



Practical Challenges for Social Justice: Some Fundamental Socio-Political Issues

Md. Javed Hassan

PhD. Scholar, University of Calcutta,
Assistant Professor of Philosophy, S. A. Jaipuria College,
University of Calcutta, India
Email Id: hassanjaved29@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

*Justice, Social justice,
Human rights,
Marginalized community,
Equality, Equity, Fairness*

ABSTRACT

In this present situation justice in our society is under big question and undoubtedly the most valuable concept. Pursuing social justice, a concept encompassing fairness, equity, and the equitable distribution of opportunities and resources, is a complex and ongoing endeavour. While the ideals of social justice are universally recognized, the challenges encountered in its implementation are multifaceted and deeply rooted in societal structures. The persistent gap between the ideals of social justice and the realities of inequality and discrimination needs to be explored. Even in societies with strong legal frameworks protecting human rights, systemic biases and prejudices can prevent marginalized groups from enjoying equal opportunities and treatment. This paper explores the multifaceted challenges hindering the realization of social justice, examining fundamental issues that arise in its pursuit. It also delves into the historical context of social justice movements, the contemporary challenges marginalized communities face, and the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. It delves into the challenges encountered in their implementation too. Thus, by analyzing key theoretical frameworks and case studies, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex obstacles hindering the achievement of a just and equitable society for all.

Introduction: The concept of justice is multifaceted and involves several key elements. It distinguishes itself from other moral and political ideas through its emphasis on impartiality, universality, reasonableness, and publicity. To understand justice more deeply, we must explore various conceptual contrasts, such as conservative versus ideal justice, corrective versus distributive justice, procedural versus substantive justice, and comparative versus non-comparative justice. Additionally, we must consider the scope of justice, determining whether it applies to all beings or only to humans, whether it's limited to specific relationships, and whether individual duties of justice persist even after the establishment of justice-based institutions. Finally, while theories like utilitarianism, contractarianism, and egalitarianism attempt to unify different forms of justice, it seems that no single theory can fully capture the complexity of the concept. Let us brief the different kinds of justice as we understand it is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions. Distributive justice focuses on the fair allocation of resources and opportunities, while corrective justice aims to rectify past wrongs. Procedural justice ensures fairness in decision-making processes, while retributive justice involves punishing wrongdoers. Restorative justice emphasizes repairing harm and restoring relationships within communities. Social justice seeks to address systemic inequalities and promote equality in all aspects of society. Finally, environmental justice focuses on ensuring a healthy environment for all and addressing the disproportionate impact of pollution on marginalized communities. These different types of justice are interconnected and often overlap in practice. So we need to focus on the scope of justice here and when considering the scope of justice, we must ask when and among whom its principles apply. Extreme cases, like abundant or scarce resources, can challenge the relevance of justice. However, even in less extreme circumstances, questions about scope arise. We must determine who can make claims of justice and who has the obligation to fulfill them. The nature of the claim might influence these determinations. Comparative principles require identifying the relevant comparison group. Additionally, some principles of justice may have universal scope, applying to all interactions, while others may be contextual, applying only within specific relationships.

The theory of justice is a complex and ongoing field of inquiry, with diverse perspectives and debates. It continues to be relevant in addressing the challenges and opportunities of contemporary societies. Cultural, religious, and political differences can make it difficult to agree on what constitutes social justice. Social justice movements have emerged throughout history as responses to systemic injustices and inequalities. From the abolitionist movement to the civil rights movement, these movements have fought for the rights of marginalized groups and sought to create more equitable societies. However, the

progress achieved in these movements has often been uneven, and many challenges remain. The concept of social justice can be traced back to ancient civilizations. For example, in ancient Greece, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle discussed the importance of justice in a well-ordered society. While their ideas differed in certain respects, they both recognized the need for fairness and equality. The Enlightenment period in the 18th century saw a renewed emphasis on individual rights and the importance of social justice. Thinkers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued for the inherent rights of individuals and criticized the inequalities of the feudal system. The French Revolution, inspired by these ideas, sought to establish a more equitable society based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century led to significant economic and social changes. The rise of factories and the growth of cities created new forms of inequality and exploitation. In response, the labour movement emerged to fight for the rights of workers, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to organize unions. The 20th century witnessed several significant social justice movements, including the civil rights movement in the United States and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. These movements fought for the rights of marginalized groups, such as African Americans and people of colour, and sought to challenge systemic racism and discrimination. In recent decades, social justice movements have continued to emerge, addressing a wide range of issues, including gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental justice, and economic inequality. These movements have utilized various strategies, such as protests, boycotts, and legal challenges, to advocate for their causes.

