



Political Thoughts of the Aristotle

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Preface:

Aristotle (384- 322 B.C.E.) is famously known as ‘the father of Political Science’. Born in Macedonian region of Greece, he was influenced by his father, the Physician Nicomachus. He was sent to Athens at about age of seventeen to study in Plato’s Academy. Like his Master, Aristotle wrote initially in dialogue form and his early ideas show strong Platonic influence. He is called as ‘the Greatest disciple and The Greatest Critic of Plato’.

He wrote prolifically, that included range of themes like philosophical, Scientific, historical, Logic. His major surviving works include the Organon, De Anima (On soul), Nicomachean Ethics, Politics etc. He Believed “Man is by Nature a Political Animal”. According to him, for Humans, the ultimate good is the continual use and development of their reasoning powers to the fullest capacity.

Aristotle’s word for ‘politics’ is politikê, which is short for politikê epistêmê or ‘political science’. It belongs to one of the three main branches of science, which Aristotle distinguishes by their ends or objects. Contemplative science (including physics and metaphysics) is concerned with truth or knowledge for its own sake; practical science with good action; and productive science with making useful or beautiful objects. Politics is a practical Science, since it is linked with noble action or happiness of the citizens.

His major Political thoughts include Views on Polis, Constitution, Rule of Law, Justice, Citizenship and Revolution.

Objectives:

1. To understand the Ancient Ideas about the state and Debated Concept of Justice.
2. To acknowledge the significance of Civic Republican tradition.
3. To differentiate the Ancient and modern concept of citizenship.
4. To study the Aristotle’s Ideal state- Polity.

Various Political Ideas of Aristotle:

1. Theory of State and Constitution

“Man is by nature Political Animal and state is natural Association”. – Aristotle

Though Aristotle belonged to Platonic Tradition, He Followed Teleological School. For him state (*Polis*) is highest union of all associations Family, Village, society) and fulfills all the needs. Chronologically man is prior to state but logically state is prior to the man. He who is unable to live in society or no need it because self sufficient for himself, is either beast or God. State comes into existence for life, but continues for sake of a Good Life. As per Aristotle, The goal of individual life is

to live well and to live as a moral person – something that requires choice. Polis makes citizens moral by giving them a Right to make political decisions by participating in deliberations and in judicial office. Hence state is the natural end of the human life.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle argues that, Authority of statesman is different than authority of Father. He believes that State is the family of the families.

Moving ahead, Aristotle defined The Constitution (*Politeia*) as a way of organising the offices of the city – state, particularly the sovereign office. By utilizing Empirical Method, He studied, analysed and classified 158 Constitutions of his time . Thus he laid the foundation of Comparative Politics. He postulated that Constitutions which aim at the common advantage are correct and just without qualification, whereas those which aim only at the advantage of the rulers are deviant and unjust, because they involve despotic rule which is inappropriate for a community of free persons

<i>Rulers</i>	<i>Normal/ Correct</i>	<i>Deviant</i>
<i>One</i>	Monarchy	Tyranny
<i>Few</i>	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
<i>Many</i>	Polity	Democracy

Fig.: Aristotle’s Classification of the Constitutions

This classification is adapted from Plato's 'Statesman' and sets a stage for Aristotle's inquiry into the best constitution. Aristotle called Polity as the Ideal Constitution. It is the Golden Mean of Oligarchy and Democracy. Polity is characterized as a kind of "mixed" constitution typified by rule of the "middle" group of citizens, a moderately wealthy class between the rich and poor. It neutralises Centrifugal Tendencies, prevents Revolution by Promoting Interests of all and provide stability to the Polis. It is contrary to Plato's Philosopher King, as for Aristotle Rule of Law is better than Rule of a Knowledge. Law and Reason are the two sides of a same coin. It represents Collective wisdom of ages.

However, Aristotle's Criticism of Democracy as A 'Rule of Poor' is not acceptable in contemporary times where there's more and more call for democratic decentralisation. His classification of Constitution is not completely applicable today. Yet, as said by Sinclair, Aristotle's Best State symbolises the principle of moderation of practical politics. It is epitome of his practical political wisdom.

2. Theory Of Citizenship

Aristotle defined city - state as the collective entity of inhabitants. He gave the functional concept of citizenship rather than legal or birth based concept as prevalent in modern times. Further, he defined Citizen as a person who has the right (*exousia*) to participate in deliberative or judicial office.

