

Q) Critically analyze Kenneth Waltz's structural realism/neorealism.

Ans: **Kenneth Neal Waltz** was an American political scientist and one of the most prominent scholars in the field of international relations. He was one of the original founders of neorealism or structural realism in international relations theory. But later, he became associated with the school of defensive neorealism. By 1979, Kenneth Waltz attempted to reformulate realism in a new and distinctive way. His aim was to cure the defects of earlier theories of international relations, including classical realism, by applying a more scientific approach. He divided neorealism into two branches- defensive and offensive neorealism.

Basic assumptions of structural realism

- 1) There is perpetual international anarchy in the international environment. In the international realm, the actors cannot be compelled to a central authority like state or government in domestic sphere, as no such source of law exists. The anarchy of international politics means that states must act in a way that ensures their security above all.
- 2) According to him, globalization is posing new challenges to states. But he does not believe that states are being replaced because no other non-state actor can equal the capabilities of the state.
- 3) The structure of the system and its relative distribution of power are the focal point of analysis. He puts great importance on the structure of the system, changes occurring in it and on its interacting units. He sees the system and its structures as more important than individuals.

- 4) All states are similar in their functional aspects. It performs similar tasks such as promoting citizen's welfare, collecting taxes, formulating foreign policies and maintaining internal peace etc. States are different from each other due to different capabilities. So, those states which are more 'capable' than others would control international politics.
- 5) Neorealism is not a theory of foreign policy and does not attempt to predict specific state actions, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union. The theory explains only general principles of behaviour that govern relations between states in an anarchic international system.

Criticisms of Waltz's neorealism

- 1) According to the critics, neorealism simply made old realism rigorous. Traditional realists are behaviouralists; they believe that good states produce good outcomes; bad states, bad ones. The new realism is structural; outcomes depend not only on qualities of states, but also on variation of the structure.
- 2) It fails to include consideration of the effects of the policies and behaviour of states on international politics. It explains how external forces shape state's behaviour, but says nothing about the effects of internal forces.
- 3) Scholars like Robert Cox claim that Waltz has sacrificed the interpretive richness of classical realism as a critical theory in order to transform it into a positivistic problem-solving theory. This approach is unable to differentiate between times and places.

- 4) Waltz pays little attention to international actors, individuals, private organizations and multinational corporations. He concedes that their dealings are of increasing importance in a modern world but his judgement was that they do not matter in determining the issues of war and peace.
- 5) Waltz's love for structures of the system is a partial one. It is not that structures only condition humans. But it is humans who build and change structures of the political system according to their convenience.

However, despite criticisms by many schools of thought in international relations, neo-realist theory endeavours to provide scientific weight to traditional power-political ideas of hierarchy and balance of power. It also sharpens identification and justification of the political realist's moral philosophy.