



## The marginalisation of justice in public discourse

### Context:

- The pursuit of greed and narrow self-interest leads to severe inequalities, to an unequal division of social benefits. This has made us to look at what Justice entails.



### What are ethical challenges with development?

- The burden of realising national goals such as development is not equally shared by all. This leads to **unfair division of social labour**
- The burden is easily passed on to those who are powerless to desist it. Some people sacrifice virtually everything they have and others benefit without forgoing anything at all.
- The least paid workers and peasants in our society are expected to offer the greatest sacrifices for building the nation
- Also, concern for a fair distribution of benefits and burdens — the core issue of justice — is rare in mainstream public discourse.

### What is Justice?

- The basic idea of justice is that ‘each person gets what is properly due to him or her’, that the benefits and burdens of society be **distributed in a manner that gives each person his or her due.**

### What is David Hume’s ‘circumstances of justice’?

- The idea of distributive justice presupposes not only a social condition marked by an absence of love or familiarity, but also others which the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, termed ‘the circumstances of justice’.
- For instance, a society where everything is abundantly available would not need justice.

27.08.2020

Thursday



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- Each of us will have as much of everything we want. Without the necessity of sharing, justice becomes redundant.
- Equally, in a society with massive scarcity, justice is impossible. In order to survive, each person is compelled to grab whatever happens to be available.
- **Justice, therefore, is possible and necessary in societies with moderate scarcity.**
- Justice also presupposes that people are neither totally alone nor organically united with others
- If one was totally fused with others, with no distinction between self and other, then again, sharing will be unnecessary.
- **Justice therefore presupposes a moral psychology in which humans are neither wholly selfish nor entirely benevolent.**
- Since most societies share these conditions, we can say that justice is a necessary social virtue and has great moral value.

### What are the challenges with achieving Justice?

- Our society is afflicted by deep material, cultural and knowledge-related inequalities.
- While dealing with resource/burden sharing, prominence given to hierarchical notions of Justice rather than egalitarian Justice
- In **hierarchical notions**, what is due to a person (Justice) is established by her or his place within a hierarchical system. For instance, by rank determined at birth (Caste System)
- In societies still infested with live hierarchies, people must first struggle for recognition as equals, for what might be called **basic social justice**.
- Then, they must decide how to share all social benefits and burdens among equal persons — the essence of egalitarian distributive justice.

### Challenges with Egalitarian Justice:

Two main contenders exist for interpreting what is due to persons of equal moral worth.



1. First, the need-based principle for which, what is due to a person is **what she really needs**, i.e., whatever is necessary for general human well-being (basic needs)
  2. Second, the principle of desert for which, what is due to a person is **what he or she deserves** determined by her own qualities and hard work
- Most reasonable egalitarian conceptions of justice try to find a balance between need and desert.
  - They try to ensure a distribution of goods and abilities (benefits) that satisfies everyone's needs. After this, rewards are permissible to those who by virtue of natural gift, social learning and personal effort, deserve more.

### Conclusion:

- Putting justice back into public discourse should be our priority. Or else, the dreams of our nation will never turn into reality