematic framework on the basis of the systems analysis approach for the study of politics instead of merely adapting it from anthropology or sociology. The book points out that Easton beats - all political systems as both open and adaptive systems and concentrates mainly on the study of the nature of the exchanges and transactions that take place between a political system and its environment. The book tried to compare and

contrast the work of Gabriel Almond and other scholars - for him, the method adopted by Almond is more representative in political science than that of David Easton, however like him, he is also in search of a functional theory of the polity, however Almond structural functionalism suffers from the difficulties from which an analysis picked up from one discipline and applied to another is likely to suffer.

The author observed that a researcher requires a very high level of theoretical consciousness to be able to apply the general systems theory in its fully extended and integrated form. The book also tried to find out the relationship between systems analysis and international relations - he sees systems analysis as a part of the behavioralist movement in political science which had been growing in various American Universities - David Easton a young scholar was the first to think of analysing politics from the point of view of the systems analysis and presented in his famous work .Political system 1953 - the purpose of systems analysis as applied later in international relations was the same as in political science, to make description more scientific, or inductive and to use it for theory building or for other theoretical effort.

There was also another approach called the Decision making approach - it was developed by Richard C. Snyder and his colleagues after the Second World War. Snyder made a distinction between the static analysis so far adopted in the study of politics by the structural functionalism and the system theorists and claimed that the decision-making analysis based as it was on process analysis was capable of dealing with dynamic situations. Snyder's approach, even though applied in the beginning to the limited field of international relations was full of immense possibilities in other field of political science. Another theory that came into limelight was the Games theory which owes its genesis to parlour games. In games theory, players are supposed to be engaged in choosing alternatives which would be required to be used in some conceived future state of affairs. Part three of the book dealt with main stream of contemporary political thought, In chapter 9 which is the first chapter, the author started with the theories of Alienation from Sartre to Marcuse - the author explained that the major problem identified by the social critics in the west today are those of a highly organised capitalist society. Political philosophers in the 19th century which is regarded as the classic age of individualism and rationalism had written with a sense of satisfaction of the progressive emancipation of the individual from the tyrannous and irrational status handed down to him.

There is no doubt about it that political development and modernization are highly related; In their writings and theorizing most of the western political scientists have continued to identify political development with political modernization. A modern society according to Ward is characterized by its far reaching ability to control or influence the physical and social circumstances of its environment.

A third world analyst from Brazil has tried to develop in his various write up, a comprehensive and a more convincing theory of political development he regarded political development as a political modernization plus political institutionalization. As a process political modernization involves increase in the operational variables of a polity.

The last chapter of the book discussed Gandhi and contemporary political thought. The author observed that Gandhi could not be seen as a philosopher or a political thinker, he was a man of action who reacted with vigour to every critical situation of political social, religious or cultural conflict that he was faced with and tried to resolve it by truthful and non-violent means. He symbolized a harmony between thought and action, the depth of it may be difficult to comprehend.

On Gandhi's philosophy of life, the author saw him as neither a politician nor a political thinker, He was just a seeker after truth and had developed the conviction early in life that truth could be reached only through non-violence. Gandhi was not seen as a utopian by the book rather his great message was that political power can be won through non-violent action. In the matter of property - Gandhi was a believer in economic equality which did not mean "possession of an equal amount of worldly goods by everyone.

Thinking on development at the world level as such has reached a full circle and come back or gone forward to the line of development which Gandhi has advocated, it would therefore, be difficult to challenge the statement that Gandhi is more relevant today not only to development policies to be adopted by the developing countries but also to those which regard themselves as developed - one can say the Gandhi is modern.

The book under review is highly enriched, and worth its salt, he uses simplicity of words to the understanding of his readers - this work cannot be for political scientist alone but for all who would want to venture into other aspects of life. Incidentally, the book did not make any reference to any African scholar, the only mentioned was the Brazilian scholar. Notwithstanding, the book deserves to be a reference material for researchers and policy makers.

Biographical Note

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