

*Full Length Research*

# Plato's Notion of Justice in Understanding Order and Stability in Stratified Societies: a Study of India's Experience

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Social injustice is the major philosophical problem which is an important issue in politics, religion and society. In the context of globalization, the theory of justice is a problematic issue in contemporary states. The ideas of justice developed during ancient times especially around Athens led ancient political philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to theorize on the concept of justice, democracy, virtue, rights, equality, liberty and ethics. These great political theorists provided the concept like nature law, humanity and society that led to the ideas like the public virtue, justice, hierarchy and participation for just social order. Plato's work 'The Republic' is a scientific and systematic work in western states and the concept of justice deals with classes of society and division of labour. Plato's notion of justice has been conceived from two perspectives the individual justice, which is a human virtue that makes a person self consistent and good; and the social justice, which is a social consciousness that makes a society internally harmonious and good. Therefore, Plato ideas and plans can be used to build a better and just society. Present study critically evaluates basic idea of social justice. Why Plato's contribution to justice is neglected in contemporary world. And can his concept of justice be implemented in the present day society? Stressing upon on these quire, the study would therefore focus on the Plato's cone of justice and its implications in India. This study is mainly concentrated theory of justice in the framework of globalization. The paper finds that Plato's justice is an ideal concept of justice based on moral values which determines division of labour among three classes of the society and by concluding Plato's concept of justice is not acceptable to modern democratic countries like India.

**Keywords:** Plato's Justice, Just Social Order, Indian Caste System, Social Injustice, Divisions of Labour

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## INTRODUCTION

Plato was an ancient political philosopher. He was born into an aristocratic Athenian family. Plato's "The Republic" of Plato was the first systematic work of political theory in the western world which consisted of ten books. The book discusses social and moral ideal, educational system, the family, theory of property and the

ideal state. It is a mixture of ethics and politics which promote sound government and good citizenship. Among the most important problem disused in the book are nature of justice, virtue, system of education, ideal citizen, ideal government, ideal state and political unity and harmony cannot be achieved without psychological

unity and harmony in each citizen ( Lee 2007:xvi).

The first and second books discuss the nature of justice and moral duty, third and fourth books discuss the system of education and the different classes in society. Fifth, sixth and seventh books present the concept of communism and the philosophical based of an ideal state. Eight and ninth book illustrate that deformities of the state and the citizens. The tenth book discusses about theory of soul. This study mainly focuses on first and second books which cover the nature of justice and moral duty. Sharma said that "The Republic" was an attempt at a complete philosophy of man. Plato used the Greek word "Dikaisyne" for justice which comes very near to the work 'morality' or 'righteousness'; which properly include within them the whole duty of man and cover the whole field of the individual's conduct and affect others (Bhandari 2008). During Plato era, he had not satisfied that government, because government was selfish. Plato strives to give a definition of justice for the ideal state and society. Plato relates that the order and goodness of the individual of that nation, claiming that the society is just "the individual writ large" ( Sheldon 2005: 232).

Plato's "The Republic" is significantly both an enquiry into the "true nature" of justice and a construction of an ideal just state against which existing empirical state could be evaluated (Barry 1989: 133). Plato sees that "justice is harmony" (Maiman: 2008). Plato's justice is to be born in human mind and analogy is to be between the human organism and social organism (Hath 2004: p.104). According to Plato, justice is a human attribute and consisted in the harmony of human soul. Plato's idea of justice is that the soul is conceives an analogous justice in society and still relates to a form of order; a harmonious order between the different elements of soul, or between different social classes.

### Principle of Virtue

Plato's justice is "human virtue" that makes a person self-consistent and good. Plato argues that virtue is knowledge. The main principles of virtue are wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. Justice is regarded as the supreme virtue and it means that equitable distribution of goods and evils, including rewards and punishment. Courage means that willingness to take reasonable risks in pursuit of a worthwhile goal. Third principles of virtue are temperance which deals with self control (Spherepurei, 2001: 32).

### Division of Labour and Justice in the Society

Plato begins by dividing human nature into three dispositions; i. the Philosopher or intellectual, ii. The Spirited or Military, and iii. Appetite or Economic. The

philosophy soul is characterized by learning and knowledge a natural curiosity, a desire for truth, and a capacity to understand and communicate.

A spirited person is interested in adventure, combat and has physical abilities to be a good athlete and warrior. The appetitive personality cares most about physical consumptions (Food, Cloths, and Property) and likes economic matter (Sheldon 2005:233). The functions of society are broadly divided into three; ruling, defence, and production (Sharma 2001: 68). Justice is the quality of the soul; therefore, it does not depend upon any external source of power. It is the voice of conscience of man (Bhandari 2008).

### Human Organism and the notion of Plato's Justice

He looks justice in two ways; namely, individual justice and social justice. Justice is "human virtue" that makes a person self-consistent and good. Individual justice (Human Organism) is the spirit by which men animate to fulfillment of their own duty. In human mind, there are three elements- rational, spirit and appetite; while wisdom is the virtue of rations, the courage of the spirit and the temperance of the appetite, Justices is the virtue which maintains harmony in all the three elements.

