

The Greek City States and the Genesis of Political Culture of the West

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Abstract: The importance of ideals like Citizen Rights, Justice, and Public Welfare etc. has always attracted the scholars across the world. Greece is the birthplace of democracy and the process involved in it is very significant for the human progress. The in-depth study of democracy gives us strength and always motivate us to move ahead. The real ideals of democracy can be understood in a true sense when we see how Ekklesia and the Boule were organized. The Public Office heralds scope for the process of Institutionalization and reviving the Citizen Rights. The welfare concept is the crux of Athenian Democracy. The theme selected for study i.e. The Greek City States and The Genesis of Political Culture of the West could be an epochal determinant in the Historical studies. People Centric approach holds a lot of potential and judicial process holds the strength to mould the society. The proper direction in the society can only be gained once the institutions are studied in a structured manner. As there is the scope of democracy in the modern world we see that the real power lies in the hands of people. The right to Vote and the importance of every Citizen is realized in the present day context. Immense structural formulations and issues involved with the stratum and the sub-stratum is the importance of Greek city states. The determinants, ideologies and the deductions that are generated after the study of Greek City-States are the grand answers towards a better future. And it also determines how the public office actually works in a dedicated manner. Hierarchy becomes the issue when we have such formulations. The theme of checks and balances also appears here and it becomes the concern of public arena.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Greek city-states i.e. Polis developed during the Archaic Period in Greece, bearing impactful determinants in the realm of political ideals of the West. The city-state gave us the idea of Government and its Characteristics which would engulf the dimensions of citizen welfare. Concerns related to the Civic Formulations, virtues and individuality along with justice and courage were the ones which made Polis the area of study (Hansen, 2006). It is perhaps the political life which had unique combination of rulers and the socio economic classes that made Polis the outstanding marvel in Historical study. Independent City-states emerged in the Niche of Greece peninsular. The geographic elements which is supposed to be present for the growth of city was present in the tiny islands of Greece at that time. Trade and Economic classes determined the fate of the Civilization and the thriving trade made Greece the sterling center of manufacturing and merchandising (Boardman, 1973). The most striking feature of the trade was that it grew enormously in due course of time.

Another dimension is the growth of Agora i.e. the hub of the Society and the place of finance dealing became the place of importance. It is an open air space and centrally located arena. Next, is the Acropolis i.e. the citadel had a temple located inside it. The phenomenal structures revealed the grand urban planning of the period. The religious and the people's life got interlinked with the coming up of these structural institutions. The social life got merged in the political sphere and this is the beginning of finest Democracy (Garlan, 1988).

There were several other aspects like coinage which were minted in the city itself. These coins had special symbols. The relevance of coinage here gained its natural denominations and the distinctiveness. Mainly coinage was adopted as a measure of wealth, the bullions i.e. silver coins were mainly used. And the clear cut method of coinage became so popular for its authenticity in the Archaic Greece.

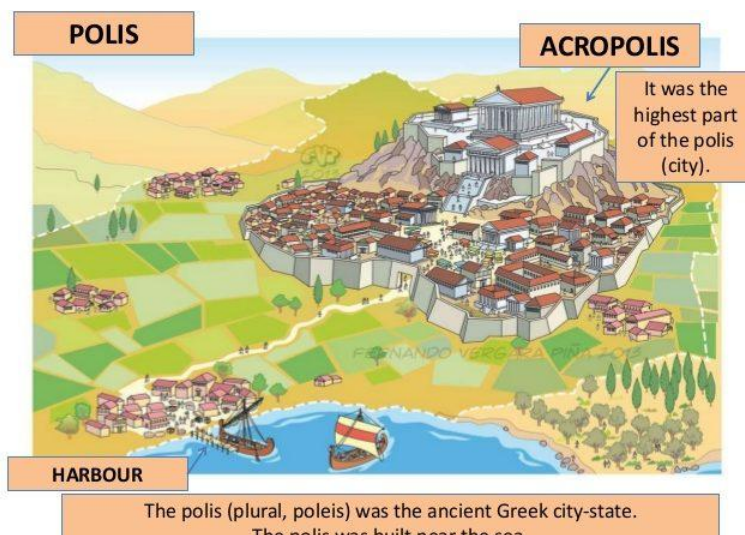


Figure1: An idea of Polis, ancient Greek City State. Source:<https://europe-greece.com>.

II. EKKLESIA

In the coterie of politics, the Ekklesia i.e., assembly of all adult male citizens played the main role. It had other features like the Boule i.e. the Council of 500 and also the civic councils. Revolving around the theme of political basis they had the Archons, Stasis etc. All of them adopted the method of direct democracy. The publications were determined by law, decrees and the accounts of fiscal nature. Public trial method grabbed the attention of Greek citizens. It was the polis which incorporated every kind of people whether it be tribesman or city dwellers. The polis was beyond the meaning of territorial grouping. It incorporated the realms of political justice for all the members of the Ekklesia. It also had a meaningful derivative for the sub stratum which gave a new hope of voting in the public. This aspect revolutionized the idea of political democracy once again (Demand, 1990).

