**Decline of Political Theory:**

**Meaning of Decline:**

We know that after the Second World War all out efforts were made to base political theory upon the foundation of empirical research and to scrutinize political principles by data and facts. In earlier periods political theory had no separate existence and importance. Political science was made to cohabit with history, economics, and sociology. Serious research and investigation practically had no place in political science.

David Easton writes, “Political theory today is interested primarily in the history of ideas”. This was the exact character of political theory. Also it was inextricably associated with notions of value and general principles. Easton could not accept this position of political theory. He thought that value, principles and history cannot be the sole determiners of political theory.

The classical and modern traditional political scientists did not pay any attention to the development of the theoretical analysis with the help of data. It was the purpose of Easton and many others to rewrite the meaning of political theory and to treat it “as part of empirical science and to reject explicitly. The emerging tendency to identify the term with both metaphysical speculation (abstractions hopelessly removed from empirical observation and control) and the history of political thought”.

**Eclipse of Liberalism:**

The study of political science mainly based on history or supported by historical data exposes the bare fact that from the 1920s liberal political thought or liberalism was passing through a number of crises. One, the establishment of Bolshevik rule in Russia laid the foundation of Collectivism and curtailment of individual freedom initiative.

In other words after the First World War (1914-1918) a belief gathered momentum that only state sponsored projects and gargantuan type of state activity can be prophylactic device for the removal of numerous miseries from which common people were suffering. This drastically corroded the individual’s freedom.

Again in the 1930s American capitalism experienced an unprecedented crisis and the White House adopted certain measures which went against the liberalism. Easton diagnosed another reason of the “eclipse of liberalism”. In his opinion the problem of contemporary liberalism was its general failure to put its theories to the test of social reality. Scientific methods shall be used to discover social facts about the source of political power.

To sum up, liberalism as well as political theory must be based on rigorous empirical study. If this technique is strictly followed the fragility of liberalism and decline of political theory can be stopped. He has elaborated his conception of the idea of decline of political theory in The Political System.

#### Historicism and Decline of Political Theory:

According to David Easton the ever-increasing role of historicism is a major cause of the decline of political theory. In his words: “Political theory has been devoted to a form of historical researches that has robbed it of its earlier, constructive role”. What is historicism? It is defined as a belief that history is governed by inexorable laws of change and that human actions are guided by permanent ultimate purposes.

#### Domination of Moral Theory:

We shall now explore another aspect of the decline of political theory. For several centuries political science in general and political theory in particular was dominated by the moral premises of Western civilisation. The exponents of these moral premises have constantly and vigorously preached that they are right and no objection or criticism can be levelled against them. Presumably the researchers were not very interested in launching protracted research about the validity and acceptability of mere moral values and concepts.

This notion also crippled all sorts of research work. Students of political theory took no interest to verify the various aspects of political theory with the help of new facts and data. It was very much difficult for them to challenge the prevailing notion about political theory.

The consequence is political theory remained shrouded with vague notions and premises, Easton concludes. “This tendency towards moral conformity is both symptom of and a cause contributing to the lack of constructive approach; therefore it prevents the very kind of inquiry necessary for a thorough understanding of the values underlying research”.

#### Ideological Reductionism:

The decline of political theory can be traced to “ideological reductionism”. Before entering into the depth of the matter ideology and reductionism ought to be clarified. “An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides a basis for organised political action”. Simply stated, ideology is a set of coherent ideas. Generally, ideology is related to politics. Reductionism is the practice of analysing and describing a complex phenomenon in terms of its simple or fundamental constituents especially when it is said to provide a sufficient explanation.

According to Dante Germino (Beyond Ideology: The Revival of Political Theory) one of the major causes of the decline of political theory is colourful emergence of ideology or ideological reductionism. There are a number of pioneers in this field and most important of them is Karl Marx. Marx studied the history of several hundred years and after doing this he arrived at certain conclusions which formed Marxism. Though Marxism forms a part of political science, it does not constitute any important segment of political theory.

It is simply “ideological reductionism” and also partly propagandist ideology. Marx’s political concepts were preached and propagated for particular purpose and this purpose is emancipation of working class through the abolition of capitalism by means of class struggle leading to violent revolution. Marxism so much dominated the intellectual world and revolution; in particular that political theory could not get any scope to develop.

#### Contemporary Conditions:

Contemporary conditions of various parts of the globe have contributed to the decline of political theory. Some of these conditions are stated below: ‘One such condition is the emergence of communism or collectivism in several parts of Europe. In the communist countries party, bureaucracy and ideology completely dominated the political as well as ideological affairs of the state, the academic world hardly got any opportunity to think and express freely. Political scientists, researchers and other academicians were not in a position to pursue their academic works without any outside restrictions.

In fact, communist countries imposed thought and feeling upon the intellectuals and finally this destroyed the openness of society. The entire society lived in unbearable suffocation and this is treated as a cause of decline in political theory.

