UNIT 14: PLATO: CONCEPT OF IDEAL STATE

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14.1: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Know the concept of ideal state of Plato
- Explain the three classes of citizens in the state
- Know the concept of education and family
- Explain the features of an ideal state of Plato
- Know the criticisms of the concept of ideal state of Plato

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you about the ideal state of Plato. After going through unit you will be able to know how Plato has defined the ideal state. It is said by Plato that until philosophers are kings or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and the power of philosophy and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, cities will never rest from their evils. Now let us study in details about Plato's concept of ideal state.

14.3 THE CONCEPT OF IDEAL STATE OF PLATO

Plato has provided his theory of ideal state in his famous book 'The Republic'. Plato's ideal state is based on certain fundamental principles, such as- classification of people into three classes, i.e. Guardian Class, Auxiliaries and Producing Class; establishment of justice; state-regulated system of education; communism of property and family.

The Republic of Plato has been interpreted as Utopia to the end of all Utopias. It is not because of the cause that it is a romance, but because he has constructed an ideal state in it. Plato has compared the construction of an ideal state with an act of an artist who sketches an ideal picture without concerning himself with the fact whether individual characteristic features of imaginative picture are to be found anywhere or not? In the same way, Plato has never thought of the possibility of the institutions of his ideal state has the capability of ever becoming a reality or not. He has never thought of the impracticability of his concept of ideal state.

Plato has built his state on the analogy of an individual organism. He always believes that the virtues of an individual and of the state were identical. He has presented the view that an individual use to present almost the same features and qualities on a smaller scale as society on a bigger scale.

14.4 THREE CLASSES OF CITIZENS IN THE STATE

According to Plato, state is the product of human soul which is composed of three elements, such as reason, courage and appetite. Corresponding to these three human elements, there are three classes of people- Guardian Class, Auxiliaries and Producing Class. Plato has advocated for functional specialisation and division of labour among these three classes of people. When these three classes of people perform their respective duties without interfering in each other's affairs then justice prevailed. Thus, in an ideal state, the philosopher king is to rule the state, the soldiers are to be in charge of defence of the state and the producing class are to produce food and other necessary goods for all.

14.5 CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

According to Plato, if all the people use to perform their allotted task without interfering in others' affairs, then peace and prosperity would prevail in the state. The Philosopher king or the guardian class use to attain the necessary skill and knowledge through state-regulated system of education. According to Plato, the state-regulated education system actually aims at developing wise rulers and virtuous citizens in the ideal state.

14.6 CONCEPT OF FAMILY

The ideal state was also marked by the presence of the system of communism of property and family. Under this system of communism, the philosopher king or the guardian class had no right to have family and private property. Plato considered attachment towards family and private property as the greatest obstacles in the way of achieving unity of the state. Therefore, he advocated communism of private property and family for the guardian class under which they would not have private property and family of their own and ultimately which would help them to devote themselves to the service of the state.

14.7 FEATURES OF AN IDEAL STATE OF PLATO

There are some important features of the ideal state of Plato. They are as follows:

14.7.1 Rule of Philosophy

Plato is of the view that in an ideal state the philosopher-ruler should be prominent. He should has a broaden vision of unity of knowledge. Philosopher-kings are immune from the provisions of law and public opinion.

14.7.2. No Unqualified Absolutism:

In Plato's concept of ideal state though there is neither any restraint of law nor of public opinion over philosopher-rulers, but that

is not an unqualified absolutism. It is not all despotism, because rule of philosophy is not free from the basic articles of the constitution.

14.7.3: Control over the Education System

Philosopher ruler should control the education system in an ideal state.

14.7.4: Justice in Ideal State

Justice is the main feature of Plato's Republic and it is also present in his ideal state. Justice is the bond which binds every member of society together. It forms a harmonious union of individuals.

14.7.5: Censorship of Art and Literature

In an ideal state of Plato, there should be a complete censorship of art and literature. It is necessary so that nothing immoral things might falls into the hands of the young individuals.

14.7.6: System of Communism

Plato was of the view that guardian class should live under the system of communism of property and family. The rulers and soldiers do not possess any property of their own.

14.7.7: Equality among Men and Women

According to Plato, equal opportunities should be given to both men and women for their economic, social, intellectual and political uplift. It can be said that Plato can be regarded to be the first feminist of his time.

14.7.8: Principle of Functional Specialization

Plato is of the view that due to multiple wants, an individual could not fulfil all his desires by himself alone due to lack of capacity. Thus co-operation among individuals should be necessary to satisfy their mutual desires. Some people are specialized in performing some certain tasks.

