

Political Parties Act as a Platform for Interest Articulation: A Critical Analysis of the concept of Representation.

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Abstract: Any critical evaluation of how political parties behave requires a firm support of the conceptual analysis of the concept of Representation. The concept of Representation, in modern times has gained immense popularity, provided the fact that every social or political group wants to be represented or every other government and governmental institution claims to be representative. This modern day popularity of the concept of representation can be accorded to its being coupled with the ideals of Democracy, Justice, Liberty and Equality. The institutions embodying some form of Representation can be a part and parcel of any large and well-articulated society which need not be a popular self-government only. This serves as a precursor to the research of this merit; which in turn tries to look at political parties as an instrument of interest articulation. Political party thus acts as an illustration of political life and at the same time as a medium for its growth. They fill the large void which is otherwise so evident in any political system. Countries with a highly developed party system provide its citizens the platform for fulfilling their duties and act as a medium for imparting education to its citizens. Despite much importance the area has been much less researched upon and almost neglected by political scientists.

Keywords: Representation, Political Parties, Interest Articulation, Collective Action.

1.Introduction

Any empirical evidence of how our representatives behave requires a firm support of the conceptual analysis of the concept of Representation as a whole. Analyzing the concept of Representation, one cannot ignore Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's classic work *The Concept of Representation*. The entire work is dedicated to the conceptual analysis of the word representation; as social scientists treat words not merely as words but as instruments of operation. Man's actions are governed by their ideas. Whatever we do is in a way an outcome of the way we situate ourselves in the world around us or the way we look at the world we live in. Thus an understanding of the word "representation" is inseparable from the mode of representation.

The concept of Representation, in modern times has gained immense popularity, provided the fact that every social or political group wants to be represented or every other government and governmental institution claims to be representative; whatever it entails. This modern day popularity of the concept of representation can be accorded to its being coupled with the ideals of Democracy, Justice, Liberty and Equality. Tracing the history, Representation as a concept is a fairly modern phenomenon. Traditionally, both the concept and practise of Representation had nothing to do with the ideals of Democracy or of Liberty. "Representation does not necessarily refer to a representative government. The institutions embodying some form of Representation can be a part and parcel of any large and well-articulated society which need not be a popular self-government only. A King can very well represent a nation as can an ambassador."¹

Earlier, neither representation as a concept nor the institutions to which it was being associated with had any association with the democracy, elections or justice. Early Romans, however used *repraesentare*; the English word Representation thus deriving its root from. Precisely, the Roman word *repraesentare* meant the exact substitution of something which is not present or the symbolization of a concept in an entity. Thus human beings

representing other human beings came to fore much later; first in Latin in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while as English adopted it even later. The people sent on behalf of the larger population to church councils and Parliaments were then referred to as Representatives. Nevertheless the complexity does not end here; the meaning that the term entails was something debatable. Showing up at Churches and Parliaments was still considered as one of the other tasks to perform, rather considering it as a right, privilege or immunity. However it was later that Representation was seen as a necessary means bridging the gap between the ruler and the local subjects by advancing their interests. Seventeenth century saw a massive expansion in the claim to the membership of the Parliament, where the poorest of the poor could claim to be a member of the council.

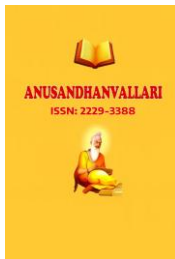
The American Revolutions call to battle, “that taxation without representation is tyranny”, drew its roots from this tradition and thus there was no looking back. Evidently, American and French Revolution of 1789 gave it a sacred status of „Rights of Man”. Thus every man was accorded the status and the right to have an equal say in the affairs of the government which claims to be his own. Thus, the concept of Representation came to be equated with the modern understanding of the term where it is interchangeably linked to the self- government. Popular Representation has since been part and parcel of our institutions of self- government.

What is surprising to know is that, even after the notable significance and the recurrence that the concept enjoys, it has witnessed a severe negligence of the interpretation of the meaning of the term. Nonetheless, complexity of the term can also be one plausible answer of this negligence. History has been a witness to this negligence where political theorists like John Stuart Mill even though dedicated an entire book to Representative Government, forget to define what actually he meant by the word representation.²In bulk of the literature we will only find the limited analysis of the concept by simply reading between the lines or the apparent dissent over the meaning of the concept. However, Thomas Hobbes is one such political theorist who has gone into the minute details of the concept.³For him all governments are representative in the sense that they represent their subjects who make them. The view has entailed both praise and criticism. Those who oppose Hobbes argue that indirect democracies who claim to be representative are a utopia. There is no such government which can be called representative in its purest form. These governments only use one or the other means to win popular support, which an authoritarian government can also have.

