



UNDERSTANDING JOHN RAWLS CONCEPTION OF JUSTICE

Ramla Alvi

Research Student

Department of International Relations

SZABIST, Karachi

ramla_alvi@yahoo.com

Dr. Muhammad Umair Rafique

Assistant Professor

Social Sciences

SZABIST, Karachi Campus

umair.rafiq@szabist.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

John Rawls, an American Political Philosopher worked on the very idea of justice in his writings throughout his life. He was of the opinion that an institution is just and fair only when its principles and rules are prepared to benefit all the members of the society equally and if there is an unequal distribution then it must advantage all of them especially the ones who are least i.e. needy. The political institutions must shape up such kind of policies in order for the development of the well-being of the individuals in the society by providing them with resources, opportunities, basic necessities etc. equally. Whereas, the conception of social justice is also based on equality and the human rights where they could be treated as free and equals i.e. an egalitarian society. In this research paper we will identify the significant notions in the study of Social Justice for an ideal and analyze the significance of John Rawl's theory.

KEYWORDS

Justice, Equal distribution, Development, Social Justice, Political Institutions, Egalitarian Society.



Objectives of the Study:

- Identify the significant notions in the study of Social Justice for an ideal and society of justice by John Rawls.
- To ascertain the principles of an Egalitarian Society in the Theory of Justice.

Research Questions:

- Which values are essential in the foundations of the Rawls theory of Justice for an egalitarian society?
- What is the basic arrangement of a Just or an Egalitarian society according to Rawls Justice Theory?

Research Methodology:

This research work is secondary qualitative in nature.

INTRODUCTION:

John Rawls was a Political Philosopher from America from the liberal tradition. His famous work i.e. the theory of justice as fairness explains such kind of society where the members of the citizens holds basic rights and the rights which are equal to all along with the collaboration and cooperation in an egalitarian system. Another famous work on the political liberalism explains the importance of legitimacy in political power and its usage in a democratic system and also highlights that how citizens of a just society must sustain with the diverse world. Rawls was born in Baltimore, Maryland and studied at Princeton where he got influenced by Norman Malcolm who was a student of Wittgenstein at Oxford. In John Rawls's writings he mostly discussed and gave the concept of just society or justice as fairness and continued to work on fairness his whole life. (Wenar, 2007)

The conception of social justice by John Rawls is considered as the most significant and persuasive. (Ho, 2011) As his concept of distributive justice contributed that the social ethics or values should be allocated evenly except for this that if an unequal distribution or allocation occurs of any values or all the values then it must be beneficial for everyone. (Rawls, 1971) In his work, there was a question which was raised by Rawls that specifically which set of laws or order would be approved by the people as part of a society so that they



conform to them accordingly in order to have a just social order also in which no person in that society is either exploited or victimized hence suffers from any kind of demoralization. (Baldry, 2010) The two essential principles were given by John Rawls in his study of Social Justice and they are as following: Every individual in the society has his right of the substantial structure of his own liberty i.e. personal liberty as a part of the system which should be total liberty for everyone.

The inequalities in the economic and social spheres in the society must be organized in such a manner that the people who are less wealthy must be benefitted with a greater amount equally so that they also get benefitted from it order to avoid inequality. Moreover, the inequalities in the both the spheres must be devoted to positions which must be accessible to all individuals in the society in order to have an equality all over and that is why equal opportunities must be accessible to all the members to get onto the ranks in their own society where they can make or create resolutions for their people in the society regarding the inequalities that exists. (Ho, 2011)

Social Justice can be defined as equal distribution of duties, power, responsibilities and resources to all the people living in a society in a just manner irrespective of sex, age, ethnicity, race, religion or any kind of spiritual experience. The important values essential to this definition also includes equal prospects, opportunities, standards, collaboration and access to things. These kinds of values acts as a foundation of an egalitarian society or a democratic one. The absence of justice leads to vulnerabilities in the society or amongst people. (Hage, 2011)

