POLITICAL THEORY

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONAL THEORY

Structural-Functional is based on the concept of Political System. This model of political analysis has been widely used in the methods of comparative politics because it provides for standard categories for different types of political systems. It originated in the sphere of social anthropology in the writings of Radcliffe Brown and B. Malinowski. Then it was developed in the field of sociology by Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, and Marion Levy. Gabriel Almond and his associates develop it into a tool of political analysis.

A structural-functional approach is a form of systemic analysis that looks at the political system as a coherent whole that influences and is in turn influenced by their environments. A political system is held together by the presence of legitimate force throughout the system. It has three characteristics: comprehensiveness, independence, and the existence of boundaries. The interactions that take place within a system are not between individuals but between the roles which these individuals adopt. Lastly, the political system is an open system and is involved in communications with systems, beyond its boundaries.

GABRIEL ALMOND: STRUCTURAL - FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

Gabriel Almond and J.S. Coleman in The Politics of Developing Area, 1960 identified four characteristics of the political systems. These are

i) All political systems have structures.
ii) The same functions are performed in all political systems with different frequencies and by different kinds of structures.
iii) All political structures are multifunctional.
iv) All political systems are mixed in the cultural sense i.e. they are based in a culture which is always a mixture of the modern and the traditional.

The structural-functional approach was further developed by Gabriel Almond and Powell in Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach, 1966. He and his associates argued that all political systems, regardless of their types, must perform specific sets of tasks if they are to remain in existence as systems in working order or equilibrium i.e. ongoing systems’. These are the functional requirements of the system. They suggested the use of ‘functions’ and ‘functional requisites’ instead of ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ as modifications to Easton’s modal.
They have provided seven functions that a political system has to perform to sustain themselves and stay relevant.

Accordingly, Almond and his associates discerned his functional categories classifying them into as ‘Inputs’ and ‘Outputs’. There were a total of seven functions, four input functions, and three output functions respectively.

The Inputs functions are:

i) **Political Socialisation and recruitment**: Political socialisation is the process whereby an individual acquires attitudes and orientations towards political phenomena; it also implies the process whereby society transmits political norms and beliefs from one generation to the next. Recruitment stands for the process whereby political groups obtain members for various important roles in the political process, either in addition to the existing members or as a replacement for other members. Primary socialization at home, locality, and educational institutions indoctrinate and inculcate the members with attitudes, opinions, and orientations towards the political phenomenon.

ii) **Interest articulation**: It implies the process whereby opinions, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, etc. are converted into coherent demands on the political system. This function may be performed by various structures, but interest groups are most suited to perform this perform. Coherent demands are placed by various structures such as peer groups, pressure groups, interest groups, associations, etc to preserve and further their interest.

iii) **Interest aggregation**: It is the process by which demands are translated into policies and decisions which could be acted upon. Political parties are most suited to perform this function.

iv) **Political Communications**: It is a process by which the components of a political system such as individuals, groups, and institutions transmit and receive information regarding the functions of the political system. Mass media and lately social media are most suited to perform this action.

The Output Functions are:

i) **Rule-making**

ii) **Rule – application**

iii) **Rule – adjudication**

Of these, output functions correspond to conventional governmental functions, which are performed by formal governmental organs, viz. legislature (rule-making), executive (rule-application), and judiciary (rule- adjudication). Almond has paid special attention to input functions that are performed by non-governmental structures or institutions. Although all structures are multi-functional, yet some structures are especially suited for specific functions.
Almond and Powell identified two chief characteristics of the development of political system i.e. political development. These are i) structural differentiation, and b) secularisation of culture. As they have elucidated: ‘’A principal aspect of the development or transformation of the political system is role differentiation or structural differentiation. By differentiation, we refer to the process whereby roles change and become more socialised or more autonomous or whereby new types of roles are established or new structures and subsystems emerge or are created.’’ (Comparative Politics: A Development Approach; 1966). The more evolved and mature the clearer is the distinction and differentiation between the roles of political structures. The secularization of culture denotes the process by which traditional attitudes and orientations give way for more dynamic making processes involving the gathering of information, the evaluation of the information, the laying out of the alternative course of action. Objective gathering and evaluation of information along with analysis of alternative policies transcending parochial loyalties would enable the realization of the collective good of the entire community. These two criteria will enable us to measure the level of development of any political system.

The Structural- functional framework of political analysis has been particularly useful for comparative politics. A developed political system is characterised by the differentiation of structures for the performance of specific functions. In less developed political systems, functions of interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication might be performed by some structures which have not taken a definitive shape, but in a developed system growth of interest groups, political parties and mass media would be discernible.

**CONCLUSION**

This analysis has been criticised on various grounds. Firstly, it has been criticised that the system is primarily concerned about its survival, hence it is ideologically inclined towards conservatism. Secondly, it is not suited to the analysis of power relations in society. Finally, the analysis is based on Western democratic political modal. They do not allow for the development of the institution in developing societies based on their genius and specific requirements. They believe the system incorporates the belief that western modal is superior to that followed elsewhere. However, the systems functional approach serves as an important tool in comparative political analysis. It helps in understanding the political system and structures better.