

PLURALISTIC THEORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

Pluralism in political science means that existence of many groups and associations in a society and the recognition of their importance for the overall welfare of human beings. Pluralists accuse monists that they regard all non-political associations created by the state as dependent for their continued existence upon the will of the state and as exercising only powers conceded by the state. Pluralists believe that other associations arise naturally and spontaneously and in their peculiar spheres act independently of state control.

During the period of First World War, the state forced its citizens to obey each and every rule created by it and went to the extent of saying them to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the state. Their policy of war was also determined only by the people in power who were imperfect and unsound like other common people. Therefore, the pluralists argued that the state may be a powerful and dominant institution, but it is only one of many associations in society. Pluralist ideas can be traced back to early liberal political philosophy, and notably to the ideas of John Locke and Montesquieu. Their first systematic development, however, was in the contribution of James Madison to the The Federalist Papers, in which he advocated a system of divided government based upon the separation of powers, bicameralism and federalism in order to resist majoritarianism and to provide minority interests with a guaranteed political voice.

Whereas the monistic theory is associated with the legal aspects of sovereignty, the pluralist theory emphasizes on the sociological character of the state. The pluralists are of the view that there many associations in the society and some of them like family and church have been in existence prior to the origin of the state itself. All these associations are equally important for the well-being of the human beings.

The assumptions of the pluralism are as follows:

All citizens belong to groups and many will have multiple group membership;

There is rough equality amongst groups, in that each group has access to government and no group enjoys a dominant position;

There is a high level of internal responsiveness within groups, leaders being accountable to members;

The state is neutral amongst groups and the governmental machine is sufficiently fragmented to offer groups a number of access points;

Although groups have competing interests, there is a wider consensus among groups on the nature of the political system and the values of openness and competition.

MAIN POINTS OF THE PLURALISTIC THEORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

- Pluralist abhor the over-concentration of power in the hands of the state. It is harmful.
- They want a state in which power is distributed among different groups and associations.
- Absolute sovereignty undermines the autonomous associations.
- State is an amalgam of agencies and persons with different objectives and means of decision.
- It is tyrannical to treat state as the only source & upholder of power.

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE PLURALISTIC THEORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

Some of the criticisms are given below:

1. It is said that the logical conclusion of the theory of pluralism is anarchism.

Anarchism is an ideology that is defined by the central belief that political authority in all its form, and especially in the form of the state is both evil and unnecessary. Anarchy literally means 'without rule.'

2. The pluralists forget that the state is a unifying force, which cannot be challenged by others. In order to avoid social conflict, unified power must be given to the state.

3. The pluralistic theory of sovereignty implies superiority of the interests of the dominant group over those of the vulnerable groups/sections of the society.

4. This theory equates power of the state with other associations and puts them in the same category. But the reality is that it is in the interest of associations that more power is vested in the state.

5. Division of sovereignty among different associations is not only impossible but also improper. Division of sovereignty in fact lead to destruction of sovereignty.