INTRODUCTION

Inquiry in the field of what is known as political science has traditionally been based on ideal speculation. Ever since the days of Plato traditional political science has engaged itself mainly in the formation of Utopian systems, i.e., ideal states and societies. These hypothetical systems represent the logically organized recommendations of their authors about how the world ought to be constituted. These are also expected to be the measuring rods to judge the politics of the real world. This concern with ideals made traditional political science a normative exercise. In the process the study of facts, very often, remained neglected. Emergence of behaviouralism led to a break in this tradition. The early behaviouralists emphasized the study of facts. As a result traditional political science came to face severe criticism. In a sense, the arrogance of the early behaviouralists prevented them from realising the fact that the inquiry conducted by the normative Political Scientists of the past had been primarily motivated by the desire to explore moral and political values. These values were largely given to them by the world around them. Therefore, even while formulating Utopian systems, traditional political science had to take cognizance of the facts. The early behaviouralists, however, thought that traditional political science totally ignored facts. Their principal criticism was that traditional study
of politics was not scientific, the knowledge it produced was not cumulative. In fact, empirical deficiency of traditional political science was itself the proximate impetus for behaviouralism.

In the 1950s of this century, American political science came fully under the influence of behaviouralism. Despite the resistance from traditional political science, the behaviouralists came to dominate the discipline in such a manner that the whole discipline became engrossed in factual research. This obsession with factual research led to a neglect of the study of political theory. The situation came to such a pass that in 1967 Ithiel de Solapool could say:

Behaviouralism is said to have won acceptance to the point where it is no longer an issue in the discipline. Men so labeled no longer have trouble in getting jobs in the best-known universities. Departments no longer try to prove that they are liberal by having one man be the local behaviourist. They are more likely now to try to prove that they are cultured by hiring one man labeled a theorist. (emphasis added)¹

The behavioural conquest of American political science, thus, created a situation where theoretical inquiry came to be regarded as a suspicious, unsatisfactory, and perhaps illogical form of thought. It is remarkable that during the same period a group of political scientists began to express concern over the decline of political theory. Peter Laslett and Robert A. Dahl declared that political theory was "dead."^2 Neal Reimer said that political theory was "in the dog house". 3 Alfred Cobban and David Easton wrote about its "decline".4 Scholars may have differed about the nature and causes of this decline; but a majority of political scientists with


the exception of a few like Dante Germino agreed that there was a decline in the study of political theory. As one perceptive scholar says:

The 'deline' and occasionally even 'death' of political theory has been a subject of much recent discussion. Though covering both empirical or causal and normative or value theory, the focus of discussion has been more on the latter than the former. And while the gravity of the situation has been variously assessed and the diagnosis differed, as also remedies suggested, there has been a wide consensus, alarmed or complascent, about the existence of a situation of real 'trouble' or 'malise' as it has been called.

Among these authors who tried to draw the attention of the discipline to the decline of political theory, Professor David Easton was, probably the most important. He had not only pointed out the decline of political theory but also ventured "to win back for theory its proper and necessary place."

5. Dante Germino argues that during the period in which the above-mentioned scholars and a host of others were speaking of a decline of political theory it was actually reviving. See Dante Germino, "The Revival of Political Theory" The Journal of Politics, Vol. 2 (August 1963), pp. 437-460. See also his book Beyond Ideology: The Revival of Political Theory, (Harper and Row, New York, 1967).


Though Easton begins by referring to the decline of political theory in general, he is particularly disturbed about the state of political theory in the United States. His comments on the state of political theory in America, however, becomes a commentary on the state of political theory in general because political science in its present form is almost entirely an American discipline. In the opening paragraph of *The Political System* Easton says:

> ... in the light of what society demands from them and of what is in fact possible for political science, they (political scientists) would be compelled ... to set all pride aside and confess that in its achievement in research American political science has great difficulty in measuring up to the task imposed upon it.

He then states the reason for this failure in the following words:

> It is the burden of this study that among these reasons and at the forefront we must place the constant reluctance in American political science to adopt and

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8. Gabriel Almond says, "... although political philosophy and political analysis are ancient fields of inquiry — primarily Mediterranean and European in their origin — political science as a profession with specialization of interests, substantial research support, emphasis on systematic field research, and rigorous logical methods, is relatively new and at the present time is almost entirely American." Gabriel Almond, "Political Theory and Political Science", in Ithiel de Solapool, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

teach seriously the standards of valid thinking, observation and description which today we are prone to associate with something vaguely called scientific method.  

Easton rightly argues that acceptance, and introduction into on-going research, of the fundamental postulates and assumptions of this method would reveal that "a major source of the shortcomings in political science lies in the failure to clarify the true relationship between facts and political theory and the vital role of theory in this partnership."  

