IN CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to assess David Easton's contribution to political science. Easton's main concern is political theory and he writes from the perspective of an American political scientist who was worried about the so-called "decline of political theory". Easton maintains that as a result of this decline, American political science has failed to produce any reliable political knowledge. There cannot be any two opinions about the fact that in the fifties of this century when Easton started writing, political theory was a neglected area of study in American political science. Our analysis of the emergence and the development of political science in America in chapter I shows that it was not merely a case of decline of political theory; there was in fact a certain casualness about the study of theory. The period of the emergence of American political science was characterized by drastic changes in American society. The emerging discipline took upon itself the task of training citizens to accept the new order and the values attached to it. The discipline went through the stages of reformism, pragmatism, scientism and behaviouralism. In each of these stages it neglected the study of political theory. The concept of decline has implicit in it the assumption that at some point in history, political theory was in a state of ascendancy or was having its hey day. That, however,
was not the case in the United States. Therefore, it is our contention that it was not merely a case of decline; American political science, as a discipline, never took political theory seriously.

Though we may not agree with Easton on the question of decline of political theory in America we must appreciate the fact that he put forward a strong case in favour of the necessity of studying political theory. His argument that all mature scientific knowledge is theoretical, is valid. His persistent arguments have successfully drawn the attention of the discipline to the serious consequences of the neglect of political theory.

On the basis of these arguments Easton hopes to win back for theory its proper place in the study of political science. He seems to have achieved this goal; but his own attempt at theorization needs a close examination. In his effort at theory building Easton provides us with a general theory of politics. This theory is presented in the form of a conceptual framework. This framework views the political life as a 'constructive system'. Now, the political system is perceived as an open, boundary maintaining, responsive system with two essential variables. The idea is that of a flow model where the system receives 'inputs' (demands and supports) from the environment and converts them to 'out-puts' (decisions
and actions of authorities). The consequences of these out-puts are returned to the system as in-puts through a feed-back system. If the process works smoothly the 'essential variables' (making authoritative allocations and getting them accepted as binding) of the system remain within the 'critical range'. So long as these variables remain within the 'critical range' the system persists. Despite Easton's Protestations, the 'critical range', as we have shown, is another version of the idea of equilibrium. If the flow model operates, the system is in an equilibrium. If the balance between the in-puts and the out-puts is disturbed as a result of the failure of the feed-back, the equilibrium is lost and the system fails to persist. Easton, of course, claims that in the case of occurrence of stress, the system can take corrective steps. If such stress is the result of overflow of demands, corrective steps will be taken through the 'gate keepers'. If the stress results from the fall in support for any or all of the 'political objects' — the authorities, the Regime and the Political community — the corrective steps will be directed towards these objects. In such a case the system may modify or change any or all of the 'political objects'.

Our analysis of Easton's ideas on political theory (Chapter II) and his conceptual framework (Chapter IV and V) reveals that in the ultimate analysis his idea of a political
theory is that of a conceptual framework only. He hopes that such a framework will enable political science to produce reliable knowledge. But our analysis shows that his own framework fails to do that. We agree with Thomas Landon Thorson that Easton's framework can merely handle change; it cannot explain change. Moreover, it cannot explain why particular policies are adopted by particular governments. Thorson calls it a futile enterprise. He maintains that this futility is caused by the fact that Easton adopts the prediction-generalization model for scientific theory. This explanation for the futility of Easton's enterprise does not, however, appear to be convincing for if it were so, systems analysis in physiology, which is also based on the same model of science, should also have been an equally futile exercise. Systems analysis in physiology is a branch of General Systems theory which itself is firmly rooted in holism. Holism believes in unity of sciences and aims at integration of scientific knowledge. An analysis of Easton's system analysis (Chapter IV) shows that he has broken away from this tradition. He uses the concept of system for an entirely different purpose, namely, to delimit the field of political science. It is this break, as we tried to show in chapter four which may partially explain why Easton's framework loses its utility.
Moreover, Easton views political life as a system not because he thinks that it is a system; but because it is convenient to do so. With the help of the idea of an 'analytical' political system he aims at building an all-time all-place general theory of politics. Such a theory cannot focus on any determinate political system. It focuses on 'politics in general'. While doing so, in the place of determinate, historical political systems he interpolates the idea of a political system in general. In the process, the framework becomes so general as to become a meta-theory rather than theory. The structure of this theory is so abstract that it becomes impossible to find an empirical point of reference. This exercise carries Easton's political science to the realm of metaphysics. It is no wonder that this framework fails to produce any reliable knowledge — the one purpose for which Easton had sought to develop his framework. Although Easton's exercise in theory building produces this abstract framework, yet he intended his theory to be empirical. He pleads for a theory which will be able to 'order all political data.'

To say this is by no means to imply that Easton ignores the question of values. In his book The Political System and also in his famous presidential address to the American political Science Association, Easton took great pains to emphasize the role of value theory. He argues that political scientists must take a "constructive approach" to the question
of values. In this approach a theorist is expected to spell out his normative preferences not only to inform others about these but also to enable himself to "check the impact of his moral views on his theory." Easton advocates the need to develop a set of theories free from the influence of the moral views of the theorist. This idea is based on the belief that it is possible to deal with facts without getting involved in normative issues. We tried to show, in chapter II, that an attempt to develop an empirical political theory free from the value bias of the theorist would prevent political scientists from studying the really crucial issues of political and social life. Such an approach would make the study of normative questions impossible for political scientists. Even central questions of political theory like the right order of society would be placed outside the scope of political theory. By viewing political theory within these parameters Easton remains in line with the positivist tradition.