The concept of social justice accentuates onto the unequal distribution in the society as per the needs of the individuals or necessities focusing particularly onto the necessities of the people who are needy, understanding and making sure that they must get an equal chance or opportunity as part of being an equal member of the society so this conception of social justice can be applied onto the society as a whole not as individuals purely. (Ho, 2011) The conception, significance and the implementation of social justice in the current framework necessitates further thorough description. If we look over to the historical philosophers such as Averroes, Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Aristotle or Confucius etc. none of them considered the conception of social justice in their works or saw it as a need to do so from a social perspective. The conception of social



justice first appeared at the time of the Industrial Revolution on the western side. i.e. in the western thought and in the political language. Moreover this expression was emerged in which it was used as an expression of protest as a central point in order for the measures of development aiming to improve the conditions of human beings so it was used a revolutionary motto exemplifying the principles of development and fraternity. So in the mid-1800s social justice assembling call for the political activists, protesters, thinkers etc. in Europe. Social Justice necessitate resilient, strong and rational strategies in various areas of a society. The economic polies, monetary or fiscal policies for that matter as well as along with the social policies and with few more specific goals, overall is the social aim of endorsing the citizens of the country's welfare or the citizens of the world. In the current era, the welfare of the members necessitates economic growth and justice along with the employment facilities along with the optimal growth of people around as social beings. (UN, 2006) The complications that are met in order to enlarge and employ such kind of policies in a manner that balances diverse areas of interests and at the same time safeguards and guarantee development towards the aim of social justice are massive especially for such nations who are still considered as under developing countries in terms of who are still creating or establishing their political, economic and institutional bases. The critical point in this context here is that the certainty that the objective is that its value is worth it along with that the mutual determinations and struggles are necessary. (UN, 2006)

To grasp the concept and in order to assess the concept of Justice by Rawls there is a need to have an actual image of that sort of society in which the concept of justice would be implemented but such kind of an image is not alone sufficient because this concretely imaginary society would not operate with the real people in the real context but hence this concept of justice must be reformed at such a point where the implementation becomes realistic according to Rawls. Realistic in terms of where it visualizes such kind of a society which could conserve and preserve itself in the long run. So the concerns of John Rawls are pragmatic in nature and consequently are intensely entrenched in his intellect. (Freeman, 2007)

Rawls was of the opinion that there is a possibility that in the world in which we live in even if we idealize human beings as the social organizations which they might form accordingly then a social order (just) may get unrealizable no



matter if there will be willingness to create rational and judicious amendments into the concept of Justice in order to meet the pragmatic and empirical certainties partially or completely. If this is attained then it would show that the world in which we live in would not be a good world in this certain significant respect. Furthermore, according to Rawls work, he was not willing to review his concept in the aspect of practical hurdles or complications of any or all kinds but he was mainly concerned with the difficulties which are internal or local for that matter i.e. the ones which are restricted within the society only which will be just especially in order to sustain it and strengthen itself for a just society in the longer run. (Kosch, 2007)

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Rawls's theory of justice as equality or fairness in the liberal society offers a structure for the political power in order to use it legitimately. He constructed the paradigms of justice as fairness or equality around particular explanations of notions and certain concepts that the citizens of the society are equal as well as free in the fair society. Furthermore, he perceives it as solving out the tensions underlined by the socialist criticism and the conventional critique both from the liberal democracy the modern welfare state among the concept of equality and freedom. Rawls's considered justice as the most reasonable, credible and egalitarian connotation of these essential conceptions of liberalism. He also contended that justice as equality or fairness delivers a greater and a clearer understanding of justice as compared to that of dominant tradition from the utilitarianism. (Wenar, 2007)

The Basic Arrangement of Society as a subject of Justice:

The structure of the society by Rawls explains that the purpose of justice is that there must be a just agreements or procedures in the social and political organizations in a liberal society i.e. the economy and the legal structure, political constitution etc. The arrangements of these organizations is called the basic structure of a society by Rawls because these organizations are the ones who provides the welfares, facilities to the society, the ones who will attain social appreciation and recognition and the ones who will give basic rights, opportunities and will be responsible for all the strategies that will be followed in the society for the member. (Freeman, 2003)



