**FUUGP SEM- 5**

**POLITICAL SCIENCE (MAJOR)**

**PAPER- WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**UNIT-1**

**Aristotle’s Classification of Government**

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), the famous Greek philosopher, is often called the "Father of Political Science" because he systematically studied politics, government, and society. In his important work *Politics*, Aristotle tried to understand how states are organized and how governments work. One of his most significant contributions is his **classification of government**.

He carefully examined different forms of government, compared them, and grouped them based on who rules and for whose benefit the ruling is done.

**Basis of Aristotle’s Classification**

Aristotle classified governments on **two main bases**:

1. **Number of Rulers** – Who holds power?
   1. One person
   2. A few persons (a small group)
   3. Many persons (majority or citizens)
2. **Purpose of Ruling** – For whose benefit is power used?
   1. For the **common good** (good of all) → Correct or true form
   2. For the **private interest** of the ruler/rulers → Perverted or corrupt form

By combining these two criteria, Aristotle created a clear classification system.

**Aristotle’s Sixfold Classification of Government**

Aristotle divided governments into **six types** – three correct forms and three corrupt forms.

| **Number of Rulers** | **Correct Form (Common Good)** | **Corrupt Form (Self-Interest)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| One | **Monarchy** | **Tyranny** |
| Few | **Aristocracy** | **Oligarchy** |
| Many | **Polity** | **Democracy** (in Aristotle’s sense) |

Let us understand each in detail:

**1. Monarchy (Rule by One – for Common Good)**

Monarchy means rule by a single person (king, queen, or leader) who governs in the interest of all citizens. A good monarch is wise, just, and virtuous. The king sees himself as the "father" of the people and cares for their welfare.

1. **Features:**
   1. Power is concentrated in one person.
   2. The monarch rules according to law and justice.
   3. Aim is the common good, not personal gain.

**2. Tyranny (Rule by One – for Self-Interest)**

When monarchy becomes selfish and corrupt, it turns into tyranny. A tyrant rules for his own benefit, not for the welfare of the people.

1. **Features:**
   1. Power is absolute and often cruel.
   2. Laws are ignored or twisted for personal benefit.
   3. Citizens are oppressed, and liberty is destroyed.

**3. Aristocracy (Rule by Few – for Common Good)**

Aristocracy literally means “rule of the best.” In this form, a small group of virtuous, wise, and capable persons govern for the welfare of all. They are selected for their merit and moral excellence.

1. **Features:**
   1. Governed by the most capable citizens.
   2. Rule is based on knowledge, justice, and virtue.
   3. Objective is to promote common happiness.

**4. Oligarchy (Rule by Few – for Self-Interest)**

When aristocracy becomes selfish, it turns into oligarchy. Here, a small group of rich and powerful persons rule for their own wealth and power.

1. **Features:**
   1. Rule by wealthy elites or influential families.
   2. Focus is on protecting their own economic interests.
   3. Poor citizens are excluded from participation.

**5. Polity (Rule by Many – for Common Good)**

Polity is Aristotle’s ideal form of government. It means a constitutional government where power is in the hands of many (citizens) but controlled by law. It is a mixture of democracy and oligarchy.

1. **Features:**
   1. Large number of citizens participate in decision-making.
   2. Rule of law is supreme.
   3. Balance between rich and poor, ensuring stability.

**6. Democracy (Rule by Many – for Self-Interest)**

Aristotle used the term “democracy” in a slightly negative sense. For him, democracy meant mob rule – where the majority governs only for its own interest, ignoring justice or rights of the minority.

1. **Features:**
   1. Decisions are taken by the majority, even if unjust.
   2. Poor citizens dominate and may exploit the rich minority.
   3. Can lead to instability and chaos if unchecked.

**Aristotle’s Preference for Polity**

Although monarchy was considered the highest form (if the monarch is perfect), Aristotle preferred **polity** as the most realistic and stable system. He argued that:

1. Perfect monarchs are rare.
2. Rule by many reduces the chance of abuse of power.
3. Polity combines the good features of both democracy (participation) and oligarchy (wisdom of the capable).
4. Middle class plays a key role, preventing domination by rich or poor.

Hence, Aristotle saw polity as a practical compromise that ensures justice and stability.

**Criticism of Aristotle’s Classification**

1. **Limited to Greek City-States:** His theory was based on small city-states and may not fully apply to large modern nations.
2. **Negative View of Democracy:** Modern democracy is no longer seen as mob rule but as a system protecting rights and freedoms.
3. **Static Classification:** He did not fully explain how governments change from one form to another (although he did mention revolution and decay).

Despite these criticisms, Aristotle’s classification remains a foundation of political science.

**Conclusion**

Aristotle’s classification of government is one of his greatest contributions to political thought. By dividing governments into six types – monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity, and democracy – he gave a clear and systematic framework to study political systems.