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The Place of Women: In The Political Thought of Plato

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ABSTRACT: Plato's political thought envisions women as equals and calls for the dissolution of families among the ruling class. He aspired to alter the conventional roles of wives and mothers, enabling women to fully participate in public life. His belief is not only for the good of women, but also for the good and unity of his ideal state. He wanted to abolish family for the emancipation of women because he thought that women were imprisoned in their families, which meant a narrow life for them. According to Plato, women had a lot of natural virtue, but the main problem with their miserable condition is their involvement in the institution of the private family and household. Women have traditionally been the ones who take care of the household, which makes them more likely to experience its adverse effects. The development of virtue is hindered by the private family, according to Plato. It is a clear contrast between men role's in the public and women's role as a caretaker of household. Women's role as homemaker will foster a strong interest in family welfare, but their isolation from society will hinder their ability to cultivate a concern for the common good. Women who live with their families always see themselves as caregiver, lusting after money and other material goods. As a result, they fill their emotional needs and stay away from public life, filling up their appetite without the fear of shame. Plato's objective was to enhance women's virtue and assist them in escaping domestic misery. He also aspired to empower women to take charge of the state as philosopher, kings and guardians. Plato wanted to change the traditional marriage system and advocated for a caretaker for betrothed children under state control to eliminate the harassment of childcare, which was given of his views on communism of wives. He emphasizes the importance of women's education to create a group of guardian class for his ideal state.

KEYWORDS: Abolition of family, communism of wives, emancipation of women, political participation of women, women's education, philosopher Queen.

INTRODUCTION: The birth place of Plato was Athence, Greece in 428 BC. He was a student of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. His family was aristocratic and he was born into it. The Peloponnesian war was running during his time and was governed by oligarchy. The major works of Plato are – The Apology, The Phaedo, The Laws etc. but most famous work is the 'The Republic' which details a wise society run by a Philosopher. Plato is considered the father of political philosophy because he was the first to describe the theory of state and politics in a systematic manner. Plato's ideas, particularly in his work 'The Republic', demonstrate a resemblance to feminist thought. Plato's proposal is recognized by feminist commentator as both radical and problematic.

In view of abolition of family and communism of wives

There is a concept of city- state in ancient Greece at the time of Plato. At this time, there is no consideration for females and slaves as citizens. There is no social value for female.

Society was based on patriarchy. Plato brought lifting to female in his political thought from a place of underestimate. Plato elevated the position of women at the centre point in the formation of an ideal state. As a result of the underestimation of women, they were confined to the family. According to Plato it is possible to achieve the emancipation of women if women are free from family structure. So he wanted to break the family structure and introduced the idea of wives in communism.

Plato advances several arguments for the abolition of the family. He is opposed to it because he thinks that with its narrow life, hoarded wealth and secluded women, it is the enemy of the unity of the state and the free development of all its members.¹ The women in the family were restricted and dedicated to obeying orders from both a male and husband. Women are preoccupied with home work, including cooking and other household duties, in addition to raising children. Plato was opposed to this conventional idea. According to Plato a woman can possess the same capabilities as a man, but all virtue is lost when women are in harmony with one another in the family. If women get a chance, they will be at the same level as a male. Life of women was restricted.

Plato here proceeds on the assumption that, except in the matter of sex, there is no fundamental difference, between man and which can affect the participation of the later in the political life of the community. Just as the female dog is nearly as good for watch-keeping as the male dog and is capable of the same training, similarly women can discharge the same functions as men.²

According to Plato Family is a place where talents are wasted and women's power is underappreciated. It prevents men and women, particularly women, from developing their personalities fully; women are confined to the seclusion of their quarters in the homes and have no other function except that of bearing and rearing children. The state is deprived of the service of about half of its population in this way.³ Women are deprived of self-developing environment due to being detained in their family, which means they are not able to participate in forming an ideal state. So Plato wanted to free from family system for women's. The abolition of the family would thus not only destroy a centre of selfishness, it would be also result in the emancipation of the women from the drudgery of the home and set them free for the service of the state.⁴

Women were bound in loyalty to look after male-oriented problems, which resulted in the death of all talent, which is more essential to forming a good state. When women become mothers, their dreams are lapsed because they are thinking about the future of their children. Plato wanted to participate in the political system for women because

women were considered inferior in the family system. Plato's goal was to give women freedom, which was the only way to release them from the agony of women's lives, because they had no economic or political rights at that time. The philosopher king status was promoted to women by abolishing the family, as he believed that both men and women have equal status, and thus women were the one to manage state responsibilities.

Plato sought to abolish the family not only because he regarded it as a centre of exclusiveness and a serious rival to the state, but also because it involved an inferior status for women.⁵

By a conventional marriage ceremony, women enter a life of slavery in a family and later spend time on raising children. Therefore, Plato did not encourage conventional marriage but rather interested in reforming the marriage system. The abolition of marriage was thus 'a tremendous assertion of the rights of women. It raised her to the level of man, and it postulated her national nature'.⁶ Plato accepted women as legislator and rulers. There were two distinct ideas that were embedded in Plato's community of wives: reform of conventional marriage, and emancipation of women. To achieve these, he proposed abolition of permanent monogamous marriage and private families. These were restricted to guardian women alone.⁷ It is important to ensure that men and women of the highest quality are brought together at the right age when celebrating marriage. Plato viewed the ideal age for marriage to be between 25 and 55 for men and 20 and 40 for women⁸. Here Plato opposes child marriage as it deprives women of the chance to develop their physical and mental abilities, and he pointed out the appropriate age for women. He also stresses that women should choose high-quality partners during the wedding ceremony and not be pressured by their families to have children, which is a future citizen of the ideal state. Birthed children of the guardian class would be reared under state management, and here Plato emancipates women's from the boring life of raising children in the family.