14.8 CRITICISMS OF THE CONCEPT OF IDEAL STATE OF PLATO

Plato's theory of ideal state is subjected to severe criticism which can be mentioned as follows:

1. Plato's ideal state is a *utopian* state. It cannot be realised in practice. His concepts of philosopher king, communism of property and family are anti-human in nature.
2. In Plato's ideal state there was no provision for law. The philosopher king was not bound by any law.
3. Plato's ideal state was anti-democratic. In such a state all powers were concentrated in the hand of the philosopher king or the guardian class and opinions of other people were not given any importance.
4. Plato built his ideal state on the analogy of individual and this identification leads to confusion. He failed to distinguish ethics from politics. His ideal state is based not merely on analogy but almost identification between the individual and the state, which is quite wrong.
5. Plato fails to condemn the institution of slavery and regard it as fundamental evil.
6. Plato's system of communism of women and temporary marriage is detestable and unethical.
7. Plato is a moralist rather than a political idealist. His assumption that the state should control the entire lives of its citizens is false and contrary to human liberty.
8. By the system of functional specialization, Plato tends to dwarf the personality of the individual. There is no possibility of any full development of human personality in his ideal state.
9. Plato completely ignores the lower class in his ideal state which forms the great bulk of population. Such negligence may divide the society into two hostile groups.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q No 1: Who is the author of the book entitled, 'Republic'?

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Q No 2: How has the republic of Plato been interpreted?

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Q No 3: Does Plato think that the possibility of the institutions of his ideal state has the capability of ever becoming a reality?

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Q No 4: For Plato a virtue of an ideal state is identical with what?

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Q No 5: For Plato, what the state regulated education system aims at?

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Q No 6: According to Plato, what right cannot have to a philosopher king or a guardian class?

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Q No 7: How the institution of a slavery has been regarded by Plato?

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14.9: LET US SUM UP

- Plato has provided his theory of ideal state in his famous book 'The Republic'.
- Plato's ideal state is based on certain fundamental principles, such as- classification of people into three classes, i.e. Guardian Class, Auxiliaries and Producing Class; establishment of justice; state-regulated system of education; communism of property and family.

- The Republic of Plato has been interpreted as Utopia to the end of all Utopias.
- It is not because of the cause that it is a romance, but because he has constructed an ideal state in it.
- Plato has built his state on the analogy of an individual organism.
- Plato has always believed that the virtues of an individual and of the state were identical.
- According to Plato, state is the product of human soul which is composed of three elements, such as reason, courage and appetite.
- Corresponding to these three human elements, there are three classes of people- Guardian Class, Auxiliaries and Producing Class.
- Plato has advocated for functional specialisation and division of labour among these three classes of people.
- The ideal state was also marked by the presence of the system of communism of property and family.
- Under this system of communism, the philosopher king or the guardian class had no right to family and private property.
- Plato has considered attachment towards family and private property as the greatest obstacles in the way of achieving unity of the state.



14.10: FURTHER READING

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Johari, J.C. (1994). *Traditions of Political Thought*. Bombay: Himalayan Publishing House,

Mahis, Y. (1994). *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Rao, V.V. (1998). *A History of Political Theories*. New Delhi: S. Chand and Company

Sharma, R.P. (1984). *Western Political Thought*. New Delhi: Sterling Publications Ltd.

Thilly, Frank. (1914). *A History of Philosophy.* H. Holt and Company



14.11 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Plato

Ans to Q No 2: Utopia to the end of all Utopias.

Ans to Q No 3: No, Plato never thinks that

Ans to Q No 4: Virtues of an individual

Ans to Q No 5: It aims at developing wise rulers and virtuous citizens in the ideal state.

Ans to Q No 6: To have family and private property

Ans to Q No 7: Fundamental Evils



14.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions:

1. What are the fundamental principles on which Plato's ideal state is based on?
2. How has Plato compared the construction of ideal state?
3. What are the three classes of citizens of an ideal state?
4. According to Plato what is the greatest obstacles in the way of achieving unity of the state?

B. Short Questions (Answer in within 100-150 words)

1. Write a short note on the 'three classes of citizens in the state'?
2. Briefly describes Plato's concept of education?
3. Write a short note on Plato's concept of family?

C. Long Questions (Answer in within 300-500 words)

1. Explain the concept of ideal state of Plato.
2. Describe the main features of an ideal state of Plato.
3. Critically discuss Plato's concept of ideal state.

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