### Stratified Society

Every individual has a functional unite assigned with particular task, clear cut obligations and privileges, which are expecting to perform diligently and meticulously. It is also underlined the fact that none is born to render a specific function. Certain levels of training and skill are required. Moreover, everybody is to be involved in the performance of a socially required function.

### Just Individual

A just individual is also a good person and a happy one according to Plato because: 1. "A just individual limited his desires, for non-satisfaction of desires led to unhappiness. 2. Only a philosopher could differentiate between the pleasure derived from the pursuit of reason and those obtained from appetite and sensuality. 3. Pleasures drove from the intellect were more genuine and comforting than those drives from the senses" (Mukherjee and Ramasamy 1999: pp.69-71).

Social justice is a social consciousness that makes society internally harmonious and good. It is a "sort of specializations" (Bhandari 2008). The society is visualized as a harmonized orderly whole, based on the recognition of individual talents and contributions (Mukherjee and Ramasamy, 1999: p 69). The state has

three types of peoples namely workers, soldiers and rulers. The workers practice a specific form of labour. They are part of the society whose role is to provide food, clothes and any other necessities the state requires. They are required to be moderate and obedient to their ruler.

The soldier's fight for the state or country with a patriotic attitude and defend that state from foreign and domestic enemies. The rulers rule the state and they understand its rules and therefore will do everything within their power to preserve it (Bhandari 2008). In an ideal state, justice is given to each individual, who in his turn fulfils his duties towards the state. Justice means fulfillment of one's duties. Justice is possible only when each member of societies honestly fulfils his duties (Sharma: 2004 p.47). Justice is doing one's own job or work. Justice consists of fulfillment of duties by all the classes in a state. Plato believed that man should practice its own action.

Plato views injustice as any society that 1. Does not identify and recognize the innate nature and talents of each citizen, 2. Does not train and cultivate that nature through public education for the individual's fulfillment and common good and 3. Does not provide employment in that area for each qualified person? Most societies are practicing injustice by their haphazard educational, occupational and economic system; Crime and mental illness follow from such injustice (Sheldon 2005: p232). Plato sees the justice as what states the guidelines of individual behaviour and societal behaviour. Plato's justice is based on division of labour. His division has three types of hierarchy classes. The creation of justice in society depends upon the conditions that are to be created which lays emphasis upon fulfillment of duties. He wants to reform the individual and society through spiritual means.

The Figure 1 represents the moral values of Plato's justice. Justice has been divided into two parts which are social organism and individual organism. Social organism based on divisions of classes such as rulers, soldiers and artisans. Individual organism based on human virtue and human soul.

It is also underlined the fact that none is born to render a specific function. Certain levels of training and skill are required. Moreover, everybody are to be involved in the performance of a socially required function. A just individual is also a good person and happy one, according to Plato; because: 1. "A just individual limits his desires, for non-satisfaction of desires lead to unhappiness. 2. Only a philosopher can differentiate between the pleasure derived from the pursuit of reason and those obtained from appetite and sensuality. 3. Pleasures derived from the intellect were more genuine and comforting than those derived from the senses" (Mukherjee and Ramasamy 1999: 71). Social justice is a social consciousness that makes society internally

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### **Indian Society and Plato's Notion of Justice**

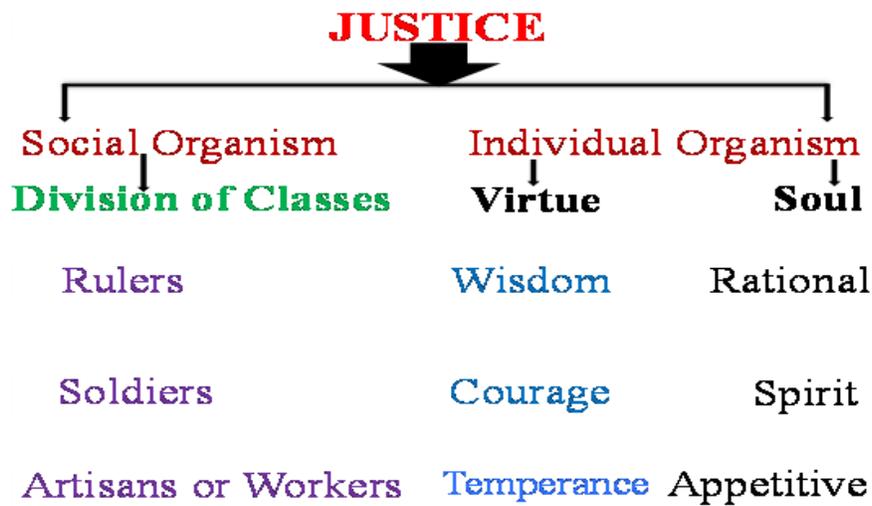
Indian Society or Hindu Society has been divided into four categories namely; 1.The Brahmins, 2. The Kshatriyas, 3. The Vaisyar, 4. The Shudras and outcaste. Out caste is called as untouchables and they are outside the system. The Hindu caste system is based on hierarchical division which is divided by hereditary occupation. The outcaste communities came to be placed at the lowest rung of the hierarchical caste order. The power and the privilege accorded to the upper castes in the social order in course of time resulted in the appropriation of wealth and resources. The diagram below shows classes in Indian society with their corresponding functions and duties.