The children born of such temporary union will be taken over by the state and brought up in public crèches so that no child will know its parentage and no parents will know their children. All the children born in season will be the common sons and daughters of all the persons married at that time. In this way Plato's scheme for the reform of marriage serves several purposes; it makes for the unity of the state; it leads to the improvement of the race; and, as has already been shown, it emancipates women for the service of the state and puts them on a level of equality with men.⁹

Plato's position on women in political participation:

In classical Athens where Plato lived, women were largely excluded from political and intellectual life due to their confinement to the domestic sphere. Additionally, women were not allowed to vote, participate in discussion, or engage in other political activities. Plato believed that women should be educated and given the opportunity to serve as guardians, warriors and even rulers, which were previously only reserved for men, in contrast to his ideal state. Plato states this principle most explicitly in Book v of 'The Republic', where he insists that only ability should be considered when it comes to political participation, not gender. Plato's belief in meritocracy system meant that both women and men could serve the city if they had the necessary talent and virtues, as he was a promoter of equal opportunity. His interest was in including women in the group of warriors because the functional group of guardians must consist of individuals whose spiritual excellence is based on courage, and they may also participate. In other words, women will be allowed to dedicate themselves to a military career which was ridiculous for an Athenian male citizen at the time because war was still a privilege that defined men and those who were more valuable. Women may be part of the group that defends the city and their aggressive nature is dominant in their souls. Plato does not care about male or female sex, but rather about one's excellent soul. Therefore, the distinction between male and female gender is irrelevant for assigning such task, as is the difference between having a lot of hair or being bold. The warrior class, which is the most aggressive part of the soul, is responsible for using weapons and women are educated to do so through music, gymnastics and military training.

Reflecting on the education of women: To achieve economic and political freedom and overcome family misery, Plato insists on educating women. In his time, women were deprived of the light of education, so he opened the door for education for female also. So he introduced the education system for his ideal state formation.

Plato recommended a state-controlled, compulsory and comprehensive scheme of education in two phases: In the first phase, elementary education that would be confined to the young till age of 18, followed by two years of compulsory military training and then higher education the second phase for the selected persons of both the sexes who would be members of the ruling class, from the age twenty to thirty five.¹⁰ Plato was against restricting women's education within the household, such as cooking, child and physical training for both boys and girls.

Both Boys and girls received the same kind of education, far beyond the physical distinctions. Plato did not find any

difference between the sexes in talents and skills, thus making a subtle criticism of secondary status accorded to women participation in politics was the main subject of one of the comedies of Aristophanes the (447-385 BC) women in parliament (Ecclesiazusae) which discussed the status of women as early as 393 BC. Plato followed Aristophanes.¹¹

Plato introduced gymnastics in elementary education, keeping in mind that it tempts the spirit, which is important for warrior classes for both sexes. He stated that both gender would be required to attend two years of military training to become perfect warrior as professional for guardian. Plato reiterated the Athenian practice which provided for compulsory military service between the ages of 17 or 18 and 20. Elementary education perfects those souls who were receptive to habit and conditioning. These souls would become auxiliaries.¹² Plato also said that after the age of six, both girls and boys should be separated. Boys should play with Boys and Girls with girls and both should be taught the use of different arms.

He regarded the suppression of women's education as a loss of society's intellectual side. He established an education system for both genders to encourage virtue and skill in both males and females, which resulted in an effective and stable condition for ideal states. Plato's ideas on education were primarily targeted towards those who were to become statesmen. Without women's education, only male statesmen could lead a country through a dire situation. Plato's concept on education in his book 'The Laws' was that it should be available to all, but as in 'The Republic', it should be mandatory for the guardian class.

Criticism of Plato's views on women: Plato's marriage system was criticized for implying that men and women come together solely for child reproduction. This not true as the wife and husband relationship is spiritual and long-term. Raising a child under such state management means ignoring the actual love and affection of both women and children. Therefore, Plato ignored the psychological side of women to release them from family-oriented agony and male oriented agony. Confusion, disorder, and antisocial behavior are heightened when permanent marriage and exclusive bonds are absent, as loyalty shifts entirely from family to state. Plato's theory of communism is too abstract and far from the real world that critics platonic communism as half communism.

Conclusion: Feminist ideology demands gender equality and gender justice. Although Plato was a part of highly patriarchal society, he did not believe that women had any natural limitations in either education or governance. So equal opportunities are given to women by him. Plato does not discriminate against gender for the position of philosopher king. Women have the potential to become

philosopher queen in Plato's ideal state. Plato's primary goal was to free women from family bonds and he also hoped to make them free so that they could use their talents for the benefit of the state. Plato was the first person in western world who realize that women are not affected by any natural disability. He proposed the idea of a philosopher queen, which was a radical idea at the time. So it is may be called Plato is first feminist. Today, women are involved and making a contribution in all aspect of society, which was Plato's vision in ancient Greece.

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Endnotes

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- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid, page 87.
- ⁶ Ibid.
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- ⁹ Jyoti Prasad Suda: History Of Political Thought Vol. I Ancient And Medieval: P.88
- ¹⁰ Subrata Mukherjee, Sushila Ramaswami: A History Of Political Thought; Plato To Marx- Second Edition: 82 Pages.
- ¹¹ Ibid, page-83.
- ¹² Ibid, page-84.