A broad array of scholars, including Hobbes suggest that a representative should have the complete freedom to do what he thinks will be the best for those who are in his/her charge; using his/her own rational understanding as he has been elected to represent. However a small minority argues that the representative should be able to make the best possible judgment on the behalf of those for whom he/she has been elected.⁴For Hanna Pitkin, Representation as a concept derives its meaning from the etymological analysis of the word itself, i.e. “representation, making present again.”⁵Representation has always been much more than just bringing into place of someone or something. What is not literally present can be made present in some sense of it, however anything cannot be present as well as absent at the same time. Hannah Pitkin comes to rescue and puts an end to the paradox quite intelligently by arguing that, “representation simply means something which is not otherwise present, can be considered to be present in a non-literal sense.”⁶

2.Objective

The definition further opens ground for further discussions, where two important questions were being **raised-**



one when something is not present in a literal sense how can it be considered to be present, while as second question points towards the fact that who will be responsible for consideration. Hans Wolff argues that the form and practise of representation is purely a matter of perception. What occupies a position of prime importance here is how and under what state of affairs is it justified, as it is particularly a conceptual idea which can be accepted by few and rejected by others, like any other human construct. Hobbes formulation of the definition of Representation is profoundly formalistic, thinking of it in terms of institutions responsible for its initiation including the dispersion of authority it entails. This is however contrasted, by correspondingly formalistic definition of Representation where representation is seen resting in the formal institutions that emanate from it like accountability where the representative is held responsible for his words and actions.

However, Hobbes in his definition of Representation implicitly maintains that man represents man, thus neglecting the situations where Representation necessarily implies *standing for* rather than *acting for*, which can be equally true for exanimate objects.

3.Scope and Methodology

In order to make the issues of interest part of the larger policy- process the group or community should be active participants of the policy-formulation process. Political participation consists of activities which are modelled to articulate the demands and shape the decision-making process such that its impact will be binding for a larger group within the society or society as a whole. Participation at any level involves a 'conscious action,' however the action is always subject to presence of a group or a collectively. Participation cannot exist in solitude. In the modern way today, the most assertive form of democracy is the representative form of democracy. Theoretically, representative form of democracy expects all its citizens to be active participants in debates, discussions, deliberations and decision-making activities. For some proponents of democracy, what is important is this 'process of deliberation' and for others modern democracy is competitive in nature as individual interest remains in conflict with one other. Here the role of the State becomes important with plays a critical role in satisfying the individual and group interests by pacifying the conflicts that exists between them.

4.Literature Review

Representation can be both *descriptive* as well as *substantive*: where former involves representing something or someone only by means of a mirror image while as the latter involves a bond of special kind between the one who represents and the one who gets represented.⁷ Even though Hobbes is not a famous representational theorist but the concept of Representation forms a pivot of his political endeavour. His analysis of Representation is solely political in nature. His analysis begins with the „idea of a person“, classifying the natural person from an artificial person and finally distinguishing a representative as an “artificial person.”

This idea of person does not simply refer to a human person or a thing as the person's words and actions can sometimes be his own but at other times they are just a portrayal of other people's actions and words, attributed naturally or fictionally. He calls the person whose words and actions are a characterisation of one's own self as a “natural person”; while as the person whose words and actions are an embodiment of someone else's words and actions as an “artificial person”. Hobbes calls representatives as artificial people because the actions they perform are not guided by their own informed reason rather by someone else's. Thus when a person lacks authority over his actions, the actions are no longer corresponded with their own self just as property lacks ownership. Here Hobbes argues that the individual lacks the “right to perform action”. One who performs the actions and the one who reserves the right to action are named as *actor* and *author* respectively.⁸



Besides ownership and rights, another dimension to Representation involves the „aspect of responsibility“. Ownership does not come without responsibility which is pertinent to actions of the individual as well. Hobbes takes keen interest in the analysis of responsibility of the “author of the action”. Thus rights and responsibility go hand in hand. Hobbes definition of Representative leaves him completely free who can act at his own liberty. He maintains that the representative should either be allowed to act without limits at all or should be made to act within some specified limits. The Hobbesian system can limit the actions of the representative beyond which he cannot perform. He can only perform within the specified limits, thus enjoying rights with no obligations, ultimately giving rise to an absolute representative who is free to act as one deems necessary.

All the other views on Representation by different political theorists face the similar obstacles as did the Hobbesian argument on Representation because they define Representation in terms of authority. Hannah Pitkin calls them authorization theorists”, who argue that representatives can authorize freely in a manner they deem right. This view gives prime importance to the representative whose rights are further aggrandized with minimal responsibility because the represented are held responsible for the all the actions. Represented

on the contrary has been assigned more responsibilities with even more curtailed rights. To sum up, Representation can be defined as the fair amount of authorisation practised by the representative within his limited sphere of influence. The view is furthered by many theorists like Max Weber, who particularly belongs to the German *Organschaft theorists*’ league emphasizing on the representative being the agency of a group rather than of an individual.