As a result of this approach to political theory Easton's political science would tend to become descriptive in nature. An analysis of Easton's definition of politics reinforces this conclusion. Easton rightly argues that the traditional definitions of politics which centered round the concepts of state and power failed to define politics. It is true that we need a definition of politics which views it as an activity and carefully demarcates it, for analytical purposes, from other related
phenomena. But Easton's definition of politics as the authoritative allocation of values for a society does not serve the purpose. Evans and Vandyke are right in pointing out that the key terms in this definition are ambiguous and hence it fails to identify and define political phenomena. But the more important point to note in this connection is that such a definition casts political science in an allocative frame. As a result, like the neo-classical marginal allocative economists, political scientists of this hue prevent themselves from asking fundamental questions about the nature of political power and the related normative questions like, whether it is right, just and so on. As this definition focuses on policy decisions as allocation of values it makes it unnecessary for the political scientists to go into the 'core assumptions' of political power in any determinate society. Though it does not neglect power as such it focuses merely on the distribution of power and not on the purpose of political power. It must be noted here that the purpose of power is also a normative question and therefore, Easton's political science with its positivist roots would not permit its discussion. A political science which merely describes the distribution of power but does not go into the questions concerning the purpose of such distribution, loses much of its utility. Moreover, such a perspective brings a conservative bias to political theory. It remains concerned with the reality; but only as it exists.
We have tried to show in chapter five that such a concern brings a status-quo bias to Easton's theory.

The status-quoist nature of Easton's theory is revealed also by the way he deals with the question of system maintenance and the roles of consensus and equilibrium in his theory. Like all other forms of systems analysis Easton's approach also cannot avoid the issue of system maintenance. In 1957, in his first attempt to build a framework for systems analysis of political life Easton took a position which clearly reflected a maintenance bias. We have tried to show in the fifth chapter that under his framework, as spelled out in 1957, he perceived the main research task as one which sought to examine how a system maintained itself. But over a decade a shift seems to have taken place in his approach. In his works published in 1965, and after, he insists that he is concerned with 'persistence' and not 'maintenance'. Easton deliberately chooses the term persistence to refer to the continuous existence of a political system, if necessary through changes, as against maintenance which refers to keeping the political system in a certain condition. We note that most of the major criticism against the maintenance bias of the systems approach in social sciences came in late fifties. Though Easton himself was not enjoined, such criticism was forcefully directed against scholars like Talcott Parsons. In an interview with the author of the present study Easton indicated that he was
aware of these criticism. Therefore, the deliberate attempt on Easton's part to avoid the term maintenance seems to be intended to pre-empting such criticism. But such avoidance does not liberate his framework from its conservative bias. An analysis of the roles of consensus and equilibrium in his theory makes the point clear.

In our analysis of Easton's framework as developed in 1957 and also in 1965 and later, we have noted that equilibrium and consensus play very important roles in his framework. The idea of the critical range, as we have mentioned above, is reminiscent of the equilibrium theory and the whole political process is actually viewed as the result of a consensus. This perspective is also evident in Easton's work on political socialization, which has status-quo implications.

In our analysis of Easton's empirical work in the area of political socialization we have tried to show that these studies were undertaken on the assumption that an understanding of change and stability of political attitudes of children would facilitate an understanding of stability and change within the political system. We have explained that this assumption itself was based on three questionable assumptions viz. (1) Adult behaviour was shaped in part by attitudes learnt during childhood, (2) Adult opinions were in large part the end product of political socialization, (3) Individual political opinions

1. See Appendix.
(and the resulting behaviour) had an impact on the operation of a nation's government and political life. We have further pointed out that these studies attempt to understand behaviour in terms of attitudes, which are actually express attitudes only. These studies tend to generalize children's attitudes to the American political system on the basis of a sample collected from among white urban children in metropolitan areas. We have argued in the sixth chapter that since man's consciousness is determined to a great extent by his social existence no general conclusions could be drawn from such studies which are confined to certain strata of the society. But as in his theoretical framework, here too Easton assumes that support or opposition to a political system is the result of a consensus among its members.

The emphasis on equilibrium and consensus reflected in Easton's political science is the outcome of his perception of reality. On the one hand reality can be viewed as pervaded by consensus with given structures, capable of experiencing only limited changes. Such a view of reality is essentially static. On the other hand, a reality can be viewed as beset with contradictions which are capable of transforming it. A theory which centres round the concepts of equilibrium and consensus has a view of reality as static.

At the beginning of this study, we stated that we would try to analyse if Easton's political theory could
simplify reality so that it could be presented in a more comprehensible manner. We also proposed to analyse whether his view of reality was static or dynamic. In the course of our study we have demonstrated that in his bid to develop an all-time all-place general theory of politics he develops such an abstract framework which loses all empirical relevance. We have also found that he emphasises equilibrium and consensus and, therefore, has a static view of reality. This gives a conservative bias to his theory. We find that his conservatism is the result of his conformity with the logical positivist tradition on the question of value-relativism. This conclusion is supported by our analysis of Easton's idea of political theory and his definition of politics. These conclusions, however, do not deny Easton's contributions to the understanding of political science. Through his persistent arguments in favour of a serious study of political theory, Easton has won back for theory, what he himself called, "its proper and necessary place"², and this contribution itself should ensure him a prominent place among the great political scientists of our time.

2. Easton, The Political System, op. cit., p. XV.