III. THE SOLONIC REFORMS

The Solonic reforms formed a very important part of the political beginnings of Greece. Solon was an archaic lawgiver, statesman and a poet. His understanding of the context to which the reforms supposed to be formulated are based on Economic consideration. Further, the substratum structure in order to move towards democratic implications had to depend on Solon. With the progress of human civilization in the realm the power centric approach became more popular in the different islands of Greece. Regional rivalry became common in the context of the Sparta and Athens. The continuous rivalry between two of the states heralded a new situation where the consequences demanded new set of reforms. The class structure too demanded new set of law as the richer aristocratic clans provided the base for the concentration of the better affiliations. It was the sub- clan structural innovation drive which when understanding the need of the time was reflected in the Solonic Reforms. Next to all this we also have the clans fighting among themselves and the archaic time. The complexities of the time and the Accenture of a new set of reforms is the crux of Solonic reforms which always opens out the process of debate among the Greek Historians. Examples of Cleisthenes, Megara and Theagenes became very important from the context of the nobility demanding kingship in the archaic period. (Snodgrass, 1980).

Noble birth played the important role in the selection of the Archons. The Areopagus appointed them who were the former Archons. The consultative body was determined by these officials who had immense power. The stone of the Agora is the place where these Archons took oaths, in a ceremony that was placed at the zenithal position. Here only they said about their dedication to put a golden statue if the prestigious law is violated. The issues and the deliberative procedures of the lowest strata was not admitted to the assembly of the Athenian citizens. The proceedings of the archons then carried on smooth owing to the duties enrolled to it and also due to the responsibilities it ensured. (Wood, 1988).



Figure 2: Solon, The Archaic Lawgiver. Source: <https://www.ancient-origins.net>

The Athenian Constitution Details Solon formed a new type of assembly i.e. Ekklesia with the incorporation of all the citizens. It is a bold move during those days. The Jury also consisted of some of them sitting together. The foundation of Authentic Republic was laid with this; the voice of the people got heard and accountability also mounted on officials. There was a council of 400 selected among the tribes as the steering committee for the Ekklesia. Although this is a type of debate among the scholars specially regarding the representation of the thetes yet the significance of the step cannot be denied as it had potent reflection in the archaic Greece.

Constitution of Athens declares that the Election to the highest office like those of Archons were reserved for the Generals or the Military Governors. Entry to the Aeropagus was entitled only with the respective qualifications. A kind of medieval knights also had some kind of privilege. Now there is the debate whether the Solonic reforms were the radical formulations of Democratic Government or the measurement of aristocratic determinations remains an issue among the scholars. Hence the proper study could give us some clue to ever widening debate to early democratic reforms in Greece.

Solon's economic reforms actually took place at a time when there was economic transition. It was a determining period as the subsistence economy of archaic Greece was in need of intermingling with the greater international trade. The economic reforms were truly a demand of time and their importance grew rapidly day by day. The coinage system of archaic Greece too had seen a drastic change with the coming of Solonic reforms. The increasing use of silver bullions was seen during that period. Olive production got a boost and the export of grains was banned for the benefit of the poor. Hence the debate still continues whether economic reforms were pro poor?

IV. IMPORTANCE OF DEMOKRATIA

Demokratia, the time-honoured Greek word literally has the meaning people's power. The question arises about the coterie of people who actually exercised the power. Did it consist of all the people i.e. the proletariat and the aristocracy including the oligarchs? Here comes the understanding of the meaning of the word Demos which could have implied both the categories. There is the debate which says that Demokratia word was coined by people who were the opponents of democracy. They were the members of Rich and the elite class who had their own consideration for voting. They had a sense of their own consideration for voting. They had a sense of their own judgement against the socially inferior class. Standing by this debate one could imagine that the real meaning of democracy was perhaps dictatorship of the proletariat. (Ober, 1989).

The Greek political system should be studied in details in order to understand the concept of democracy. Hundreds of thriving democracy existed during the period of Aristotle (4th C B. C.). A single political system was absent in Greece during the period. And it was the assemblage of around 1500 separate polis or cities dispersed in the realm of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Coastline.

Apart from the thriving democracies which existed during the period there was the other powers like small monarchies and the tyrannies that existed during the period. The power that was played by the ruler that an impactful jerking in the Greek political scenario. Among all the democracies of the period the most stable and the outstanding in the political context was Athens that had Radical reforms. Radical Political Reforms were

championed after Pisistratus by the Cleisthenes and hence was done the making of Athenian Democratic Constitution (Manville, 1990).

Ancient Democracies had a tradition that substantial somatic presence was required in the validation of voting. The Citizenship was debarred if one is involved in military training or distant service. Raising the hands was considered as validation for voting authenticated by the presence of officials. The system of review was present in ancient Athens. The quorum was 6000 for the minimal issue of voting and a compact stone either black or white was used for voting purpose. The system of putting the particular stones in pottery generally a clay pottery is used. The Modern system of counting of ballots is actually inherited from the Athenian democratic system.

