

Chapter 4 - Social Justice

Question 1:

What does it mean to give each person his/her due? How has the meaning of “giving each his due” changed over time?

Answer:

Giving each person his/her due means providing justice by ensuring the well-being of all the people.

In contemporary time, the concept of “giving each his due” has changed to the understanding of what is due to each person as a human being.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that if all persons are granted dignity then what is due to each of them is the opportunity to develop their talents and pursue their chosen goals.

Question 2:

Briefly discuss the three principles of justice outlined in the chapter. Explain each with examples.

Answer:

Equal Treatment of Equals:

- This indicates the principle of treating people equally.
- All individuals share certain characteristics as human beings. Therefore, they deserve to be treated equally and provided with equal rights.
- It includes civil rights like right to life, liberty and property, political rights like right to vote and social rights related to equal social opportunities.
- It also prohibits discrimination on the grounds of class, caste, gender and race.
- For example, two individuals from different backgrounds should be paid same reward for the same kind of job.

Proportionate justice:

- This principle indicates rewarding people in proportion to the scale and quality of their effort.
- It is just to reward different jobs differently on the basis of efforts and skills required and the danger involved.
- Thus, proportionality provides balance to the principle of equal treatment.
- The reward and compensation for a surgeon and an architect varies according to the skill that is required in their job.

Recognition of Special Needs:

- This principle is based on distributing rewards and duties on the basis of special needs of people.

- On the basis of factors such as age, physical disabilities and lack of access to good education or health care, special treatment is given in many countries.
- People with special needs or disabilities are treated unequal in some particular respect and therefore are provided with some deserving and special help.
- A physically challenged person getting a reserved seat in bus is an example of principle of recognition of special needs.

Question 3:

Does the principle of considering the special needs of people conflict with the principle of equal treatment for all?

Answer:

- The principle of considering the special needs of people does not raise a conflict with the principle of equal treatment for all.
- People with special needs are given special treatment to facilitate their participation in the running of the society.
- People with special needs also require special treatment for integration with society and for securing opportunities and basic needs that would be otherwise denied to them.
- The senior citizens, women and socially backward people are given special treatment due to their special needs.

Question 4:

How does Rawls use the idea of a veil of ignorance to argue that fair and just distribution can be defended on rational grounds?

Answer:

- Rawls uses the idea of a veil of ignorance to argue that fair and just distribution can be defended on rational grounds.
- He says that if a person keeps herself/himself under the 'veil of ignorance' then s/he would come up with the just distribution, fair laws and policies that would affect the whole society.
- A person under the 'veil of ignorance' is unaware of her/his possible position and status in the society therefore s/he would rationally decide from the point of view of the worst-off.
- It would be sensible in this situation for everyone to ensure that all resources are available equally to all persons.
- In this way Rawls, with his idea of 'veil of ignorance', is able to prove that fair and just distribution can be defended on rational grounds with the help of this idea.

Question 5:

What are generally considered to be the basic minimum requirements of people for living a healthy and productive life? What is the responsibility of governments in trying to ensure this minimum to all?

Answer:

Housing, supply of clean water, basic amount of nourishment to remain healthy, education and minimum wage are the basic minimum requirements of people for living a healthy and productive life.

Government is responsible for providing these services to all sections of the society irrespective of their class, caste, race and gender at a cost they can afford.

- Supporters of free market ideology are in favour of providing goods and services by the private agencies and the state or government should only try to empower people to buy those goods and services. However, eventually, free market tends to work in the interest of the powerful section.
- Government checks the interference of private agencies in some sectors of the economy so that the goods and services in the free market do not become out of reach for the weaker sections.

Question 6:

Which of the following arguments could be used to justify state action to provide basic minimum conditions of life to all citizens?

- (a) Providing free services to the poor and needy can be justified as an act of charity.
- (b) Providing all citizens with a basic minimum standard of living is one way of ensuring equality of opportunity.
- (c) Some people are naturally lazy and we should be kind to them.
- (d) Ensuring basic facilities and a minimum standard of living to all is a recognition of our shared humanity and a human right.

Answer:

- (a) Providing free services to the poor and needy as an act of charity is unjustified basis of state action to provide basic minimum conditions of life to all citizens. Services to the poor and needy are their rights and the government should not give these to them as charity.
- (b) Providing all citizens with a basic minimum standard of living to ensure equality of opportunity is justified basis of state action to provide basic minimum conditions of life to all citizens. This is because it is the responsibility of the government to provide opportunities for citizens.
- (c) Being kind to people who are lazy is not rational thinking as laziness is not a physical handicap. Therefore, it is an unjustified basis for state action to provide basic minimum conditions of life to all citizens.
- (d) Ensuring basic facilities and a minimum standard of living to all as a recognition of our shared humanity and human rights is a justified basis of state action to provide basic minimum conditions of life to all citizens.