He excluded the following people from citizenship:

1. Slaves and women- because lack of reason and courage
2. Children and seniors – because rationality is imperfect and feeble
3. Foreigners

According to him, Only naturally born Adult men are to be considered as citizens. Because they have the reason, Intelligence and possess property. As they have slaves, they get leisure time to participate Affairs of the polis and fulfill their responsibilities as citizens.

However, In modern times, Aristotle's concept of citizenship seems irrational. Everyone, regardless of his/ her education, property should have the right to make own will in matters of the state (Rousseau). Feminist calls for equal participation of women in public life. Although, His functional concept of citizenship Led to Emergence of Civic Republican tradition and influenced the scholars like Hannah Ardent.

3. Theory of Justice

Aristotle, in his 'Nicomachean Ethics, defined Justice as The virtue in Action. It takes state to the heights of all the Ethical values. Aristotle talked about three types of Justice- Rectificatory (Related to Punishment and Damages),

Commutative (in connection with voluntary relations that should be guided by complete goodness) and Distributive based on Proportional Equality)

Aristotle opined, "It is unjust to treat equal unequivocally and unequal equally". Justice requires that the benefits be distributed to individuals in proportion to their merit or desert, because "the cause of sedition is always found in Inequality". He further linked the idea of Justice with constitution. According to him, The oligarchs mistakenly think that those who are superior in wealth should also have superior political rights, whereas the democrats hold that those who are equal in free birth should also have equal political rights. Both of these conceptions of political justice are mistaken in Aristotle's view, because they assume a false conception of the ultimate end of the city-state. The city-state is neither a business enterprise to maximize wealth (as the oligarchs suppose) nor an association to promote liberty and equality (as the democrats maintain). Instead, Aristotle argues, "the good life is the end of the city-state." Hence, the correct conception of justice is aristocratic, assigning political rights to those who make a full contribution to the political community, that is, to those with virtue as well as property and freedom.

However, Aristotle's Idea of Proportional Equality is Criticised as status quoist. Communitarians like Michel Walzer maintained that Justice is a social concept and varies as per the society. In India, the concept the idea of merit based justice won't work considering the Highly entrenched Caste system.

4. Theory of Revolution

Aristotle was Conservative Greek political philosopher. He used Empirical methodology while arriving at political ideas. Book no. V of his POLITICS deals with Revolution. He was very sensitive to changes in Polis and defined Revolution as any change in Constitution – Big or small, peaceful or violent, change in number of Ruling Individuals.

Aristotle explained General, Particular and Regime Specific causes of Revolution.

"In all the cases The cause of Sedition always is to be found in inequality- though there's no inequality when unequals are treated in proportion to the inequality existing between them ..." Thus Real or imagined Inequality is the most General cause of Revolution.

Particular Causes include

1. Passion for power.
2. Rampant corruption, maladministration.
3. Neglect of small changes.
4. Influx of foreigners.
5. Heterogeneity of the population and territory of the state.

Some regime specific Causes:

1. Monarchy: family quarrels, jealousy.
2. Aristocracy: due to those who are denied honour which are conferred only on few.
3. Oligarchy: Rivalries and dissensions among ruling oligarchies due to oppressive and dictatorial nature
4. Polity: Defective balance of the different elements in the constitution.
5. Democracy: Excessive use of powers and unwarranted condemnation of rich by demagogues.

In addition to this, Aristotle also suggested Remedies to prevent the revolution. They were like eliminating all systems of injustice, maintaining spirit of obedience to law, promoting civic culture, patriotism, imparting necessary education to citizens regarding the working of the Constitution, taking petty changes seriously, equal distribution of wealth and honour among all as far as possible and so on. Further, in a democracy, the rich should be made to feel that their property and estate shall not be redistributed. In Aristocracy and Oligarchy, the people should be treated with fairness and no single person or group should be permitted to become powerful. Under tyranny, revolutions can be checked through good espionage system and by following a policy of aggression.

Yet, Aristotle limited the meaning of Revolution to only political change. Revolution is actually a comprehensive socio, economic, political change. Karl Marx Called Revolution as a locomotive of history.

Conclusion:

Departing from Plato's Idealism, Aristotle systematically, empirically analysed matter of politics. His Ideal of Rule of Law is well accepted in contemporary democracies. Entire edifice of modern civilization is based on constitution and well defined law that owes to the Aristotle. While Representative Democracy in present days is inevitable, it has led to civic disengagement. This highlights the need for Aristotle's understand; of Active Citizenry. His ideas of Inequality causing revolution are evident in the American and French revolutions, Arab Spring. It also gave rise to Political Sociology Approach in later times. Despite having status quoist, Aristotle contributed Significantly to the Political science and Rightly called as the Father of Political Science.

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