The Figure 2 rightly shows the Indian caste system and their duties. The Brahmin were the priests, teachers, and judges who understood dharma. Dharma is the spiritual laws that govern the universe. The Brahmin often lived apart from the rest of society in temples. The Kshatriya were the warrior caste who made everyday decisions and run the government. The Kshatriya had most of the power in everyday life, but their decisions could be overruled by the Brahmin. The Vaishyas were skilled farmers and merchants. They occasionally had leadership positions in local villages. The unskilled workers were of the Sudras caste. Members of the Sudras caste often worked on the farms of the people of higher castes. The Sudras were given only one occupation to serve the members of the twice-born castes. Untouchable, inevitably, there were certain people who failed to live up to their caste dharma or who violated the rules concerning marriage between castes. Such people and their children were considered outcasts from Hindu society. They had to live apart from other castes and were given the jobs that no one else wanted to perform. Because of their contact with things considered unclean or polluted, the outcasts were believed to be deeply tainted.

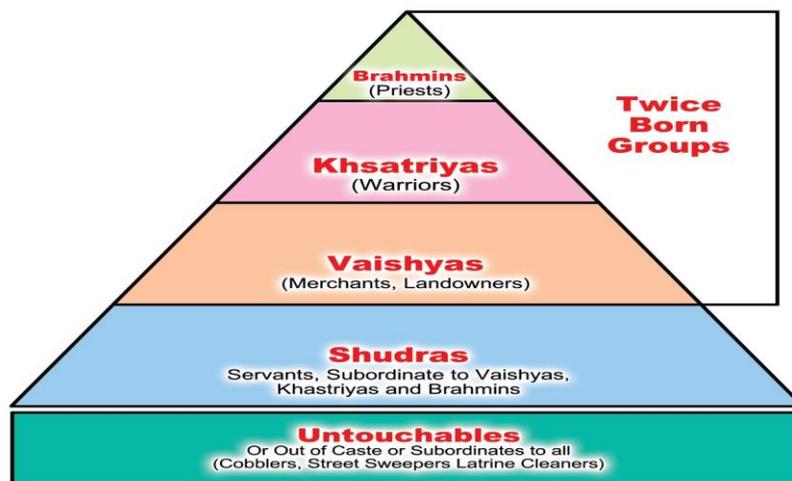
### **Comparison of Plato's Justice and Indian Society**

The present study tries to understand about Plato's Justice and its implication in Indian society. We know that Plato's justice is based on ideal concept, but it can be possible to execute in Indian society without any discrimination.

The Table 1 shows that comparison between Plato's



**Figure 1.** Plato's notion of justice and moral values is diagrammatically presented



**Figure 2:** Hierarchy of Indian Caste System

**Table 1:** Comparison of Plato's Justice and Indian Society

Plato's Notion		Indian Society		Duties
Hierarchy	Functions	Hierarchy	Functions	
Rulers	Intellectual	Brahmins	Priests	To ruling their state
Soldiers	Military	Kshatriyas	Warriors	To fight
-	-	Vaisyar	Merchants , landowners	Trading activities
Workers	Economic	Shudras	Servants, subordinate to priests, warriors A merchants	To practice a specific form of labour.
-	-	Untouchables	Out of caste or subordinates to all	Involved ritually polluting activities

justice and Indian society. Plato's society based on rulers, soldiers and worker. At the same time, Indian society based on five kinds of society are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyar, Shudras and untouchables or outcaste. Plato observed it and said that there was three was not untouchables community or outside communities. He never excluded any community. Plato gave equal right to every community and justice is disturbing to everyone without any discrimination. Plato's justice based on work. Hence, it is observed that there is not injustice among the community. In India, totally deviates from Plato's justice. One among community like outside caste excluded from the mainstream political participation even till now. They have been denied their basic right which is continued still now.

## OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSION

Plato's justice is an ideal concept of justice based on moral values which determine division of labour among three classes of the society. These classes are doing different work in accordance with the division of labour. Justice belongs to the individual organism (Virtue & Soul) and Social Organism which consists of three Classes of the societies (Hath 2004:104). Researcher finds that Plato's justice is based on class, labour and social discrimination. Plato justice reflects into Indian social structure and Hindu Caste System such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Plato's concept of justice is not acceptable to modern democratic countries. However, all human being live in welfare society. Democracy maintains rule of law and enacts law to create a welfare state. According to Cole, the welfare state is a society in which assured minimum standard of living and opportunity become the possession of every citizen. Plato's justice does not focus welfare state. For him division of labour is more important.

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