**Question: Discuss the virtues of Philosopher King/Queen as prescribed ‘Republic’**

**Or**

**Question: “Until the philosophers are kings, or kings and princes of this world have spirit and power of philosophy, cities will ever rest from their evils**.” **Explain.**

**Introduction**

Plato depicted the rule of philosopher kings in his book the Republic. In this book Plato tried to establish that there is close relationship between the Plato’s theory of justice and the rule of philosopher king. Plato said that human mind is composed of with three elements i.e. the reason, spirit and appetite. Among these three elements he kept the first element, the reason on the top position and from this he desired to produce the guardian or the ruling class. Plato named this ruling as the philosopher kings. Plato did not support the democratic system and he viewed that the present democratic system was the main responsible for the turmoil system the Athenian society. It is the rule of ignorant and ignorant is ruling over the wise and it is not good sign for the affairs of the state. Therefore, he disregarded the democratic system and preferred to the rule of philosopher king. He said that the *virtue is knowledge*; two must go hand in hand. Plato viewed that affairs of the state could be rightly managed with the rule competent people i.e. philosopher king. According to Plato “Until the philosophers are kings, or kings and princes of this world have spirit and power of philosophy, cities will ever rest from their evils.” Therefore, the affairs of the state should be run by efficient person and he said that this efficient person is the philosopher king.

**Plato’s Ideas of Philosopher King**

1. **Philosopher King is Wise:** According to Plato the skill and capacity vary from human to human. All human being do not possess the same capacity. Therefore, all people should not be entitled to participate in the administration of the state. He did not like the democratic system and ignored the rule of ignorant. According to him, democracy is the rule of fool. Hence instead of democratic system he preferred to the rule of one wise person. To him, an affair of the state is one kind of art and all people do not have this capacity. For this, there should be some trained elites or wise person. Plato wants vest the entire power of state in the hand of one person who is by virtue is wise i.e. the philosopher king.
2. **Lover of wisdom:** According to Plato, the philosopher king is the lover of wisdom and he is also the seeker of truth. Therefore, he better knows what is good and what is bad for the state than the ordinary people. For his virtues he is on the top position in the state and can determine what the interest of the community is and what steps have to taken in crucial time of the state.
3. **Interest only in Welfare of the State:** Plato said about the communism of wives and property for the philosopher king. That means the philosopher king should not have any family and state. They are free from these basic needs of human being. To Plato, these two things lead the people to involve in corruption. Therefore, Plato wanted to establish a corruption free society. Instead of involving himself in corruption the philosopher king will give more attention to the welfare of the common people. They will think that the state is his own family and the citizens of the state are his children. This feeling will be more effective to establish ideal welfare state.
4. **Product of Rigorous Training and Education:** Plato prepared his curriculum of education for the philosopher kings. After thirty five years of rigorous training and education one person can become a philosopher king. Not only that but also after his retirement the philosopher kings continued his service. According to Prof. Barker, “*Plato’s ideal state is the consequence of his system of education. It may seem paradoxical to speak of government as a corollary of the system of education as a consequence of government as one of the functions of government, he conceives government as the consequence of Education.”*

1. **Unlimited Power:** Plato’ philosopher king is not bound by any custom, tradition and law. He is above the law of the state. Philosopher king is nor accountable to public opinion. According to Plato, king has their own virtues and knowledge. Therefore, there is no any logic to control their behavior by any extra mechanism. Whatever they will do it will be for the greater interest of the community. He viewed that it will be foolish to control the philosopher king by extra force as to force an expert doctor to write a prescription on the basis of medical text book. The rule of philosopher king is more flexible than the rule of law. The rule of law cannot deal the all situation. On the other hand the rule of philosopher king due to its flexibility can face any situation. From observing all situations Plato viewed that the philosopher king should be bestowed unlimited power in the state of affairs.
2. **Basic Principles for the Philosopher King:** Though Plato bestowed unlimited power to philosopher king yet, the philosopher king must obey the basic articles of the constitution and by this Plato has imposed some restrains on them. According to Plato, the philosopher king must not change the fundamental aspects of the constitution. For this he prepared some guidelines and principles for the philosopher king and these are – (i) they must watch the excessive inflow and property and wealth in the state. To do welfare of the people the wealth and property is very essential (ii) It is the duty of the king to keep the size of the state intact and along with that he should also bring unity and integrality among the people, (iii) The philosopher king must ensure that the citizens perform their allotted functions in proper ways and (iv) he must keep in vigilance that no change is made in the existing the education system.