Here, a general notion of the scholars is to consider the ‘State’ as political power. Though it could be naïve if the political power would be analysed as kind of an isolated concept. The very structure of political power is blended with two further structures i.e. the social and economic power structures. Thus, any kind of discussion onto the state, the composite structure of power must be taken into account about Rawls regarded it as kind of a basic arrangement of a society. As per Rawls, the basic arrangement or structure of society is considered to be the key subject when it comes to justice which actually is regarded as the way where the main social organizations allocate the fundamental duties as well as rights in order to determine the divisions of the benefits from the social cooperation bodies. For Rawls, an arrangement of rules explains an organization such as the parliamentary bodies where they could be defined as an arrangement or structure of rules enumerating particular forms of actions just like holding up the sessions of the parliament to take up the votes or to increase the points of orders. (Sarangi, 1991)

In the later writings of John Rawls i.e. in 1985 he started to regard the notion of political concept of justice for democratic societies. He started to draw upon the basic notions which are entrenched in political organizations of the constitutional democratic governments along with the public traditions. He confined his notions to a democratic and constitutional state and further restricted himself to a society which is well ordered. By a concept of being well ordered here, it means that a society where all the citizens accept the same doctrines and rules of justice, also where the basic arrangement or structure is accepted and known in order to fulfill those principles which have been set and then the citizens must hold sense or concept of justice which would empower them to comprehend and implement the same doctrines or principles of justice. As it was stated that a society which is well ordered, citizens in such societies meet the final ends mutually. (Rawls, 1985)

The Two Guiding Notions of Rawls

In a society it's important to have social cooperation amongst the citizens because that will lead them to good wellbeing. However Rawls also said that the burdens, complications and benefits will be divided equally among the members of the society and these principles of cooperation and justice design the ideas of central liberty and in this way the collaboration and cooperation



will be equal and just with all the members of society. The two interpretations were given by Rawls in his concepts and are seen as a combination of positive and negative thesis. The negative thesis of Rawls consists of this idea that all the individuals born in a society do not deserve to come in this world as rich or poor, male or female. Hence these features are considered as morally illogical and they will not be allocated the resources or benefits accordingly whereas the positive thesis is based on equality that all the products in the society must be distributed with justice and when it comes to the unequal distribution then that distribution must benefit everyone. And here the guiding idea is that the inequalities in a society must be of everyone's advantage especially for those who get less due to the reason that equality sets up a standard and it progresses situation for all the people in the society. Therefore these solid requirements in the John Rawls theory such as justice as fairness, reciprocity, equality in the society or socially just society are considered as the symbols of John Rawls theory of justice. (Freeman, 2007)

According to Rawls four roles are being executed by political philosophy in a public life of society and they are as following:

The first role being fulfilled by political philosophy is practical i.e. grounds can be determined or discovered for rational agreements in a society by political philosophy where sharp detachments intimidates that a conflict will occur. For example Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes was quoted by Rawls as an effort to resolve the issue of order in the English Civil War.

Whereas the second role is to support the citizens in the social world in which they live so that they can orientate themselves where philosophy can contemplates on how the history of that particular society can be understood by the citizens, also what does it mean to be a member and the manner in which the nature of the society can be understood.

The third role is about examination of the boundaries of realistic possibilities in politics. So practical measures of politics must be explained so that it may gain support from the genuine people around. However, the philosophy here can exist as utopian within the limits that exist where it can portray social order which is the greatest that could be hoped for.

A fourth role of political philosophy is reunion or reconciliation i.e. to pacify the rage and exasperation against the society along with the history by presenting the ways in which the institutions are developing with the passage



of time and are rational as it was done to achieve their rational and current method. (Rawls, 2001) Moreover philosophy can demonstrate that the life of a human is not just corrupted, brutality or dominance for that matter but is better in many ways that it has converted as it is.

