

PLATO

5th century BC was a period of great turmoil for the Greeks. The security of city states was under threat from the Persians. It was the period of Sophists also. They were freelance teachers. They taught logic and philosophy. Their method of teaching was called rhetoric. It is was kind of question and answer method. But only the rich could pay for it. The ancient Greek society was very much influenced by Sophist teachers. Plato was a great Greek Political philosopher. He lived during 427 BC to 347 BC. He was born in a noble family in Greece. He had royal blood in his veins also. He was a follower of Socrates. He was the most well-known philosopher in the 5th century BC. By the execution of his master, Plato lost faith in Democracy. He travelled all across the world and gave his philosophy in the form of Dialogues or lectures. 'The Republic' was his famous work. 'The Statesman', and 'The Laws' were other famous works. It contained his ideas about Justice, Knowledge, and Education etc. He raised the major questions, "What is 'right' and what is 'wrong'?", "What is the best educational system", "Who is an Ideal Man"? and "What are the qualities of a good government".

He instituted the 'Academy' also. It was a great centre of learning in Europe. It was considered as the first university in ancient Europe. He laid the foundation of Western Political Philosophy. He died at the age of 81.

Ideal State: Plato's concept of the ideal state is given in his book 'The Republic'. It also contains his ideas about 'Justice', 'Education', 'Ideal Man' and best form of government.

According to Plato, the State is like a human being. A human being consists of three elements. They are called **Reason, Spirit** and **Appetite**. Just like the individual, in the State also, there are three elements. They are called the **Philosopher**, the **Soldiers** and **Workers**. Each one possessed a special character or nature. Reason exists in the Philosopher. It means the ability to think intelligently. Spirit exists in the Soldier. It means courage and valour. Appetite exists in the Worker. It means great interest to work and produce results immediately. **Wisdom** is the quality of the Philosopher. **Courage** is the quality of the Soldier. **Appetite** is the quality of the worker.

There are certain reasons for the formation of the State. The first reason for the formation of the state is **economic motive**. Everyone wants to satisfy his food and other needs. So, there should be people doing economic activities. The Workers are engaged in economic activity. Secondly, there is the **need for protection**. The soldiers are engaged in protection of the state. Thirdly, there is the **need for government**. The philosophers will take care of it.

Plato's Philosopher is like a King. He is called the **Philosopher King**. There is the rule of Philosophy through the Philosopher King. He is the head of the State. The Philosopher King represents **Reason**. He is engaged in the government of the state. The Philosopher King makes laws. But he is above law. However, he is a true statesman.

Thus it can be seen that in the Platonic state, there is the system of specialization of functions. It means that there is a special group of people to take care of each function of the state like production, protection and government.

Plato's State is like an individual. All the individual elements like Reason, Spirit and Appetite should be present in the state in the form of Workers, Soldiers and Philosophers. Thus, the state reflects human nature. The State is like a large individual. The state is **individual writ large**. The object of the Ideal State is **good life** or goodness.

The salient features of Platonic Ideal state can be summarised as follows:-

1. Rule of Philosopher King: Plato's state is ruled by the King who is a philosopher. It is the rule of the Philosopher-King. It is the rule of knowledge and wisdom. Philosopher king is the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge.

2. Equality of Men and Women: In Platonic State, there is equality of men and women. Both men and women are equals. They have equal status in society. Both men and women should have equal education also.

3. State controlled education system: The education system is under the full control of the state. There is a complete scheme of education promoted by the State. It is to promote social justice and individual justice.

4. Functional specialization: There is complete functional specialization in Platonic state. There is a class of people to perform each job. The philosophers will take care of government. The soldiers will take care of protection. The workers will take care of economic production.

5. Communism of wives and property: In platonic state, only the lower class can have family and private property. For the upper classes of soldiers and philosophers, there is only the communism of wives and property. The children should be brought up by the state.

6. Control of art and literature: In Platonic state, there is control of art and literature. Cheap and wrong ideas should not reach the people. People should read only literature which is of high moral value and wisdom.

Criticism of Platonic Ideal State:

The following are some of the criticism of Platonic Ideal State:

1. **Platonic state** is a totalitarian state: The Platonic state is ruled by the Philosopher King. Therefore, it is a one man show. It is not a democratic situation. It leads to absolutism and totalitarianism.

Under-development of human personality: There is strict functional specialization in Platonic State. The rulers should have the element of reason only. The soldiers should have the element of spirit only. The workers should have the element of appetite only. Therefore, it affects the development of human personality.

2. **Utopian State:** The Platonic State is utopian. It is not based on reality. The Philosopher King is neither a King nor a Philosopher. He is a strange mix of authority and philosophy. The concept of communism of wives and property is anti-human. It is against human nature.

3. **Anti-democratic State:** Plato's state is anti-democratic. It is ruled by a totalitarian king.

4. **No education for lower classes:** In Plato's state, there is no opportunity for education for the lower classes. But at the same time, for the upper classes, the education goes up to the age of 50.