**Criticism**

1. **Anti-Democratic:** Vesting absolute and unlimited power to the philosopher king Plato destroyed the democratic norms and paves the way of tyrannical rule. Though Plato said about some principles to restrain the actions of the king yet these were not sufficient.In his ideal state the people had not any say or they could not give any opinion in public affairs. They are not allowed to participate in the affairs of state administration. The philosopher king was above the law. His commend was law. Plato, later on realized the impertinence of law which he described in his book *The Law.*
2. **Collective Wisdom is Better than Rule of Philosopher King:** According to Plato. Knowledge is the prerogative of the handful person in society. All people have not this quality. His education system was planned to impart education only a handful persons of society i.e. the guardian class. But, in actual practice, collective wisdom of people is better than the wisdom of philosopher king and it is also superior to the wisdom of later. But, Plato could not realize this truth.
3. **Defective Education System for the Philosopher King:** The education system provided by Plato is highly defective. It was lifelong education system. The person after completing a long period of education i.e. up to the age of fifty years could become a philosopher king. Again his curriculum of education was also defective. For philosopher king he kept in his curriculum the music, abstract mathematics, dialects and the idea of the good, which are not sufficient to be a perfect ruler. To be a perfect philosopher king a person should have the knowledge of law, finance and defense or military tactics. Plato, unlike Kautilya in Indian context also did not mention how to maintain the foreign affairs in his education system. Therefore, his philosopher king instead of coining the *Rule* of *Philosopher King* it would be better to say the *Rule of Saint.*
4. **Promote the Totalitarian Rule:** According to Plato there is no any contradiction between the interest of the philosopher king and the interest of the community. This view of Plato is dangerous for his ideal state. The philosopher king may assume unlimited power and it may encourage him to be more powerful. He may use his power to fulfill his own self interest instead of fulfilling the interest of the community. In other words, instead of to be a philosopher king, he may transform himself to a totalitarian ruler. Therefore, Kant rightly said, “that the king should become philosopher king is not like to be happen; nor it would be desirable sine the possession of power invariably debases the free judgment of reason.”
5. **Plato advocated the concept with a Selfish Motive:** Popper, one of the critiques of Plato’s philosophy viewed that Plato’s philosopher king was only to fulfill his own selfish motives. His ambition was to be the ruler of Athens. In *Republic* he said that it was his due. His demand was that the descended and legitimate heir of Codrus, the martyr, the last Athens king who according to Plato sacrificed himself in order to preserve the kingdom for his children. From this view of Plato it is clear that the motive of Plato was to be the king of Athens.

1. **There is no any Provision to Produce New Philosopher King:** In his ideal state the Supply of philosopher king is a continuous process. He said that the philosophers are the permanent rulers. This statement of Plato is contradictory to his education system. On the one hand, he prepared a long term education system to make philosopher kings; on the other hand, he said that the philosopher kings are permanent ruler. From this point of view it can be said that he did not keep any provision in his education system to produce new philosopher kings.

1. **It is Utopian in Nature:** Plato’s concept of philosopher king is fully based imagination. It is utopian in nature. It is very tough to find out the kings having the qualities like selflessness, devotion and high ideals as Plato said. Again Plato deprived of the philosopher kings from basic human needs like family and property. Nobody will sacrifice these basic needs against the interest of the community. Historically also there is no any evident that ever this kind of philosopher king exited. So, this concept philosopher king of Plato is fully utopian in nature.

**Conclusion**

Despite some criticism leveled against the concept of Plato’s philosopher king it cannot be denied that his concept is the most profound original conception in the whole political thought. He rightly said that to run the affairs of the state is a fully an art. Therefore, the persons having good skill are competent or should be given the responsibility to run the affairs of state. The only defect of his conception of philosopher king is that he could not provide the practical training and education to them.