#### Absence of Man of Vision:

Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx etc. comfortably traversed the outer and inner roads and lanes of political science, political theory, philosophy, and political philosophy with a clear vision in their mind and far-flung outlook. We may not agree with what they propounded but they said something worthwhile.

But when the tradition and vision created by them came to an end the political scientists lacked the vision and zeal which their predecessors possessed and this lack of vision was to some extent responsible for the declining condition of political theory. Political scientists, theoreticians and philosophers had a transparent vision about the present situation of society and, at the same time, they had a vision about the structure of future society.

Plato, Aristotle, Marx etc. followed this general principle. Plato conceived of an ideal state, Aristotle thought of a polity which will be free from the causes of schisms. Marx imagined of a communist society. All these visions provided raw materials for building up a structure of political theory. Subsequently political scientists forgot to imbibe vision and cherish passion.

This ultimately resulted in a declining condition of political theory. So it is observed that only rejuvenation can help the revival of political theory. The advent of behaviouralism and empiricism is directed to that direction. At least the exponents of these doctrines claim so.

### Resurgence of Political Theory:

#### Political Theory is not Dead:

The political theory during the last several decades has declined. But the declining condition does not indicate that political theory is dead. Incredible attachment to value conception, great apathy towards the application of scientific methods and techniques, and the predominance of philosophy over political theory made it considerably irrelevant in the real world.

So we can draw a subtle distinction between declining condition of political theory and its death. Political science in general and political theory in particular was always treated as very important branch of social science. Political science was and still is a very popular subject and is studied and taught in almost every university. Up to the Second World War political science generally meant the study of state and different political organisations and institutions such as legislature executive, judiciary political parties pressure groups etc.

The subject was restricted within the activities of these organisations and institutions. Political theory revolved around these traditional conceptions. This traditional outlook considerably dwarfed the content and scope of political theory: Particularly in the field of policy- making political theory had no spectacular role to play. But the real scope of political theory is much broader than the one envisaged by traditional thinkers.

#### Commencement of Resurgence:

The post Second World War period—specifically the 1950s—witnessed new directions in the development of political theory and it is observed that the War served as a dividing line between the old and the new concepts of political theory. A large number of scholars from Europe migrated to America and many of them began serious research work on political theory and their interest did not lie in the study of political theory in traditional way.

They arrived at the conclusion that the traditional method of analysing political phenomena and theory was not adequate for new reforms or rejuvenation of political theory. New methods are to be devised. This tendency finally laid the foundation of a new way of studying political theory. A critic writes, “Consequently the large new generation provided the impetus for the search of a new kind of political science”.

The main resurgence was found in United States where American Political Science Association and Rockefeller Foundation played the pioneer role. A large number of researchers gathered at various research institutes and universities of America and their painstaking efforts really enriched the empirical approach to the study of political theory leading to its resurgence.

#### Resurgence is Multifaceted Pluralism:

The Resurgence in Political Theory that took place after the Second World War assumed various shapes and manifestations and the present space cannot comprise them all. Some may be briefly stated. One such manifestation is pluralism. Pluralism wants to emphasise that in any society there are numerous individuals who cherish different tastes, interests and values. Pluralism has a clear liberal lineage.

The state or authority cannot impose any decision upon the people against their wishes. In any liberal society or pluralist society there can exist number of institutions and organisations to cater the interests and values of individuals. After the 1950s, states of Europe and America could not ignore the variety of individuals’ interests. Political scientists also wanted to propound the doctrine that there might be conflict among individuals so far as their tastes and interests are concerned.

But that does not create an atmosphere of animosity or long drawn struggle as Marx and his followers assumed. That is, pluralism proceeded to prove that pluralist society is much better than a regimented one. Pluralism further assumes that there is no need of class struggle or revolution for establishment of an ordered society. Pluralist society is endowed with certain self-regulating mechanisms which have enough ability to put society into order.

Even during the heyday of traditional political theory there existed pluralism. But after the Second World War it received larger impetus from many sources. Varieties of ideas and concepts rapidly developed due to the advance of pluralism and this helped the resurgence of political theory.

#### Behaviouralism:

Behaviouralism constitutes a very important aspect of the resurgence of political theory that took place at the beginning of the fifties of the last century. A brief definition of behaviouralism runs as follows. It is a belief that social theories can be constructed on the basis of observable facts and behaviour, quantifiable data and facts. Behaviouralism further maintains that various segments of human behaviour are both observable and quantifiable.

After a thorough analysis of the behaviour, facts and datas certain conclusions and models of political theory can be constructed. Behaviouralism in political science also states that it does not deal with all sorts of behaviour of the individuals but only with that behaviour which displays political character.

The behaviouralists, while analysing and scrutinising the behaviour, adopt such methods and techniques as are generally adopted by natural and physical sciences. The great pioneer in this field is David Easton. Behaviouralism opened the new vistas of political theory and at the same time injected new blood into the body of political theory. But this theory could not utter the last word about the status of political theory.