Platonic Concept of Justice

Plato lived during the time when democracy in Athens was going down. According to Plato, Justice is the only remedy to save the state. Justice is part of the State. Justice is inseparable from the state. Justice resides in the state. Justice means complete virtue. It means complete goodness. Justice consists of wisdom, courage, and appetite. It is the true condition of the individual and the state.

Platonic concept of Justice was not concerned with individual rights. It had nothing to do with the system of law or courts also. It was a kind of moral principles for the individual and the state. It said that none should interfere in the affairs of others. Each person should mind only his own job. So there should be functional specialization in the State.

There are two dimensions for Justice. One is the individual dimension and the other is the social dimension. At the individual level, justice means having the true vocation in life. That means, a person of

appetite should become a worker. A person of courage should become a soldier. A person of wisdom and philosophy should become a philosopher. After that each person should stick to his station in life. It means specialization of function.

From the point of the society, justice means the division of the society into three classes. These classes represent the elements of reason, spirit and appetite. Each class must mind its own job. They should not handle the function of the other classes. This specialization leads to efficiency.

There is another dimension also for Platonic concept of Justice. The two upper classes of Philosophers and Soldiers cannot have personal family and personal family life. They must mind only the affairs of the state. They have no time to mind family matters.

Criticism of Platonic concept of Justice:

1. Platonic concept of justice is only moral and not legal. There is no law to maintain justice in the state.

2. The concept of justice is practical only in the situation of a city state. It is not practical in other situations.

3. The elements of Reason, Spirit and Appetite are present in all individuals. So a particular individual cannot specialize in a particular element. For example, a Philosopher cannot possess the elements of Spirit and Appetite also.

4. The Philosopher King will become a despot because all the power is concentrated in him.

5. Communism of family and wives is not a practical idea. It is against human nature.

Plato on Education

According to Plato, education is the most important function of the state. Department of education is the most important department of the state. Education should be under the direct and strict control of the state. The objective of education is to achieve goodness. It is to promote justice. It helps individual to understand himself. It makes him harmonious with the society. To achieve good life, education is important. Both men and women should have education. They should have the same kind of education also.

Platonic system of education is systematic and progressive. It consists of two main parts: Basic Education and Higher Education. The Basic Education has three stages: First Sub Stage, Second Sub Stage and Third Sub Stage.

The First Sub Stage is from birth to the age of six. At this stage, the girls and boys are taught in the language which they can understand. They are taught the basic facts of life. They are taught with the help of stories and pictures. This is to develop the right kind of attitude.

The Second Sub Stage is from 6 to 18 years. At this stage, the children are taught music and gymnastics. Music is meant for the soul. Gymnastics is meant for the development of the body.

The Third Sub Stage is from 18 to 20 years. At this stage, men and women are given compulsory military training. This is good for national defense and protection.

Higher Education starts at the age of 20 and lasts till 35 years of age. Higher Education also has two sub stages: from 20 to 30 and from 30 to 35. At this stage, logic, mathematics, geometry, astronomy etc are taught. Only students with aptitude and interest of science and philosophy are admitted for higher studies. This kind of education makes people wise and intelligent. At the age of 30, a test is given. Those who pass the test are taught up to the age of 35. They are taught the art of dialectics. Those students who are very good are taught up to the age of 50. They will become philosopher kings. They will rule the state. For the Philosopher King, education is life-long.

Plato's Theory of Communism

Plato's concept of Communism is different from the modern Communism. Plato's Communism is meant only for the upper classes. The Philosophers and Soldiers were the upper classes. Their work is the administration of the State. They are the guardians. The elements of Reason and Spirit are present in them. Their function is ruling. They have the political power. At the same time, the workers are engaged in economic activities. Therefore, the workers have economic power. But, according to Plato, political and economic power should not concentrate in the same hands. Therefore, the upper classes should not have economic power. They should not have private

property. They cannot have private families also. They should not have land and houses of their own. They should live in large halls or barracks. They should live like a community. They should eat from a common mess. They are fully involved in the administration of the State. They get a fixed salary. It is just enough to maintain themselves for an year. So, according to Plato, only workers can have family and private property. Plato said that the family system and family feeling lead to personal ambitions. The ruling class should not have personal ambitions. This is Plato's idea of Communism.

Criticism of Plato's idea of Communism:

1. Communism of wives and children is unrealistic and unhealthy. It is against human nature and social security.
2. Wives and children are given only for the lower working class. It is against natural law.
3. Marriage is not a mechanical process. It is a social institution. It is very essential for the existence of the society. It cannot be turned into a system for making children.
4. Plato's concept of communism is unholy. It is against the idea of civilization. To have children without family is against all civilized ideas.

Estimate of Plato

Plato was a revolutionary. His ideas were against the Greek concepts of democracy and society. His ideas and methods were very different from the existing ideas of the society. He inspired the

later thinkers like Aristotle, Cicero, Dante etc. His ideas were the first systematic concept about State and society. His ideas on education were the first in the entire Europe. His ideas about the rule of the intellectuals gave importance to merit and knowledge. His ideas on Justice brought the concept of justice into the forefront of the science of politics. The most pioneering concept was that of the equality of men and women. He molded the concept of state in such a way that it paved the way towards nationalism.

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