

PLATO'S OUTLOOK ON DEMOCRACY

Trishna Pultambekar*

INTRODUCTION

Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher. He was born into an aristocratic family in Athens in 428 B.C., during the final year of The Golden Age of Pericles Athens. He was a diligent disciple of Socrates. The death of Socrates immensely affected Plato, he turned anti-democratic. Plato's Academy or 'The Academy' was a famous school located in Athens founded by Plato in 387 BC. The academy is considered to be the first university in the entire world. In it, he trained his greatest student, one of the greatest philosophers and the first genuine scientist in history Aristotle. 'The Republic' is Plato's best-known and most influential work. The book was written around 380 BCE in which he put forth the idea of an ideal state. His famous theories, The Theory of justice and The Theory of education, were based on the ideal state. Plato divided society into three classes: ruler class, soldier class and artisan class. In his vision, all classes get to perform what they are best fit to do. According to him, 'Justice is not a legal concept but a moral one'. It is a human virtue, and the three basic elements of the individual are Reason, Spirit and Appetite. Plato's ideal State helped to put forth the foundation of political science. Plato's theory is applicable in today's society as well. The main motive of Plato was the best interest of the citizens, but democracy was missing in the ideal state imagined by him.

PLATO'S CRITIQUE ON DEMOCRACY

In today's time, democracy is considered as the 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people'. It is a core part of the United Nations. The UN supports Democracy by promoting development, human rights, peace and security. It is a universally supported idea based on common values irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. The principles of democracy are based on legitimacy, justice, free will and power. Democracy is welcomed wholeheartedly in the whole wide world. But Plato's outlook on democracy was something different. He is acknowledged as the first philosopher to oppose the concept of democracy. His book 'The Republic' is taken as a criterion of anti-democratic work. Plato favours aristocracy as against democracy. He came up with a strong opposition to democracy.

*BA LLB, FIRST YEAR, DES NAVALMAL FIRODIA LAW COLLEGE PUNE.

According to him, 'Democracy is Denial of principle of qualification', in the concept of democracy every citizen should be treated equally, every citizen has the right to participate in the electoral process but the capacity of the person is neglected and it should correspond to the capacity of the person. Plato believes that the average person doesn't have the knowledge required to run the government. As doctors are trained for medicine, teachers for teaching, and pilots for navigation only we permit them for their respective practice, yet we allow anyone to run governance irrespective of the knowledge a person is equipped with or not. "Politics is an art and not a science, and what is required for its mastery is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and the moral strength of the statesman". Government functioning is complicated, the responsibility of handling it must be provided in the hands of a person who has mastered it. The principle of democracy says that all men are equal, but it is not true, everyone is capable of something but not everything. Plato's perspective, Democracy is the denial of experts or rather the setting up of everyone as his expert. Also, The role of a leader is unjustified as leaders are not rulers but guides: they play an important part in running the government. Plato's most famous critique is intellectual: rulers need to be knowledgeable to rule. In *The Republic*, he considered knowledge as a crucial criterion of the best kind of rule. Knowledge is what makes the difference between a genuinely skilled person and an occasionally skilled one. Training plays an important part in the context of being skilled, as natural talent can only take you so far, at some point you have to put in effort to become familiar with the subject matter of the skill. The result of immense training is knowledge in the subject concerned. Plato emphasizes that one must practice a single trait from childhood and should work at it all their life. According to him, the three key components of skill are nature, training and knowledge. Nature is also pivotal as some people are better suited to certain skills than others. Plato thus set a standard for the ruler. In *The Republic VIII*, Plato comes up with a more targeted critique of democracy which is their lack of order. Order is a political value for Plato, and he structured Kallipolis based on class system and specialization principles. The Statesman of Plato gives a clue about how a skilled statesman can bring about order in a city and what order amounts to. The Statesman knows how a city should work together. He has given an example of Shepherds: Shepherds are experts in taking care of sheep, but the statesman knows whether the wool obtained from sheep should be used for clothing or sailing or the sheep slaughtered for mutton. A Statesman should know of the right moment, he should know how to fight wars and win battles. He should also have the knowledge that which battle is worth fighting and which should be handled with non-violence or diplomacy. The platonic statesman looks at the city as a whole and he has the responsibility of maintaining unity and the ability to

judge what is good for all the citizens. The democracy described in Republic VIII, is disorganized, as the democracy lacks to consider the welfare of the citizens. The central principle was everyone should have the freedom to do what they desire and this puts the whole city in danger leading to destroying the city entirely. The second critique of Plato's democracy is Oratory. According to him, orators do not know the subject matter that they speak about, so rather than delivering the truth they deliver what are pleasant and appealing words. The critiques come in two parts: Plato first criticizes its goal, and then he shows how orators take the subjects to whatever beliefs and values most people hold. Orators play an important part in shaping public opinion that turns into action and becomes a threat to society. This becomes part of Plato's democracy critique as the person who doesn't know the subject matter cannot be a good orator, oratory requires skill as much as politics. The democratic policy of equality in all subjects comes into consideration with this matter also. Also from Plato's perspective, a democratic man is so imbibed in the idea of equality that he lacks the measure to govern himself. Moreover, by embracing equality and freedom, man is forced to embrace relativism. Instead of governance by all, Plato advocates aristocracy which is the best form of governance.

