

SIBPATH CHAKRAVARTY

An
Introduction
To

Politics

REVISED BY

ANUP CHAKRABARTI

AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS

Index

SIBNATH CHAKRAVARTY

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MODERN BOOK AGENCY PRIVATE LTD.
10, Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta-700 073.

Published by
Sri Debnarayan Bhattacharyya
for Modern Book Agency Private Ltd.
10, Bankim Chatterjee Street,
Calcutta-700 073

Fifteenth Revised Edition : January, 1987
Reprint Edition : July, 1990
Sixteenth Revised Edition : December, 1991
Reprint Edition—July, 1993
Seventeenth Revised Edition : November, 1994

Price : Rs. One hundred & ten Only.

Printed by
Kajal Kumar Bhowal
Dynamic Printers
24A, Bagmari Road,
Calcutta-700 054

Y. S. K. M. A. L. O. R. .
Roll 200. F.D.C. 1st
Y. S. K. M. A. L. O. R. .
PREFACE TO THE SEVENTEENTH EDITION

Since the publication of the Sixteenth Edition far reaching political changes have occurred. To take these changes into account and to update various examples, necessary alterations have been made. The USSR has ceased to exist and consequently the Constitution of the erstwhile USSR has been omitted.

It is hoped that like its predecessors, the present edition of the book will also serve the purpose of the students of Political Science of various Indian Universities as also of those who are interested in the subject.

Thanks are due to the management and staff of the Modern Book Agency Private Limited for their constant help and co-operation in getting the book out of the press.

1st November, 1994.

Anup Chakrabarti

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PART I
POLITICAL THOUGHT

CHAPTER I

DAWN OF POLITICAL SPECULATION

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G. L. Wayper—Political Thought, Ch I.

E. Barker—Plato and Aristotle.

W. A. Dunning—A History of Political Theories—Ancient and Mediaeval.

SECTION I

Introduction. "Excepting the blind forces of nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin". This statement, while it seeks to emphasize the importance of the contributions made by the Hellenic people to the progress of civilization, is apt to mislead the average people to the belief that other contemporary races were really 'Barbarians', that they practically made no contribution to supplement the achievements of the ancient Hellas. Of course, the heights reached by the Hellenic people in the fields of art, architecture, rhetoric, metaphysics and poetry long remained unsurpassed, but it does not certainly mean that at no earlier stage had these subjects been discussed by any other people. Nevertheless, the statement, in its essence, contains an element of truth which will be apparent if we turn our attention to the galaxy of luminaries of the Ancient Hellenic world, such as, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and the last though not the least in importance, the great Aristotle.

While in the Eastern countries political thought was mixed up with religion and mythology, it was the Greeks who for the first time emancipated politics from the fetters of religion and superstition and began to study the problems of government in a systematic manner. Thus the credit goes to the Greeks not only for separating politics from religion and mythology but also for giving it the character of an independent science.

Role of the city-State in the Evolution of Greek Political Thought.

The peculiar environment in which the Greeks developed their political speculation and political experimentation was the city-state which was the pivot round which all the activities of the citizens revolved. The area of the state was confined to the city comprising a few thousand citizens together with their women, attendants and a very large number of slaves who formed the non-citizen class and as such not considered as essential parts of the state. All the activities of the citizens—social, political, religious, cultural, etc., were focussed at one point, namely the city-state. The Greeks identified the state with society. The life of the city was the very life of the citizen and the life of the citizen was the very life of the city. Citizenship, to the Greeks, was in the nature of a universal partnership,—“a partnership”, in the words of Edmund Burke, “in all science in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection.” Citizenship was almost a profession with the Greeks. The city-states maintained a large number

of slaves many times more than that of the citizens and these slaves used to work for their masters who enjoyed leisure being free from the cares and anxiety of earning their livelihood. The existence of a vast body of slaves not only freed them free to cultivate higher intellectual and political pursuits but developed in them the peculiar mental attitude that manual labour and intellectual pursuits could not go together. This peculiar mental makeup was made the basis of justification of slavery. Of the Greek city-states, Sparta and Athens exerted tremendous influence upon later political development and hence a study of the political organisations of these two city-states becomes absolutely necessary for a clear understanding of Greek political philosophy.

The Constitution of Sparta. Sparta was one of the foremost city-states of Greece the social basis of which rested upon a sharp class-consciousness and class-distinction between the *Spartans*—the political and the most privileged class, the *Perioikoi* and the *Helots*. The Spartans were the Dorian conquerors who formed the political community of the state and monopolised all privileges. Performance of public duties was their only function and for that they had to receive proper training. The Spartans were meant exclusively for a political and military career, their food and other necessities of life being supplied by the other two classes. The Helots who formed the bulk of the population were the conquered people of the soil. They were at the bottom of the social structure and were denied any civil or political rights. They had to cultivate land and supply manual labour for the maintenance of the entire population of the state. The *Perioikoi* was a class intermediate between the Spartans and the Helots. They enjoyed civil rights but no political rights. Industry, trade and commerce were their avocations of life.

Thus the city-state of Sparta was a class-state in which one class had monopolised all privileges and the other two were relegated to the background. As the other two classes, namely, the *Perioikoi* and the *Helots*, were subdued classes, they were always discontented and to prevent any uprising against the ruling class, the Spartans were badly in need of military training. This training was a vital necessity with them for the enjoyment of their exclusive political rights and privileges. Hence they evolved a system of military training which could produce the best soldiers. Every Spartan citizen had to undergo this rigorous military training in special barracks from the age of seven right up to the age of sixty. As the Spartans were the conquering race, they looked upon the other two classes with suspicion and as such, military training was confined only to the Spartans. Women also had to undergo a sort of physical training which made them hardy with the sole purpose of making them capable of producing healthy and sturdy offspring. In this way, the Spartans transformed themselves into a military class, the best part of their life being devoted to the worship of the god of war. It is only when they were considered incapable of rendering active military service that they turned from soldiery to magistracy and other administrative functions.