For him Representation is something when in a social relationship, the activities of a definite

number of people are assigned to the rest of its members who are supposedly to accept these actions as legitimate and binding upon them. However if in a group every other members action is ascribed to the fellow member, Weber does not refer to it as true representation instead if only a specified number of people are legitimately supposed to represent the larger population he calls it True Representation Hans Wolff, the conventional *Organschaft* theorist, differs partly from Weber when he regards both each and every member’s actions as well as the actions of a specified group of people both as separate instances of representation. The activities and practises of the representative are assigned to the group he represents. Representation, only by a specialised group of people can be referred to as Representation of a highly developed kind and sort. The *Organschaft* thesis saw its origin in the French Revolution, but it was developed much later on.

Theorists were primarily interested in developing a theory of officialdom according to which a representative was considered as a differentiated part of the group he represents. They were interested in the legal understanding of the status of agents of government. Evidently, every complex society requires representation in one form or the other. However, such a definition of Representation does not require representatives to be an elected body; however any one working for the interests of the group of which he has become the agent can be a representative. Representatives need not be necessarily elected and they cannot be distinguished from the representatives selected by one or the other way. The *Organschaft* theorists however faced the similar shortcoming as did Hobbes when they referred to every other governmental body as representative. Only the ones elected were designated as representatives until the dimension of authority visited the situation and changed the scenario upside down. *Organschaft* Theorists like Jellinek believes that representative institutions like

elected legislature acts as an inwardly looking organisation distinguishing it from all the other representative bodies that defend the State from the outward looking or foreign forces. These representative institutions for them are “state’s- willing organ.”

The Authorization view” has found a large audience in Sir Ernest Baker, John Plamenatz, Joseph Tussman and others. Representativeness involves binding well in advance with the authority so that they can act on behalf of their constituents, thus binding them authoritative to the collective decisions they undertake. Thus no elected body



is representative in its original sense unless it is furnished by „representative authority.“ In the words of Tussman “The essence of Representation is the delegation or granting of authority. To authorise a representative is to grant another person the right to act for oneself.”

Supporters of Representative Democracy looking through the prism of authorization, see in elections the source of authority provided by the voters to the elected representatives. However this vesting of authority in elected representatives is time specific because the end of each election marks an end of this authority as well. Each new election marks a fresh beginning either in naming of all new representatives and vesting authority in them anew with an exception of re- allocating the status as well as authority to the already elected representative. Thus Elections is seen as a process of bestowing authority. Bestowing authority to someone else refers to granting other person the right to act in all situations. Thus the represented in a way pledges to accept all the decisions and pronouncements taken by the chosen representative on one’s own behalf. Representatives are no fewer rulers in any way possible. Their being elected and chosen by the population does not make them our objects of discretion; instead we have simply accepted to abide by their decisions whatever they think is better for those they represent.

Plamenatz refers to Representation as “acting with the consent of someone else” which can have two implied meanings: A person will only act according to the decisions taken by someone else if and only if his actions are shaped by that very persons will to act in a particular order. Further the representative is only said to represent the masses he intends to represent when the representative equally shares the responsibility of the activities carried on in his name and interest by the representative. In a way, representative is one where those represented share an equal burden of responsibility of the actions carried out by the representatives on their behalf.

5.Result and Discussion

Public life as a whole depends on the knowledge of history combined with the awareness and an understanding of the present. Public life is thus driven by power tactics of various parties and a struggle for the realization of their ideas. These struggles sometimes last a life time shaping the destiny of a nation and its inhabitants. Most commonly parties are formed from the dominant groups in a society based on their lineage, religion and property. Wherever this public life is not forcibly governed by the State or the ruler, political parties form an inseparable part of the democratic system. However a place where every expression of opinion is suppressed or meets indifference, parties appear far from making any appearance in the political life of such a country. States possessing a State building capacity act as smooth ground for parties to evolve and develop.

Inhibitions suppressing people’s proclivity towards constructing political parties shifts the momentum from political life towards religious arena, thus enhancing social differences. This associational bond between the political and the non- political actors stands testimony to the accord that exists between them where both can swap positions. Thus understanding of political actors is incomplete without comprehending the non-political actors, as both are somewhat affected by the similar differences in human nature. Politically developed nations exhibit a sound and advanced party system. More richly developed the public life of a State, more prominently the political parties will develop. Political Parties act as an indicator and a feature of a healthy political life because it is through them that the parties struggle to achieve the highest possible political life and in the process bringing to fore the concealed potential of the nation. “Political parties are thus the natural and the necessary projections of the powerful internal forces which propel national political life.”⁹

Political party forms an essential and an inalienable part of the larger political system. It cannot claim to represent the entire nation or State on its own. It owes its existence and development to all the other opposing parties. It can only claim to represent the interests of a particular group or community of people. However a political party can never claim to recognize the interests of a nation or a State at large and if it does it will be overemphasizing its



own existence by undermining all the opposing forces present. In a monarchy the King alone stands testimony to the unity of his State without being aligned to one particular party. Even though he did not align with any one in particular but he makes sure and possible the independent and necessary development of all. However situations sometimes force him to temporarily align with one particular party that might be powerful and have the potential to direct the state policies- say at the time of elections.

