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Political Science — Class Notes

Topics Covered:

1. Meaning & Scope of Political Science
2. Nation and State
3. Distinction Between Society, Nation, State and Government



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UNIT 1: MEANING AND SCOPE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

1.1 What is Political Science?

Political Science is the systematic study of the State, government, political processes, political behaviour, and political institutions. Political Science deals with both empirical facts and normative issues. It is one of the oldest social sciences, rooted in ancient Greek philosophy.

1.1.1 Definitions

"Political Science begins and ends with the State." — J.W. Garner

"Political Science is that part of social science which treats the foundations of the State and the principles of government." — R.G. Gettel

"Political Science deals with the life of man in relation to organised states." — Paul Janet

1.2 Meaning of Political Science

The term 'Political Science' is derived from the Greek word *polis* (city-state) and the Latin word *scientia* (knowledge). It literally means 'knowledge of the state.' It examines:

- The origin, nature, and functions of the State
- The organisation and working of government
- The relationship between the individual and the State
- The distribution and exercise of power
- Political ideologies and public policies

1.3 Scope of Political Science

The scope of Political Science has expanded considerably over time. Modern Political Science covers the following broad areas:

(a) Study of the State

- Origin and theories of the State (Divine Origin, Social Contract, Evolutionary Theory)
- Nature and elements of the State
- Purposes and functions of the State performed by the State for maintaining law, order, welfare, and development.

(b) Study of Government

- Forms of government: Democracy, Monarchy, Dictatorship, Federal, Unitary

- **Democracy:** It is a form of government in which supreme power rests with the people. Citizens participate directly or indirectly through elected representatives. According to **Abraham Lincoln**, democracy is: "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people."
 - **Monarchy:** It is a form of government in which the head of the state is a king, queen, emperor, or hereditary ruler. There are two types of Monarchy; (a) Absolute Monarchy (The ruler possesses unlimited powers. *Example:* Saudi Arabia). (b) Constitutional Monarchy (The monarch acts as a ceremonial head, while elected representatives exercise real powers. *Example:* United Kingdom, Japan).
 - **Dictatorship:** It is a form of government in which all powers are concentrated in the hands of one person or a small group. *Example:* Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler; North Korea is often cited as a contemporary example.
 - **Aristocracy** is a form of government in which power is exercised by a group of the **best, most capable, noble, or privileged citizens**. Aristocracy means "**rule by the best.**" *Example:* Ancient Sparta.
 - **Oligarchy:** It is a form of government in which political power is concentrated in the hands of a **small group of people**. These individuals may belong to wealthy families, military leaders, influential businessmen, religious authorities, or a privileged class.
 - **Theocracy:** It is a form of government in which **religious leaders or religious laws govern the state**. Theocracy means "**rule in the name of God.**" *Example:* Vatican City; Iran has several theocratic features.
 - **Plutocracy:** It is a system in which the **wealthy class dominates political power**.
 - **Autocracy:** It is a government in which **one person possesses absolute power** and exercises authority without constitutional limitations. *Example:* Tsarist Russia.
 - **Bureaucracy:** It refers to administration conducted by **government officials and civil servants** according to fixed rules and procedures.
 - **Technocracy:** It is a form of governance where **experts, scientists, engineers, and professionals** play a dominant role in decision-making.
 - **Federal Government:** It is a system in which powers are constitutionally divided between the **Central Government** and the **State Governments**. *Example:* India, United States, Canada, Australia.
 - **Unitary Government:** It is a system in which all powers are concentrated in the hands of the Central Government. Local governments function under the authority of the centre.
- The **organs of government** are the institutions through which the State performs its functions and administers the country. In a modern democratic system, governmental powers are generally divided among three organs:

1. **Legislature:** It is the law-making organ of the government. It represents the will of the people and formulates policies and laws for the country.
 2. **Executive:** It is the organ responsible for implementing laws and administering the affairs of the State.
 3. **Judiciary:** It is the organ responsible for interpreting laws and administering justice.
- **Separation of Powers:** The doctrine of **Separation of Powers** was propounded by **Montesquieu** in his book *The Spirit of Laws* (1748). According to this doctrine:
 - ✓ **Legislature** makes laws.
 - ✓ **Executive** implements laws.
 - ✓ **Judiciary** interprets laws.

