

Welcome students to Unit 2 on Aristotle. The module today

for discussion will be **Classification of government**.

The topics covered in this session will be the basis of

classification, Classification of governments, The best

practicable form of government and the cycle of change of

government. At the end of the session, the student will be

able to understand Aristotle's Classification of governments

and will be able to explain Aristotle's views on the cycle

of change of governments.

Ancient Greeks did not differentiate between state

government and constitution. So when Aristotle speaks about

Constitution, he could have meant state or government.

Aristotle was particularly concerned about the prevailing

instability of government among the city states of his time, so

he tried to develop a model constitution or a government

that could ensure political stability.

He, along with his disciples, made an empirical

study of 158 constitutions of various City- States and tried to

produce the classification of government. He also built on

Plato's Classification of Government, which is covered in

the statesman. While attempting this classification of

governments, Aristotle attributed the differences in constitutions or governments to the capabilities of men and the ends they seek to achieve, so the kind of men that formed the government, and the level that they would like to reach. The character of the state is determined by the Constitution. A change in the Constitution generally changes the identity of the state.

A government in a state is constituted on the basis of either **birth** which would give rise to hereditary form of government like a monarchy or **wealth** which will give rise to governments like oligarchies or **number**, which will give rise to Democratic forms of government. Coming to the classification of governments, Aristotle put forth this table which shows a two-fold classification, that is quantitative, which is the number of people who exercise power and qualitative as in pure form or perverted form. Now when only one person exercises power, the form of government could be monarchy, if the intention is the interest of the state. If the intention of the people in power is their own selfish interests, it could be a tyrannical government. Secondly, if the number of people exercising power are a few then, and the intent is the interest of the

state, then it would be an aristocracy. If not, if it's the interest of the ruler, then it will turn out to be an oligarchy. Finally, if many exercise power, then the form of government in a pure form would be Polity and in a perverted form will be democracy.

The classification that Aristotle spoke of is based on two factors, that is quantitative. It depends on the number of persons who exercise sovereign power. It also is qualitative that is the end for which the power is exercised, whether for the promotion of interests of the state or for private interests of the ruler.

Now coming to the best practicable form of government.

If Aristotle was asked which is the best form of government in this six-fold classification that he gave. In fact, he said that a government would depend on the period, and there are many factors involved. But when asked to name one particular one, he said Polity. So according to Aristotle, the best constitution was the one which was most practicable in a given situation.

Stability of the Constitution was the only criterion for declaring it as an Ideal. Polity was the best and the most practicable form of Government because it possessed a healthy combination of both

Liberty and wealth.

Polity or also known as constitutional government was moderate democracy. So Aristotle, like Plato, was not a supporter of democracy per se.

Now coming to the cycle of change of governments, Aristotle also came to the conclusion that no form of government is permanent or stable without proper checks on the ruler's powers. Governments keep on changing in a sort of a cycle form. So for example, a monarchy would degenerate into tyranny.

On the other hand, an aristocracy would evolve into a oligarchy or a polity would degenerate into democracy.

Monarchy was good under normal conditions, but in the absence of effective control over the monarch's powers, it degenerates into tyranny, tyranny or dictatorial government.

Eventually there will be a response to it, and it will be replaced by a better one in the form of an aristocracy. But when aristocracy also goes unchecked, it can degenerate into oligarchy and in due course an oligarchy is also challenged and replaced by Polity. This Aristotle considered to be the best form of government, because as he said it had many people exercising power, and also the intent of it was for the

interest of the larger people.

The Polity may also degenerate into democracy, which may eventually be overthrown by a single virtuous man, and monarchy may be established. This is known as the cycle of change of government.

For further understanding on the

topic, you may refer to the references. Thank you.