We have noted at the beginning of this chapter that while most of traditional political scientists indulged in purely normative theorizing at the cost of factual research the early behaviouralists concentrated on facts at the cost of theory. A rigorous scientific method should help us to restore theory to its proper place because a fundamental requirement of science is that facts and theories must be inter-related so that theories attempt to explain facts and facts help generate or test new theories. New factual data may change or destroy theories. It can also generate new theories, which, in turn, may alter the basis and pattern

10. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
11. Ibid., p. 4.
of the collection and analysis of data. Easton holds that the search for reliable knowledge about empirical phenomena requires ultimately the construction of systematic theory, the name for the highest order of generalization. He maintains that American political science failed to develop such a theory because it fell a prey to what Easton calls, 'Hyper-factualism'. This over-emphasis on "facts" in scientific research pushed theoretical perspective to the background. Moreover, political scientists were reluctant to separate pure science from what is variously called practical, prescriptive, or applied science. As a result political scientists attempted to build 'a premature policy science'. Easton concludes:

... Over the years political science has emerged as a fact gathering and reforming discipline. While verification of theory obviously requires the accumulation of facts and social reality demands the application of knowledge, nevertheless excessive emphasis on these aspects of research has both reflected and contributed


15. Ibid., p. 78.
to the concealment of the necessary theoretical foundation for any mature understanding of the political system. In concentrating on the accumulation of facts, political science has neglected the general framework within which these facts could acquire meaning to transcend any particular time and place. And in becoming pre-occupied almost exclusive with problems of applying this factual information, political science has impeded its own movement towards a fundamental understanding of political life, a kind of knowledge that would place the relation of means to ends on a secure foundation.16

As is evident from the above passage, though Easton arrives at these conclusions on the basis of his observation of the condition of the American political science his plea for developing a theory in the form of a 'general framework' is meant for the discipline as a whole. All through his book The Political System Easton emphasizes the need for a political theory in the form of a general framework of analysis which may enable us to order "all" political data.

Though this clearly is a plea for an empirical theory of politics Easton does not ignore the questions of values. He argues that moral views influence theoretical thinking to such a degree that a conceptual framework would be incomplete without a clear knowledge and understanding of its moral premises. Secondly, that mere description or formal knowledge

16. Ibid., p. 89.
of these ethical premises does not meet this requirement for moral clarity. Thirdly, that the need for closer attention to systematic theory automatically imposes upon political science the obligation to re-examine and ultimately to revise the way in which moral theory has been studied over the first half of the twentieth century. Easton shows that the approaches of authors like Dunning, Mollwain and Sabine to the study of political theory resulted in a "decline into historicism". He maintains:

... in the United States today they are representative of research in this field. Political theorists are primarily historicist in their orientation. They do not use the history of values as a device to stimulate thought on a possible constructive redefinition of political goals.

Easton wants political scientists to take a constructive approach to the question of value judgment. Such an approach must enable them to clarify their moral premises and to detect the influence of moral views on their research in systematic theory.

Any attempt at formulating such a theory immediately necessitates a definition of politics on the basis of which

17. Ibid., pp. 219-232.
13. Ibid., pp. 233-265.
20. Ibid., p. 265.
political phenomena could be distinguished from other social phenomena. Easton reviews all prevailing definitions of politics. He finds that these centre round the concepts of state and power. He shows the inadequacies of these concepts and offers a new definition of politics. He defines politics as "authoritative allocation of values for a society." This definition as Frohock says, is "perhaps the most widely known modern definition of political phenomena." Frohock has pointed out the obvious advantages of the definition. These are: it focuses on activity instead of institutions, it escapes the definitional morass of power and it provides a general frame-work for locating political variables. But, this definition has not been universally accepted. Frohock himself maintains that since under this definition only authoritative allocations could be regarded as political phenomena "to remain consistent, we must exclude a number of policy decisions made by governments which do not quite fit the proposal." He argues that many decisions of legally constituted officials are not allocative in nature. Moreover, Easton's definition regards only those policies as authoritative which are considered binding by the people for whom

21. Ibid., pp. 91-124.
22. Ibid., p. 129.
24. Ibid., p. 89.
25. Loc. cit.
they are made. In that sense government policies and decisions which are not implemented will not be considered political. Evans shows that the key terms in the definition are ambiguous and therefore it fails to define political phenomena.26