6.Findings

Political Party is a unique form of organisation very different from the associations, clubs, confederations, alliances and the like. Various Scholars attempt to define political parties has given rise to a huge literature, yet all emphasize on the need of political parties to be a party to elections with an intention of gaining public office. Antony Davis defines political party as an organisation of like minded people having an ideological similarity ensuring their ascendancy to the public office through a legally contested election. The Italian Scholar Giovanni Sartori similarly defines political party: “Any political group identified by an official label that presents at election, and is capable of placing through election, candidates for public office.”¹⁰

Political parties act as confederations, with each single member having a membership of his own. Parties seek immense interest in having a wider impact in the shaping of any political attitude. The influence of this opinion-making should be widespread as well as far reaching, not just limited to single matter. However, it is distinguished from other unions and associations as it makes evident a will to participate in elections and consistently demonstrate the zeal to represent the interests of the people while as the rest of the groups only ensure a limited span of influence without any political responsibilities; as is evident for their hesitance in contesting elections.

The political party should be independent of all the external forces and pressures therefore not making mandatory to win a seat in Parliament, instead it should not make its presence feel for only one election and then calling it off. It should be out there facing public. The public will is of due importance for the parties. They not aspire to shape public opinion but representing public and public interests in Parliament is core to their existence. This explains the close link that exists between parties, their political contribution and elections. Through elections they sought to achieve most politically decisive positions of a country to help problems and issues that are a concern to public they claim to represent. The political party should have a consistent position and an approach on almost all the issues of importance to both government and the public at large, be they issues of foreign and domestic politics, or political and economic issues, or social and civil matters. Therefore to have a mass appeal, a party should have a firm stand and a position on almost all such matters. They should always be in a position to take over the challenge of running the government with a fighting spirit” which distinguishes it from the rest. Thus a healthy competition among parties acts as a medium to gain political power. Political parties integrate different political opinions into one political project and transform it into an agenda for which they aim to gain mass support and consent, ensuring participation of individuals and groups by crafting a relationship of citizens with their political system. Political parties legitimize the political system and consequentially democracy by linking masses with their political system.

7.Limitations and Research Gaps

The area of research is severely undermined and ignored by researchers and political scientists.

8.Conclusion

Political parties act as the primary medium which influences the public opinion, even in this



era of polymorphic opinion- building processes. Political party should have a definite political principle and pursues a political purpose. Something serving a common purpose and being congruent to State by believing in its existence is called political. Political party always works towards the interests of the State. It gives prime eminence to the interests of the State as it will never place its own interests above the interests of the State. Part cannot be placed above the whole. The individual members of a political party enjoy both an individual identity of their own as well as a collective membership of the group. The two identities sometimes work peacefully but at other times come in direct confrontation with each other. Every party enjoys this kind of a dual life.

On one hand they act as league of specific party interests while as, on the other hand they are party to interests of community at large. Within every party there exists some form of party egoism based on the specific interests of the party, however State's general welfare concern for the public at large is more dear to any political party, thus easily sacrificing its party ego, if at all it does exist. In order to make the aims and objectives of the party a working reality, it should perform actively as a whole and a well knit organisation working towards realizing the

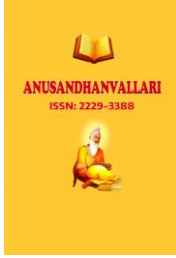
common goals. Just as obedience to the army general by the soldiers at large is in differentiable, similarly party discipline of its members and the submission of part to the whole are equally responsible for realization of the common good.

Political party thus acts as an illustration of political life and at the same time at as a medium

for its growth. In its purest form political party acts as a stable and a perdurable organisation comprising of people belonging to one particular group sharing some common principles. However in loose terms party also refers to the one or more groups coming together on the grounds of a certain common policy decisions. This bond is of less durability and is weaker in nature because the groups have temporarily come together for the realisation of goals and interests of a particular group, thus sacrificing interests of the larger community.¹¹ Thus political parties fill the large void which is otherwise so evident in any political system. Countries with a highly developed party system provide its citizens the platform for fulfilling their duties and act as a medium for imparting education to its citizens.¹² Despite much importance the area has been much less researched upon and almost neglected by the entire classic treatise in political science. Prior to the evolution of party system, political parties we addressed as enemies to the State.

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