POLITICAL CULTURE

The political culture of a nation refers to the basic attitudes and orientations of its people towards the political system. The loyalty of the people to the political system, their reaction to the political events and their faith on the fundamental issues and form of the political system are some of the important variables of studying a nation’s political culture. The political culture conditions and shapes all three of the inputs flowing from the society into the political system such as support, expectations and demands.

Definitions

According to Gabriel A. Almond who is considered as the pioneer of the concept of political culture defines it as, “a set of attitudes, cognitions, value standards and feelings toward the political system, its various role and role-incumbents. It also includes knowledge of value affecting and feelings towards the inputs of demands and claims into the system and its authoritative acts”.

According to Lucian Pye,” Political culture refers to the overall patterns of people’s attitudes, sentiments and cognitions that inform and govern political behaviour in any society”.

According to Sidney Verba , ”political culture consists of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values which define the situation in which political action takes place”.

Three Components of Orientation

According to Almond and Powell, the concept of political culture involves three components of individual orientations-

1. Cognitive orientations-which means knowledge of and belief about the political system, its role, its objects and official, its input and outputs.

2.Effective orientation- which means feeling of attachment, involvement, rejection and the like about the political system, its personnel and performance and about their political objects.

3. Evaluative orientation- means judgements and opinion about political objects which usually involve applying value standards to political objects and events.

Types of Political Culture

Almond and Powell have classified political culture into three types.

1. Parochial Political Culture – It is characterised by those people who have little or no awareness of their political system. Such individual are found in every society. There is absence and lack of cognitive orientation about the national political system. The parochial expects nothing from the political system. The political culture of the states in Central Africa are mainly parochial. The society is therefore, by and large traditional and backward.
2. Subject Political Culture – It exists where there is a high frequency of orientations to the system as a whole and to it’s specifically output aspects. It occurs in dependent colonies where the people either fell pride or cultivate hostility towards their political system. That is, they either accept the decisions of their rulers as legitimate or struggle against them in the name of their right for self-determination. Such individual may have no specific knowledge of the ways in which they can influence the political system and have no understandings of the infrastructure of society.
3. Participant Political Culture – It exists in highly developed societies where people take active part in the political sphere by considering themselves as active member of the polity. They are well conscious of their rights and duties. The participant individual therefore, tends to participate actively in the political process as he possesses a highly sense of political competence.

Thus, these three types of political culture are pure types which are not found exclusively in any societies in reality. Empirically, it is found that the individual is a mixture of parochial, subject and participant orientations. In addition to these three types, Almond classified Mixed Political Culture into four types :-

1. Parochial Subject Culture – This is a type of political culture in which most of the members of a political system are overwhelmingly parochial in their orientations, yet a portion of the population has rejected the exclusive claims of parochial institutions and groups and has developed subject orientations of rendering obedience to the Central Government of the polity. This type of mixed culture was prevalent in the erstwhile Ottoman Empire and the Prussian Kingdom of the Middle Ages.
2. The Subject-Participant Culture – This is a type of political Culture in which most of the people of a political system have developed subject orientations as they continue to be orientations towards the Central government authority, but they lack in self-orientations, whereas a part of the population has acquired input orientations and an active set of self-orientations. This type of mixed culture was prevalent in France, Germany and Italy in the 19th Century.
3. The Parochial Participant Culture – This is a type of political culture in which an overwhelming majority of the population of a political system retains strong parochial orientation and primordial allegiances, but they are required to develop participant culture as participatory structures have been introduced in the political system. The parochial allegiances of the people coming from their identification with race, tribe, caste, language, religion, region etc. Are so strong that the participant structures of their political system function under heavy stress and strain and lead to lose their participant nature in reality. This type of culture is found in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.
4. The Civic Culture – Civic political culture exist in a society in which decision-making powers are vested in a particular elite and the people do not participate directly. They express their sentiments only through their representatives who are responsible to them. Such a type of political culture exists in a democratic society.

Criticism

Critics point out that it is not possible to give a full picture of the political culture of a system as the people do not have clear political opinion or attitudes. Political researchers dealing with political culture may give a picture of political beliefs and attitudes in a country and make certain forecasts about political performance, but their actual performance maybe different from their expectations. The theory of political culture is hardly better than a new label for old ideas. However, it cannot be denied that the concept of political culture has made significant contribution to the development of political science.

Conclusion

The concept of political culture has made significant contribution to the development of modern political theory. The theory represents a significant advance in the direction of integrating psychology and sociology with political science to produce a fuller understanding of politics. In different political system they develop their own value-pattern based on their history and the process of socialisation. Political culture of a country, therefore, becomes its distinctive identity which separates it from other political system.