(c) Study of Individual and State Relationships

- Rights and duties of citizens
- Concepts of liberty, equality, and justice
- Civil liberties and fundamental rights

(d) Study of Political Institutions

- Political parties and party systems
- Pressure groups and interest groups
- Electoral systems and voting behaviour

(e) Study of International Relations

- Relations between nation-states
- International law and organisations (e.g., United Nations)
- Diplomacy, foreign policy, and globalisation

(f) Study of Political Theory

- Classical theories: Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Locke
- Modern theories: Liberalism, Marxism, Socialism, Feminism
- Concepts of power, authority, legitimacy, sovereignty

1.4 Traditional vs. Modern Approach

Traditional Approach	Modern Approach
Focuses on the State and government	Focuses on political behaviour and processes
Normative and philosophical	Empirical and scientific
Concerned with 'ought to be'	Concerned with 'what is'

Based on legal and historical analysis	Based on data collection and observation
Thinkers: Aristotle, Plato, Hobbes, Locke	Thinkers: Easton, Lasswell, Dahl, Almond

1.5 Is Political Science a Science or an Art?

There is a debate about whether Political Science is a true science:

Arguments FOR it being a Science:

- It uses systematic methods of study
- It establishes general principles and laws of political behaviour
- It uses observation, hypothesis, and verification

Arguments AGAINST it being a strict Science:

- Political behaviour is unpredictable and cannot be experimented upon
- Values, culture, and emotions influence political actions
- No universal laws can be established as in natural sciences

Political Science is best described as a social science — it uses scientific methods but studies human behaviour which is influenced by values and norms.

UNIT 2: NATION AND STATE

2.1 The Concept of Nation

A Nation is a large group of people who share a common identity based on culture, language, history, traditions, religion, or ethnicity. A nation is primarily a psychological and cultural concept.

2.1.1 Definitions of Nation

"A nation is a group of people united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbours." — **Karl Deutsch**

"A nation is a body of people who feel they are a nationality." — **Mill**

2.2 Elements / Characteristics of a Nation

- Common Race/Ethnicity: A shared biological or cultural heritage (though not absolutely necessary)
- Common Language: A common language promotes unity and national identity
- Common Religion: Shared religious beliefs can bind people together
- Common History and Traditions: Shared historical experiences, heroes, and customs

- Common Geographical Territory: A definite homeland, though not always required (e.g., the Jewish nation before 1948)
- Common Political Aspirations: Desire for self-governance or a common political future
- National Consciousness: The most important element — the feeling of 'we-ness' and belonging

2.3 The Concept of State

A State is a politically organised community occupying a definite territory, with a government that possesses sovereignty. The State is a legal and political entity, distinct from the nation.

2.3.1 Definitions of State

"State is a people organised for law within a definite territory." — **Woodrow Wilson**

"The State is a politically organised sovereign community occupying a definite territory." — **R.G. Gettel**

"The State is a human society which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." — **Max Weber**

2.4 Essential Elements of a State

According to most political scientists, a State must have four essential elements:

(i) Population

- A State must have people — there cannot be a State without population
- There is no fixed minimum or maximum size
- Examples: Vatican City (tiny) to China (1.4 billion)

(ii) Territory

- A definite and fixed geographical area is essential
- Includes land, water (rivers, lakes, territorial sea), and airspace
- Without territory, there is no State (e.g., nomadic groups are not States)

(iii) Government

- An organised political authority to make and enforce laws
- It is the agent or machinery of the State
- Government may change but the State continues

(iv) Sovereignty

- The supreme and absolute power of the State — the most essential element
- Internal Sovereignty: supremacy over all persons and associations within the territory

