

Political Theory: Issues, Concepts and Debates, October 2011, Published by Arun Prakashan, Guwahati.

Here is a brief thrust of the book.

Political theory is a core component in the discipline of Political Science. It is through political theory that the students in this discipline are introduced to the major concepts and critical debates on the subject. Political theory helps the students to move beyond the 'apparent truths' regarding what is happening in politics. Questioning the given assumptions is the core concern in political theory. Political theory primarily focuses on the critical debates on and around the concepts which are intimately connected with organisation and ruling or governing the society. The important concepts are democracy, rights, liberty and freedom, justice and citizenship, etc. These concepts are closely connected with the issue of power—who holds power and how this power is exercised. There are multiple forms and institutions of power; however, the most important structure of power is the state. State is indeed the aggregate and legitimate power structure of a country. Therefore, state is one of the core issues discussed and debated in political theory. Indeed, all other concepts in political theory, like rights, liberty and freedom and justice and citizenship, etc. are posed against the state. This book on political theory endeavours to introduce the students to these concepts and debates.

Many a times, the concepts and debates in political theory appear to be abstract having no relevance for day-to-day political developments and debates. Students in political theory, particularly at the undergraduate level, find it extremely difficult to relate the critical input derived from political theory to understand and interpret the political developments around him or her. It happens because of the fact that at many instances the books on political theory do not contextualise the evolution of the concepts and its changing forms from time to time. For example, why was it Hobbes and Locke who had talked about social contract theory and not St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine? This critical question is very often avoided which makes political theory boring and mechanical. It is true in case of other concepts in theory too. For example, why the concept of liberty or freedom received serious attention since the time of John Locke? How is it related to the growth of capitalism? Is there any relationship between liberal democracy and capitalism? Unless and until these questions are raised and debated political theory may fail to provide critical frame of understanding and interpreting political developments of our time using those theoretical concepts. At higher level of political studies, these issues are comprehensively debated. However, at the undergraduate level, these issues are very often ignored. This book attempts to address these issues for the beginners in political theory.

Political theory has constantly been evolving with new sets of ideas and debates coming in. Important among those debates are feminism, multiculturalism, postmodernism, ecologism, etc. These debates are spread over many disciplines like sociology, anthropology, archeology and cultural studies, etc. These issues and debates now question many given sets of political concepts and institutions, for

example, the state. A modern state is perceived and accepted as an omnipresent and omnipotent institution of power. It is also perceived as secular in nature. The state is also considered to be gender neutral, i.e. not discriminating its citizens on the ground of sex. The new debates in political theory have questioned the state—its power, legitimacy and its gender neutrality. It is also generally believed that the state is now obliged to undertake development initiatives to bring welfare to the citizens. Of late, the development initiatives of the state have also been questioned. At the undergraduate level, it will not be appropriate to bombard the students with these critical debates. However, these debates cannot entirely be avoided. These debates give new insights to the critical frame of understanding and interpreting politics. This book introduces the students to these emerging debates.