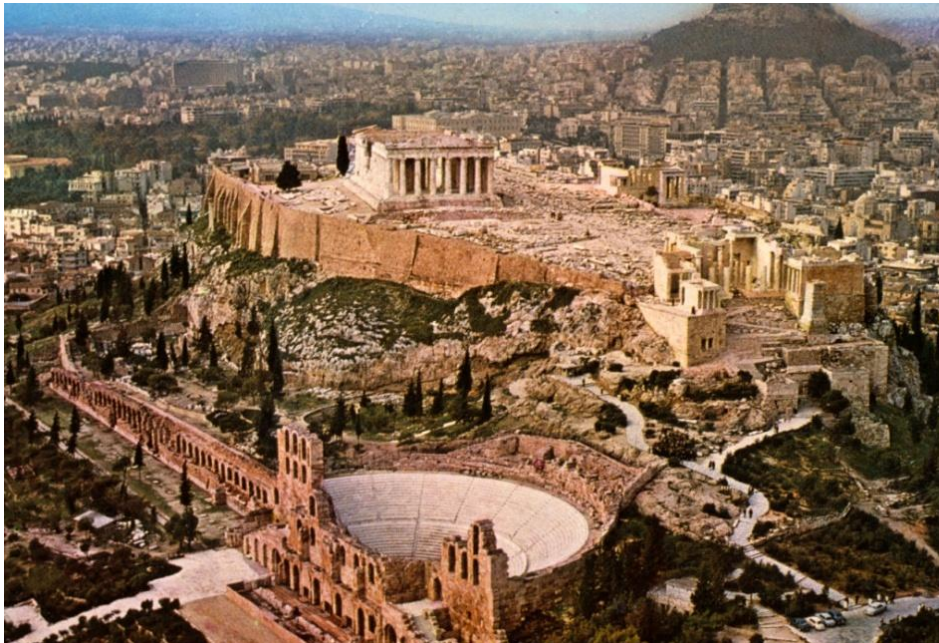


Figure 3: The City- State, Classical Period. Source: Damen, M., 2016

Next, the executive committee i.e. the Boule served as the assembly of people. Magisterial dealings were done through this. Co-ordination of various activities and the administrative aspects were carried through the Boule. The determinants of policy were moved through the Boule itself and it was an important part of the strategy. The politics and the consideration of the assembly was the coveted aspect of the political issue formulation. In the Athenian democracy perhaps it was the most strategic determination.

V. THEORY OF THE JUSTICE AND VITAL POLICIES OF THE GREEKS

The Justice is the crucial aspect of any political realm. It incorporates a lot of issues like the litigation, suits, sub-suits and many more. All the dealings revolve around the theme of citizens and their individual rights. An important development of Ancient Greece was the theory of the individual right. Here only begins the totality of all justice system which is relevant till today. Authority i.e. the Jurors had to be selected meticulously and then there comes the issue of Justice providers who operated on the system of checks and balances. The decisions determined the progress of the Society. The Policies and the process of the decision making adhered to the norms of legal determinants and here lies the greatness of Athenian Democracy. Exchange of sole speech was scaled or timed through a water clock i.e. Clepsydra was the system to put up the litigants. Actually the litigants had three hours to speak and in case of private suits it was even much less. The system was projected in a very structured manner and also in a time bound manner.

The community as a structure was given utmost importance. The judgement provided had an important implication on the society and the Jurors too took care of that in the Athenian democracy. The wonder thing that happened during that time was actually the transcendental concept of human endurance on aspects like virtue and equality. History has always taught us to be wise and justice is the act of nature to provide balance in the society. The stratum and the sub-stratum everything got involved in this. Rapid Justice was the thought that lingered in the whole scenario. The penalty issue was seriously checked and there was further voting system for some issues regarding the litigation. In some cases, further appeal was not possible. Undoing of the earlier judgement was followed wherever the issues struck imbalance. Hence rapid justice provided the ground for citizen rights in Athenian Democracy. With the passage of time the court started to interfere in the works of the

assembly. The general rule saw a remarkable shift during the high classical period. It was the assembly which earlier took decisions based on consensus and under supervision of the officials. The category of officials played the most important part in the determination of the public policies. But court gaining power over the Assembly proved a different scene altogether. It is here where in the minor of issues got complicated and perplexed the court began to overlook the same (Cargill, 1981).

Although in the realm of political culture of ancient Greece we see the role of Athenian democracy as the benchmark yet there are critiques who have their own say. The Ancient critiques included persons like Thucydides, an outstanding historian, Plato the philosopher and also Aristotle the genius of all the times (Forde, 1989). The modern critiques have their say on the parochial concept of citizenship and in the ancient ones opine that common people make huge mistakes so the determinants of ruling ability become doubtful. The critiques role in writing of history gives us new vistas to explore in studying the ancient Greek City- states.

VI. CONCLUSION

The long history of evolution of Democracy in Ancient Greece is full of ideas and grand political interpretation. The Citizen Rights is the crux where the role of public officials became the stalwarts of the justice delivery process. The wisdom of the Jury and the role of the Assembly became the inevitable part of Athenian Democracy. The Individual as an important part of civil society is the thought which benefitted the human civilization in the coming years. With all its magnanimity the scope of democracy in the Western context became broader and more people- centric with time.

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