- External Sovereignty: independence from foreign control; recognition by other States

2.5 Distinction Between Nation and State

Basis	Nation	State
Nature	Cultural and psychological concept	Political and legal concept
Territory	Not necessary (e.g., Kurds, Jews before 1948)	Absolutely essential
Sovereignty	Not required	Essential and defining attribute
Basis	Based on common culture, language, history	Based on political organisation and law
Recognition	Does not need formal recognition	Needs recognition by other States
Govt.	Need not have its own government	Must have an organised government
Nation-State	A nation may exist without a State	A State may include multiple nations

2.6 Nation-State

A Nation-State is an ideal situation where the boundaries of the nation and the State coincide — where the political unit (State) and the cultural unit (Nation) are the same. Examples: Japan, Iceland, South Korea. In practice, most modern States are multi-national (e.g., India, the USA, Russia).

UNIT 3: DISTINCTION BETWEEN SOCIETY, NATION, STATE AND GOVERNMENT

3.1 Society

Society refers to a group of human beings who live together and have developed organised ways of working together. It is the broadest of all the concepts and includes all forms of human association.

Features of Society:

- Social and cultural in nature
- Based on mutual interdependence, cooperation, and shared norms
- No specific territory or political organisation required
- Includes family, clans, tribes, villages, and communities
- More permanent than the State or Government

"Society is the web of social relationships." — MacIver

3.2 Nation

Nation is a group of people bound together by common culture, language, history, tradition, and a sense of collective identity. It is essentially a psychological and emotional concept.

Features of Nation:

- Cultural, linguistic, and historical bonds
- Does not require a specific territory or government
- National consciousness (feeling of belonging together) is its most essential feature
- A nation may or may not have its own State

3.3 State

The State is a politically organised community with a definite territory, a permanent population, an effective government, and sovereignty. It is a legal and political concept.

Features of State:

- Has four essential elements: Population, Territory, Government, Sovereignty
- Sovereign — supreme authority within and independence outside
- It is a compulsory association — membership by birth (citizenship)
- Has the legal power to make and enforce laws
- More permanent than Government

3.4 Government

Government is the machinery or agency through which the State exercises its authority. It is the practical instrument of the State's will.

Features of Government:

- It is an organ — not an entity like the State
- Consists of Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary
- Temporary — can change through elections, revolutions, or coups
- Government acts in the name of the State
- Every State must have a government, but governments change

3.5 Comprehensive Comparison Table

Basis	Society	Nation	State	Government
Definition	Group of people sharing common life & culture	People united by common identity, history & culture	Political org. with defined territory & sovereignty	The ruling machinery of the State

Nature	Social & cultural	Cultural & emotional	Political & legal	Administrative & executive
Territory	Not necessary	Not necessary	Essential	Operates within State territory
Sovereignty	No sovereignty	No sovereignty	Essential attribute	Exercises sovereignty on behalf of State
Permanence	More permanent	Permanent	Permanent	Temporary (changes with elections)
Scope	Broad — includes all human relations	Based on nationality & common heritage	Narrower — political & legal entity	Narrowest — only governing body
Examples	Human society, tribal society	Jewish nation, Kurdish nation	India, USA, France	Cabinet, Parliament, Judiciary

3.6 Important Relationships

Society and State:

- Society is broader than the State — it includes all human relationships
- The State is a part of society, though a very powerful one
- Society existed before the State; the State is a product of society
- The State regulates society; society influences the character of the State
- Society > Nation > State > Government (in terms of breadth)

Nation and State:

- A nation can exist without a State (e.g., Palestinian nation for decades)
- A State can exist without being a nation (e.g., artificially created States)
- Ideally, a Nation-State is the modern form of political organisation

State and Government:

- The State is abstract and permanent; the Government is concrete and temporary
- The Government is an element/organ of the State
- You can criticise the Government without being disloyal to the State
- The State has sovereignty; the Government exercises it