The Spartan political organisation consisted of two Kings, one Senate Assembly and an Ephoralty consisting of five Ephors. The two Kings were the head of administration, one of whom being also the Commander-in-Chief of the army. The Senate consisting of 28 aged wise Spartans discharged administrative functions, mainly legislative and judicial in character. The Assembly was a general body of all adult male Spartans who used to meet on fewer occasions.

only to ratify the decisions of the Senate. The Spartan constitution vested real powers upon the Ephoralty which could disapprove the acts of the Senate and the command of the army from the King in times of war. The five Ephors were annually elected by the people. The institution of Ephoralty was therefore the most powerful organ of the Spartan Constitution and it was designed in such a way that it could act as an effective check upon the possible tyranny of the Kings. The Spartan Constitution was therefore a blend of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy but in reality it was more oligarchical inasmuch as the Ephors wielded the highest powers of the state.

The Constitution of Athens. The Constitution of Athens stood in bold contrast to that of Sparta. In no other state of the ancient world, democracy had been given such a fair trial in its varied form as in Athens and the Athenian Constitution in its last phase is still regarded as the best specimen of a democratic Constitution.

The early history of Athens reveals that political power was first concentrated in the hands of the small privileged class of the nobility. The disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor became so pronounced at the end of the seventh century B. C. that a reform of the economic structure of society became an imperative necessity. Solon was entrusted with this arduous task of reforming the Athenian Constitution. He classified the people into four divisions on the basis of wealth. Before Solon, a man's position in society used to be determined by his birth but Solon introduced the system of distribution of political power according to income. So wealth took the place of birth in the matter of eligibility to office. The highest positions of the state were those of the Archons which remained reserved for the highest class. But the fourth or the lowest class had no bar to be appointed to other posts. Although the highest positions were open only to the first class, other positions were thrown open to all classes even to the fourth class. Thus Solon sowed the seed of democracy by largely doing away with the distinction between the rich and the poor, between the nobility and the commonalty. Solonian law also provided for the representation of all the four classes on the Senate or the Council of the four hundred and also on the *Ecclesia* or the General Assembly of Athens. The Senate consisted of four hundred members by taking one hundred members from each of the classes into which Solon divided the Athenian society on the basis of wealth. Fifty members of the Senate had to perform some administrative functions by turn during a part of the year and it is in this way that it became possible for Athenian democracy to bring all the four hundred members within the official round in the course of a year. The institution of *Ecclesia* made Athens a real democracy in operation inasmuch as all male adults above the age of 20 from all the four classes constituted the *Ecclesia* or the General Assembly. Besides these, all other official posts were filled up by lot from among the persons elected by the four classes.

Thus Solon gave Athens a really democratic constitution which though not based on class structure did not permit class hatred and class conflict to weaken the unity and solidarity of the community as a whole. Solon conceived a democratic constitution in such a way that all classes of citizens might consider themselves as part and parcel of an indivisible political community bound together by ties of equality and fraternity.

SECTION II

Precursors of Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle were great thinkers, not only of the ancient world but their political teachings in many respects still remain unsurpassed. Nevertheless for a proper appraisal of the political philosophy of these two great political seers of the ancient world, it is necessary to probe a little into the general trend of Greek political philosophy that preceded these two writers.

1. Pythagoreanism. Pythagoras who came from the island of Samos probably about 531 B.C. settled in Southern Italy. It is impossible to say what precisely he believed himself and very difficult to be sure of what his followers believed. One certain fact seemed to be that he for the first time made philosophy something which we would call a religion or a way of life. Yet the underlying substance or principle is still sought for.

Pythagoras and his followers regarded philosophy and mathematics as "good for the soul" as in fact, the best and highest form of purification. He defined "the three lives" by comparing all men to those who attend the Olympic Games. The lowest class are those who come there simply to buy and sell; next are the actual competitors and the highest class is that of those who are simply there to watch.

About the actual religious doctrine it seems certain that he believed in the transmigration of souls. He advised a number of rather curious prohibitions and injunctions for his followers, such as 'Do not eat beans', etc. He also taught them to abstain from animal flesh.

Thus highest discipline of the school was connected with music and mathematics. From the account given by Aristotle, it seems certain that they really did hold the view that things are made of numbers. It is possible also to maintain that they laid the foundation of modern mathematical physics. To the Pythagorians, there was something sacred in numbers themselves. Number and their arrangements expressed quality as well as quantity. They believed that numbers were the primary element of the whole nature. Hence they considered principles of numbers as the principle of all things and the whole universe was a harmony or number.

2. Sophism. Political philosophy is a study of man in relation to the governing authority in the society of which he is a member. It seeks to find out the appropriate relation between the individuals on the one hand and the governing authority on the other. The first systematic attempt at discovering the proper relation between the two was made by a class of philosophers who flourished in Athens during the fifth century B.C.

The Sophists gave a materialistic interpretation of life. They inculcated the doctrine of natural inequality of men and from this they concluded that stronger had a natural right to rule and as such the weaker had no natural right to self-defence against their more powerful fellows. The State, according to Sophists, is therefore the outcome of the aggression of all against all. The origin of political authority may therefore be traced to the strategem of war or to an agreement entered into by a number of men whose ambition is to control the rest by uniting their strength. Political authority, according to them, may arise in different ways. Political authority may be formed out of a union between