

Q. Explain the contribution of Aristotle regarding state and governance. Explain its relevancy in the present time.

### Introduction

In his book, Politics, Aristotle laid down the fundamental principles of governance and the key facets of establishment of a state. His theory of classification of forms of government has widely influenced the frameworks of present day states. Moreover, he defined the parameters of an effective state in terms of its population, geostrategic location and its size. Fundamental to all his principles relating to the statehood and governance are his concepts of justice and moral character of the state. His ideologies are still relevant in the present times. ~~the~~

The different forms of government that he introduced in his writings are evident in the contemporary government setups. In addition to this, his principles of justice and morality of the state are pertinent in the present day scenarios of political systems of the world.

## Aristotle's classification of governments

Aristotle classified the forms of government based on two criteria: i) the number of people ruling the government ii) whether the ruler governed with parochial self interests in mind or for the greater welfare of the public. Hence, the following table illustrates the forms of government described by Aristotle:

### Forms of government

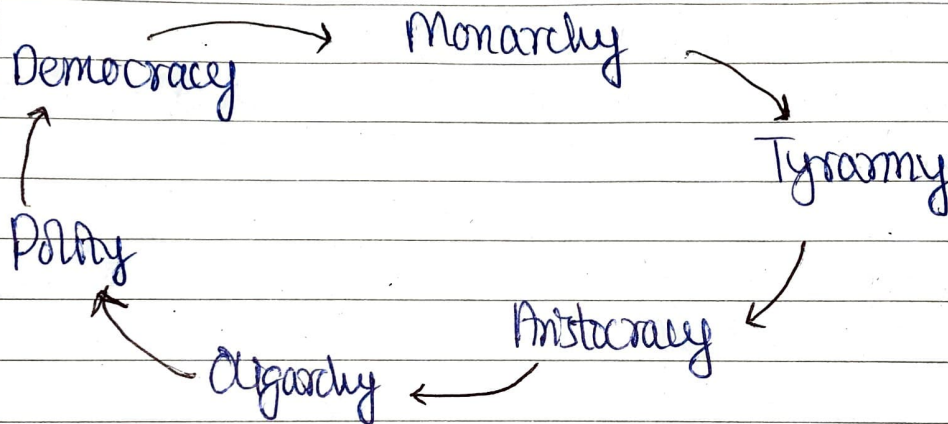
No of people ruling	Good form	Perverted form
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Another important aspect that Aristotle highlighted was that these forms of governments are often cyclical in nature. A monarch rules a state and when he pursues self interest, his rule becomes that of a tyrant. He is then replaced by few noble - aristocrats. When aristocrats become corrupted, the rule of oligarchy commences. Then, the

people rise and revolt and establish their government known as polity. Once the polity seeks to pursue selfish agendas, then it becomes a democracy, which Aristotle contends:

“Democracy is the rule of the mob and is the worst form of government”.

- Cycle of Aristotle's form of government:



## Features of an ideal state

Other than the classification of governments, Aristotle described features of an ideal state. For Aristotle, the state serves the purpose of helping the people reach moral goodness and hence, it should be effective to cater to the needs of people. Like the family assists a person with the biological needs of food, shelter, reproduction and the society

fulfills the social needs of a person, the state helps a person achieve moral goodness and assists in realizing the inner self of a person. Based on these premises, a state should be founded and developed in a way that helps people achieve their inner happiness. Other than this spiritual or moral aspect of the state, Aristotle also described the physical features of an ideal state. An ideal state should have a moderate population - enough to defend its territory, but not greater than the available resources of the territory - the number being 10,000 to 100,000. In addition to this, the state should have enough territory to be sufficient for its population and one which ~~is~~ could be easily protected from the enemy. Likewise, a state should be situated near the coastal regions so that it could flourish with trade. Ideal examples of Aristotle's ideal state were the Greek city states or the contemporary Scandinavian countries.

## Principles of governance

Aristotle was a great proponent of ethics and morality in politics. In his book, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle

emphasized on the importance of morality in the socio-political life of individuals. Therefore, a state should be governed on the principles of morality. The ultimate goal of the state is to maximize the moral goodness and happiness of its population. Moreover, central to Aristotle's political philosophy is the concept of 'Justice'. For Aristotle, Justice entails the rule of law and moral consciousness. Justice should be pivotal to the governance policy of any state, if it aims to be effective. No person should feel that his or her ~~the~~ rights have been violated by the state or any other persons in the state. Hence, an efficient state is one which promulgates effective laws to ensure justice. Another tenet of prudent governance that Aristotle highlights is that of the 'Golden Mean'. Golden Mean is the perfect amalgamation of quality and quantity. The concept applies both at the level of an individual and at the level of the state. For an state to have a productive governing mechanism, it needs to apply golden mean in its policies. The concept can be elaborated in the form of government of Aristotle. The elite of a country have the quality due to their high education and resources,

on the other hand, the populace has the quantity. The golden mean of the two is the 'middle class'; Aristotle believes that in order for a government to run efficiently, the middle class must play an important role. Even if they are not in the government, they are essential to keeping a vigilant eye on the policies of the government. Hence, a form of government which allows middle class to prosper is the one which runs more productively and produces the best outcome.

### Relevance of Aristotle's principles in the contemporary era

Aristotle's ideas are relevant at present as well. The forms of government that he postulated are still visible throughout the world. The monarchies of the Gulf states, the democracies throughout the world and the aristocracies in countries such as China. Although Aristotle contended that democracy is the worst form of government and it is the mob rule, the present day democracy is more in line with his idea of polity which was the formation of representative assembly through electorate

Instead of a complete mob rule. Additionally, the cyclical changes with regards to his forms of government is visible in different states. In Pakistan, there has been rise and fall of dictatorships, followed by democratic governments and hybrid confluence of the two. Although, the exact sequence of Aristotle's classification is not followed, but the basis of number of people governing and their interest, define the type of government in place. In addition to this, Aristotle's principles of governance are still relevant. Aristotle was a great proponent of law and constitution to permeate justice in society. The present day states are also great advocates of constitutionalism to establish a just and fair society. Moreover, the features of ideal state that Aristotle elaborated can be witnessed in the present day Scandinavian states or Singapore, such states are most successful and prosperous as Aristotle had perceived. Thus, Aristotle is rightly called the first political scientist and his teachings permeate throughout the world even in the present era.

## Conclusion

Therefore, it can be concluded that Aristotle defined the classification of forms of government and also expounded the fundamental principles of good governance. His principles and teachings are still applicable in the contemporary era as visible through the state's machineries in the present times.