However, on the basis of this definition Easton develops a framework for political analysis. He argues that political life is an activity and it must be viewed as a system. His idea of the political system has evoked great interest among political scientists. Meehan has lauded it as "one of the few comprehensive attempts to lay the foundation for systems analysis in political science and provide a 'general' functional theory of political science"27 Oran Yong calls it "undoubtedly the most inclusive systemic approach so far constructed specifically for political analysis by a political scientist." As this is an approach developed specially for political science Yong sees in it the advantage of being "able to deal with the various problems of applying systems analysis to political questions in a coordinated fashion without having to cope with problems of adaptation."28 Easton's

model is not universally acclaimed. Some political scientists have pointed out defects in the model. Others have even questioned the utility of his whole exercise. Paul F. Kress for instance says that it may best be described as an "empty vision" of politics. He writes, "by the phrase 'empty vision', I wish to summarize my arguments concerning the theory's lack of substance, the artificial nature of system and member, the replacement of the action by the container, and the disappearance of boundaries as limits of possibility". Another critic Thomas Landon Thorson argues that Easton's framework is based on the prediction-generalization model of science and that Easton aims at building an all-time, all space general theory of politics. He maintains that such a theory is not possible. Thorson writes:

Easton really performs a considerable service for students of politics although certainly not the one he intended to perform. He painstakingly creates the reduction ad absurdum for the idea of an absolutely general, any time any place, theory of politics. By showing us that a political system, construed in an absolutely general way, fails to persist only in those cases where it fails to persist Easton convinces us of what no mere critic — because he would lack the necessary persuasive and psychological leverage — of the idea of general theory of politics could possibly convince us of, namely, that the enterprise is futile.30

Such differences of opinion about Easton's ideas are the results of somewhat piecemeal studies of his works. These studies have discussed Easton's ideas on political theory, definition of politics and the conceptual framework developed by him, separately. These commentators have neither examined systematically the inter-connections between these nor have they traced the evolution of Easton's thought. In fact despite the interest aroused by his writings no systematic attempt has so far been made to study his ideas in their totality. This study is an attempt at this direction.

David Easton has concerned himself with the decline of modern political theory, particularly in American political science. He has argued the importance of political theory in the study of politics. He gives a new definition of politics and on the basis of this definition develops a 'general theory of politics' in the form of a conceptual framework which he calls a systems analysis of political life. With the help of this framework he also takes up some empirical studies in the area of political socialization. Therefore, an assessment of Easton's contribution must consider each of these areas of his research, but such an assessment is possible only if we begin by examining his idea of political science as a discipline, its nature and scope. Easton, as we have pointed out, writes as an American political scientist and it is only natural that his perception of the nature and scope
of the discipline would to a great extent be influenced by the nature of the American political science itself. Any attempt at understanding this nature would necessitate an analysis of the history of the emergence of American political science and the intellectual milieu, social environment and the forces that gave shape to this history. It is in this context that Easton's arguments about the importance of political theory, the nature of his theory, the definition of politics and his empirical work in the field of political socialization must be understood. Such a study of course cannot ignore the process of evolution of his thought; because an analysis of the evolution of his ideas would reveal the various phases of his thought and would enable us to understand the main sources of influence that shape these phases. Easton's main concern is political theory. It is this concern that pervades through his writings. A political theory is a means for understanding a political reality. To assist understanding it has to clarify; and to clarify it has to simplify. A political theory then must be based on a simplification of reality; which in itself is a notion of reality such a notion comprises of hypotheses about reality. Such hypotheses amount to tentative suggestions about reality and therefore involve a conceptualized view of the reality. A reality can be viewed either as static or as dynamic. A perspective from which a reality is viewed becomes a perspective for the analysis of
the reality itself. As Allen puts it:

> A conceptualization of reality as static implies that it has qualities which make for consensus which give it an organic unity, which are prior to any other qualities. A conceptualization of reality as a changing phenomenon gives priority to qualities which produce change. 31

A theory which is based on a view of society which is static will be a theory which is status-quoist in nature and a theory which is based on a dynamic view of society will be free from such a bias. Therefore, while trying to understand Easton's political theory, the two major questions we plan to raise are: 1) Does his political theory help us to simplify political reality so that we can understand it? 2) Does he view reality as static or as changing?

To facilitate our inquiry in this direction we have divided the study into seven chapters. The first chapter traces the emergence and development of American political science and its treatment of political theory. The second chapter evaluates Easton's ideas on the nature of political theory against the background of the development of political theory in America. Since his views on political theory are closely connected with his definition of politics so the third chapter analyses this definition. Fourth and the fifth

chapter analyse the viability of Easton's framework and the question of maintenance and persistence in his framework. Sixth chapter is a discussion of Easton's work in the area of political socialization. The last chapter summarises the discussion and attempts to arrive at some conclusions.