According to John Rawls his contribution in practical terms i.e. to resolve the long term rigidity in the democratic thought which is among equality and liberty and to depicting the confinements of the civics and international acceptance i.e. toleration. He also stated that the members of the society should understand themselves as equal members and free members in a democratic and fair society along with explaining the image of the constitutional democracy performing its role staying with in a international community along with peace. Rawls was of the opinion that this kind of diversity can help the social order with the greatest freedom for everyone and he stated this specially for the people who were frustrated and were of the opinion that their fellows do not get a chance to see or understand the complete actual trust just like they do. (Wenar, 2007)

ANALYSIS

The John Rawls justice theory has a goal of constituting such kind of a system which must ensure a fair and just distribution of all the social primary goods in the society. However, such kind of a system demands establishing such kind of institutions which distributes all the basic social goods as per the principles and rules of fairness as well as justice. All the organizations based in order to distribute fairly and justly are based according to the subjects of fairness as well as justice. John Rawls made up an imaginary hypothetical position in order to determine the justice and fairness rules where the individuals were considered to be capable as well as rational of making decisions rationally as part of a priori. Another acceptance of priori is that when the individuals would realize their maximum utility at a greater level and in what ways they could achieve based onto the principles of priori. The individuals are contemplated to be behind the conception of the veil of ignorance especially at the time when they are in their original positions as the veil of ignorance could create such kind of an environment where individuals becomes ignorant when it comes to their gender, age, level of their education, their social status, intelligence, abilities, capacities etc. Additionally, the individuals are prevented by the veil in order not to remember their very own conception of good and their plans of life



accordingly. The organizations are established in acquiescence with the doctrines of justice. According to Rawls, the individuals who are rational, agrees onto two essential principles of justice as far as the initial position is concerned behind the concept of veil of ignorance and they are as following:

Equal Liberty

Every individual in the society must have all the basic rights in equal terms i.e. the freedom of speech, political and social liberty, freedom of gathering, freedom of expression, conscience liberty, self-respect and dignity, rights to property and rights to integrity etc. As these rights and freedoms are considered to be fundamental human rights. As he has propounded that individuals would approve in the initial locus that it is hence just and fair to hold complete equality for all the essential rights amongst the individuals in the society. (Arda, 2015) Whereas in a democratic society the liberties as well as the fundamental rights are guaranteed and safeguarded by the constitution. As Rawls stated that the fundamental freedoms or rights stated above are actually the basic rights desired and deserved by all humans as being core of the society and must be protected and safeguarded as basic values and must not be negotiated or ignored for any kind of benefit as they do provide the opportunities of being free individuals or citizens or of being equal in the society. (Arda, 2015)

Social Inequality

Another principle by Rawls is that the inequalities of all the welfares and the incomes can only be considered as just and fair if they are distributed to the needy for their benefits. (Fried, 1987) Another important aspect by Rawls is that the principle demands that the positions of all the organizations holding authorities and responsibilities must be in access to all the individuals in an equal manner. Because this would lead the individuals towards having an equal right in order to apply the positions in the organizations and further on this would allow all the inequalities to boost up the advantages as well as benefits the ones who are needy. (Munson, 2012)

Social Justice

It is said that the concept of social justice is inherited from the social scientists and they defined the term 'inequality' as an unjust social associations. The



equality principles which reinforces the term social justice demands and necessitates quantifiable or material distribution for example income along with the paradigm of distribution which incorporates authority or supremacy. This means that the nation states and the individuals on the global level are treated in a just manner i.e. equally in terms of capabilities, opportunities and resources. However the contemporary propensity is to bring into line development with social justice with the conception of modernism along with the growth and practice of capitalism that exist globally. (Morvaridi, 2008)