PLATO'S ALTERNATIVE TO DEMOCRACY

The Philosopher King Concept: The Philosopher King concept: In Plato's 'The Republic' he gave the concept of the philosopher king. According to him, the philosopher king should be the ruler of the state. The philosopher king was a deep lover of wisdom and a passionate seeker of knowledge. The philosopher king concept was the linchpin of his ideal state. He shared the Greek perception that was essential for gaining wisdom. The king will be able to administer justice and will act for the welfare of his subjects. He would have a sound mind and good character. As per Plato, 'Virtue is knowledge'. Knowledge for Plato was when a person sees 'Beauty without beautiful things'. The king through his wisdom will see better than others the betterment of society. His in-depth knowledge of goodwill helps to ensure the welfare of citizens. He would not see his self-interest and will strive for the benefit of his subject. The concept serves the idea of justice. He will be free from all materialistic things, so he will not be mean, devoid of all emotions, ties and economic consideration, he will be public-spirited in a whole manner. Undaunted by death, and being a knowledge lover he will worship his duty. He will have all the qualities of a good ruler that Plato has. A good king is one who not only preserves the lives of his subjects but also transforms them into human beings. The idea of good was the biggest form of knowledge. It was compared to the sun for its illumination of

knowledge and intangible things. The valuable possession possessed by the philosopher King Plato supported that absolute power should be given in the hands of such a ruler. Also, the King is not free from all the restrictions he should be following:

- They should check the excessive growth of welfare in the State.
- To endure Self-sufficiency the size of the State should be kept in check.
- The rule of justice should be maintained.
- The education system should remain unchanged.

Eligibility for becoming a philosopher king:

- He or she must be 50 years of age.
- He or she should have the capability of reasoning.
- He or she cannot have a family.
- He or she cannot own property.

Features of Philosopher King:

- The philosopher king will be chosen based on wisdom and presence of mind to tackle problems and the person who has gone through proper training and others would be excluded.
- 'Virtue is knowledge' All those who do not have a cultivated mind and are unable to follow the supreme and noble idea of knowledge will not be eligible for the training of being a philosopher king.
- No need for education as the main aim of Plato's philosophy was to produce philosopher kings. If one such king is to rule throughout his life then very few rulers will be needed, so needs to spend money on costly educational systems.
- Plato has tried to establish aristocracy. He wants to have a government that has aristocracy. He reduced the number of citizens giving them the status of soldier or artisan classes.

Aristocracy: Aristocracy refers to the form of government in which people are ruled by a small privileged group of people known as aristocrats. The word 'Aristocracy' comes from the Greek word aristocratic, which means 'Rule by the best'. Aristocracy is similar to an oligarchy form of government, as in both types of government they place power in the hands of a few privileged groups of people. Elite aristocracies in history had ruled the United Kingdom, Russia

and France. For centuries it has been the most common type of government but it vanished after World War I. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon and the Spartans considered aristocracy as an ideal form of government. Plato favoured an aristocracy ruled by a Philosopher king, as according to him he would have all the virtues and wisdom of becoming a great leader and he would be an epitome of sacrifice and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The outlook of Plato towards democracy may be misconstrued by seeing him as the precursor of the present day. Plato is a powerful critic of some Central pillars of democratic thinking. Nowadays, we have more sophisticated ways of assessing political expertise as well as advanced ways of explaining voter behavior and assessing the impact of orators on public opinion. Plato never gave up his conviction that ordinary men and women are incapable of ruling themselves. Plato failed to see the possibility of transforming ordinary into intelligent members of society through equal education for all. Also, He failed to see the emergence of a new social class.

Platonic philosophy is criticized but still, it cannot be denied that the basis of his philosophy is sound. Plato has presented good headways in addressing his objections and solving practical problems. He has framed mixed governance where monarchical, aristocratic and democratic ways are combined for the benefit of citizens. Plato rightly pointed out the role of the orator as they have the incentive towards their audience. Also, we should keep in mind both the anti-democratic arguments from the Republic and Gorgias and the use of democratic practice for the laws.

Plato's theories are applicable in today's society as they are relevant in some sense. For establishing an ideal state, the ruler of the State should be educated, he or she must know what is good for the welfare of the State as well as for the citizens. The main aim of any state should be the welfare of its citizens. Plato has also given importance to education as per his views if all the citizens living in the society are well educated, the society will have a harmonious relationship. Plato taught that every individual has the desire to reach for a higher, purer and spiritual truth that will transform our society and illuminate our world. Plato anti- democratic view gave us a responsibility that being democratic is good but the impact of negative democracy can be vicious as well, so all the considerations should be concern while following the democratic form of government, it becomes evident that his concerns about the potential

pitfalls and challenges of democratic governance still resonate today. We gain insights into the exquisite balance between individual freedoms and the need for a just and stable society. Plato's ideas serve as a reminder to critically analyze and question the systems in place.



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