

Q: Discuss in detail plato's concept of justice

Ans

### 1- Introduction:-

The idea of justice holds a prominent position in plato's philosophy. At the time of plato, Athens was on the verge of chaos and destruction. Extreme individualism and political selfishness were prevalent in society. Athenian society was divided into two extremes: rich and cruel vs poor and oppressed. plato found the remedy to these problems in the idea of justice. His idea of justice lies in the order and harmony of every part of the soul and corresponding parts of society.

### 2. Plato's views on the prevalent

#### Theories of justice of his Time:

Plato's rejected the prevalent theories of justice of his era.

#### a) Thrasymachus Theory

For Thrasymachus, justice is always serving the interest of the stronger over the weaker. In the words, "might is Right" is the concept of justice that Thrasymachus believes in as the world understands the argument of power more than



the power of the argument.

Plato argues that an unjust person always feels unsatisfied and a ruler should make laws for the welfare of all people, not for a limited section of society.

## b) Cephalus Theory:

According to Cephalus, justice lies in:

\* Fulfilling one's duties and obligations

i) paying one's debts

Plato agrees with Cephalus that justice is undoubtedly fulfilling duties but returning debts can not be considered a universal idea of justice. For example, it's dangerous to return a borrowed weapon to a person who has gone mad.

ii) Polemarchus Theory:

Polemarchus was the son of Cephalus. His theory of justice states that justice is giving everyone what they deserve. It's about doing good to your friends and evil to your foes.

Plato refutes this idea by stating that it is difficult to differentiate between friends and foes and a person might end up doing evil with friends and good



with goes. So, it's better to be good to both friends and goes.

### 3) Plato's Theory of Justice:

After analyzing the theories of justice presented by Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, and Callicles, Plato came to the point that justice is not something external nor does it mean strict obedience to laws. For him, justice is inherent in the inner nature of human beings and it is an accomplishment of the soul.

According to Barker:

"Justice is, for Plato, at once a part of human virtue and the bond which joins men together in the states. It makes a man good and makes him social."

### 4) Types of Justice classified by Plato

Plato classified justice into two categories: Justice within an individual and justice at the social level.

#### a) Justice within an individual

The human mind according to Plato is governed by three elements; Reason, Spirit, and Appetite. A just individual is one



whose each part performs its specific functions without interfering with those of other elements. The element of reason should intelligently make decisions and the element of spirit should subordinate itself in front of reason. Appetite forms the largest part of the human soul but reason and the soul must control it for achieving justice within the individual. Therefore, for plato, justice, within an individual is the balance that keeps away an individual from experiencing every pleasure and getting selfish satisfaction.

#### b) Justice at Social level.

At the societal level, these three elements represent corresponding social classes. The ruling class represents reason, and warriors or defenders are representative of the spirit whereas farmers and artisans are representative of appetite. At this level as well, justice is achieved when every group performs the task assigned to it without interfering in other's matters.

There are corresponding benefits of justice at both levels. At the individual



level, justice makes a man self-consistent and positive. At the societal, it makes a harmonious and welfare society.

## 5) Principles of Plato's Theory of Justice:

### a) Functional Specialization:

For Plato, governments suffer injustice and crisis due to a lack of competence and skills in those who are in power.

Therefore, the solution lies in selecting the best individuals for every role by seeking specialization for the role one is fitted to by nature. For him, an organized society is a just society whereas a society in which every individual is misplaced is destined for disintegration and destruction.

Education is the means to achieve justice as education develops the abilities of every individual to the fullest. He believed in the principle of state education

(providing education is the government's responsibility) and education for all (every boy and girl must acquire education)

### b) Non Interference

Justice prevails in society when every class performs the function it is suitable



for without interfering in the matters of others. An individual fit for one field should not meddle in the duties and matters of others.

### c) Harmony:

Justice is the harmonious union of individuals in a society. It does not refer to protecting the interests of the stronger, instead, it refers to achieving a harmonious balance between all sections of society. A state must be a whole in which each individual performs his specific duty for the welfare and greater good of all.

### b) Characteristics of Plato's Theory of Justice

The key characteristics of Plato's theory of justice are the following:

- a) Justice refers to the uprightness and virtue of the human soul.
- b) Every man must be just and fair in social affairs.
- c) A society comprising just and virtuous individuals is a welfare society.
- d) Justice is more about fulfillment of duties rather than enjoying rights.



e) Justice is an individual's contribution to society according to his potential and caliber.

## 7) Critical Analysis of Plato's Theory of Justice:

a) No scope for individual thinking  
Plato's theory of justice ignores the essentials of human psychology and declares him a part of the whole order and the order is an ideal state.

b) Establishes Hegemony of the Ruling class over the Entire society:

Plato's theory establishes the hegemony of the ruling class endowed with wisdom over the entire society. For Plato, this subordination is the source of unity and integrity for society but practically, providing equal shares and rights is the source of integration for society.

c) Ignores conflict or Disagreement  
Plato has remained completely silent on the issue of the emergence of any conflict and possible resolution mechanisms.

That's why, Barker says

9 "The justice of whom Plato speaks is not justice at all"



## 8) Conclusion:

Plato's theory of justice is aimed at the division of labor according to the inherent potential of every individual. His theory of justice is based on the fundamental assumption of the division of the human mind in reason, spirit, appetite, and the corresponding division of society among rulers, soldiers, and farmers.

According to him, specialization and non-interference<sup>CC</sup> at each level by each element are key to the promotion of justice.