It is an intensely entrenched tradition when the conception of social justice is raised or its promotion from public institutions. From the time of history, these kinds of developments made by humans have been comprehended by great personalities such as political leaders, prophets, scientists, philosophers and few brave encouraged and motivated members i.e. the citizen and also few from the applied by the institutions. But if we talk about the current decade i.e. the second decade of the 21st century then in this globalized world both international and social justice do not perform or appear to establish a very high importance, not from the redistributive or distributive perception at least. Therefore, the failure to enthusiastically follow justice is not deprived of the repercussions or consequences to it. But the broad global perception is formed by the Charter of the United Nations of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, abandonment of the pursuit or quest of the conception of social justice in all the proportions which interprets into a de-facto recognition of such a future spoiled by cruelty, domination, violence and a chaotic conditions. (UN, 2006)

The notion of reforms articulated or raised in the contemporary times in order to assist the economic deregulation as well as privatization might be practically applied by some regimes such as liberal democracies encouraged by the encouraged by the liberal values and morals in order to ascertain the demands and necessitates of the social justice and to apply the suitable and applicable policies. But in the current context the UN is paving its approach for the global social justice with the precondition of global democracy. However it is working towards fortifying the part and the input for the civil society but in the context of global social justice and not on social justice. Rawls's in his theory of justice wrote that "there is no injustice in the greater benefits earned by a few provided that the situation of persons not so fortunate is thereby improved". (Lovett, 2011) The massive resources and welfares in the hands of corporations are



trickling down in order to help and facilitate the humanity. The notion of social justice is linked with the generous opinion of the nature of human and a simply positive enthusiastic belief in the volume of worthy concepts and associations to change the global world in a safe and a courteous place. The notion of Social justice can be generally understood as a considerate distribution of the resources of economic growth. Though, it is essential to ascribe few significant qualifiers to this proclamation. Presently, making the best use of the development seems as the major goal, but then again it is also important to guarantee that the development or growth is enduring along with that the natural environment's integrity is maintained and respected, and the upcoming generations can also enjoy the hospitality and beauty of the earth. The idea of social justice must incorporate these proportions specially starting with rights of the human beings. Hence this involves the fair and just distribution among the nations or social groups of the development of technologies which should be safe for construction and consumption both. (UN, 2006)

In terms of reflection with the nature, use of authority, power and legitimacy must be given to the self-interest, progressive self-interest and the public good. Furthermore, the principle of democracy exists in the mutual understanding of the concepts that are mentioned above. Along with this, the idea of social contract must be revived for the global world as well as within the communities. (Young, 2016)

Nevertheless the obscure connotations between justice, redistribution of justice and social justice as a general conception, the point is that the commitment to the social justice has been weakened and declined after the past decade. Hence this expression has been vanished i.e. extinct from the global lexicon in the 21st century. So it has been said that the international organizations, first and foremost the United Nations must perform efforts in order to reestablish the integrity and application of social justice construed in the modern framework as distributive justice.

Conclusion:

As John Rawls gave the idea of justice as fairness in his writings that how important is it to have a justice in society with equal distribution of resources in the society for all members in order to increase and progress the well beings of the individuals living in that society along with the idea that if there will be



an unequal distribution in the society then it must advantage all the members of the society especially for the ones who are least or poor and that is only possible when the political institutions will formulate such kind of policies and will implement them. Moreover, the concept of social justice explains the same idea of John Rawls i.e. it explains the concept of equal distribution of resources in order to have justice in the society. Equality in terms of benefits, opportunities, burdens resources and so on. When the organizations in the society are fair and just, their basic aim is to maintain the society with stability and peace. The very concept of stability within a society totally depends onto the balances of the purposes i.e. the very notion of justice which has been cultivated along with the goals of winning against the injustices with encouragement. Hence, Rawls either uses the word basic structure or arrangement in a very broader logic or in the narrow concept focusing onto the structure of constitutional democracy occasionally. Furthermore, in this age of globalization i.e. in the 21st century the very idea of social justice has vanished and everything matters now is economic justice, power or perhaps global justice as well. But the conception of social justice has been obscured in the lexicon of the 21st century but few authors, scholars and an international organizations such as United Nations are of the opinion that there must be a revival of the concept of Social Justice.

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