Challenges Faced by Social Justice Movements:

Social justice movements have faced numerous challenges throughout history. Social justice movements have faced numerous challenges throughout history, hindering their progress and limiting their effectiveness. Resistance from powerful interests is a common obstacle, as those who benefit from existing inequalities often oppose efforts to promote social justice. Governments may also be reluctant to implement policies that challenge the status quo or threaten powerful interests, leading to a lack of political will. Cultural and religious barriers can hinder the acceptance of social justice principles, particularly in societies with conservative values. Additionally, adequate funding and resources are essential for implementing effective social justice policies, but these may be limited, hindering progress. Internal divisions within social justice movements can also be a significant challenge, as disagreements over strategy, tactics, or priorities can undermine unity and effectiveness. Despite these challenges,

social justice movements have achieved significant victories over the centuries. By understanding the historical context of these movements, we can better appreciate the ongoing struggle for a more just and equitable society.

A. Contemporary Challenges Faced by Marginalized Communities

Marginalized communities, those who are excluded or disadvantaged due to factors like race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socioeconomic status, continue to face significant challenges in their pursuit of social justice. These challenges often intersect and reinforce one another, creating a complex web of disadvantage. These are just a few examples of the contemporary challenges faced by marginalized communities. The intersection of these challenges can further exacerbate disadvantage, making it difficult for marginalized individuals to achieve social justice. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves both individual and systemic change.

Marginalized communities continue to face significant challenges in their pursuit of social justice. These challenges include:

Economic Inequality: The widening gap between the rich and poor is a pervasive issue in many societies. This economic inequality can lead to significant disparities in access to essential resources and opportunities. For example, low-income individuals may struggle to afford quality education, healthcare, and housing, limiting their ability to improve their circumstances. This can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and disadvantage, making it difficult for marginalized communities to achieve social mobility.

Racial and Ethnic Discrimination: Despite progress made in recent decades, racial and ethnic discrimination persists in many societies. This can manifest in various forms, including:

- **Systemic racism:** Institutional policies and practices that perpetuate racial inequality.
- **Individual bias:** Prejudice and discrimination on a personal level.
- **Structural racism:** The cumulative effects of historical and contemporary racial biases across institutions and systems.

Racial discrimination can limit opportunities for marginalized communities in areas such as education, employment, housing, and the criminal justice system. It can also lead to health disparities and increased exposure to environmental hazards.

Gender Inequality: Gender inequality remains a persistent challenge in many societies. Women continue to face discrimination in various aspects of their lives, including:

- **Workplace discrimination:** Gender-based wage gaps, limited opportunities for advancement, and sexual harassment.
- **Education inequality:** Disparities in access to education and educational outcomes.
- **Healthcare disparities:** Differences in access to and quality of healthcare.
- **Violence against women:** Domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Gender inequality can limit women's economic opportunities, restrict their autonomy, and contribute to their overall disadvantage.

Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: LGBTQ+ individuals often face discrimination and violence based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This can include:

- **Workplace discrimination:** Refusal to hire, fire, or promote individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Housing discrimination:** Denial of housing or unfair treatment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Hate crimes:** Violence and harassment motivated by prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals.

These forms of discrimination can have a significant impact on the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals, leading to mental health problems, economic hardship, and social isolation.

Disability Discrimination: People with disabilities face barriers to education, employment, and social participation. These barriers can be physical, such as inaccessible buildings, or attitudinal, such as negative stereotypes and discrimination. Disability discrimination can limit the opportunities and quality of life for individuals with disabilities, contributing to their marginalization.

B. Systemic Barriers to Social Justice: Systemic barriers are deeply ingrained structures and practices within a society that perpetuate inequality and disadvantage marginalized communities. These barriers are often invisible or taken for granted, making them difficult to address. Here are some key examples:

Institutional Racism: Institutional racism refers to the policies, practices, and norms within institutions that perpetuate racial inequality. This can manifest in various ways, such as:

- **Discriminatory policies:** Laws, regulations, or procedures that disadvantage racial minorities.
- **Unequal access to resources:** Limited access to education, healthcare, housing, and other essential services.
- **Stereotyping and bias:** Negative stereotypes and biases that influence decision-making within institutions.

Institutional racism can have a profound impact on the lives of marginalized communities, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

Patriarchal Structures: Patriarchal structures are societal norms and practices that privilege men over women. These structures can include:

- **Gender roles:** Traditional gender roles that assign different responsibilities to men and women.
- **Discrimination in the workplace:** Gender-based wage gaps, limited opportunities for advancement, and sexual harassment.
- **Violence against women:** Domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Patriarchal structures can limit women's opportunities and perpetuate gender inequality, contributing to their marginalization.

C. Neoliberal Economic Systems: Neoliberal economic policies, which prioritize free markets, deregulation, and privatization, can exacerbate inequality and marginalize vulnerable groups. These policies often lead to:

- **Job loss and income inequality:** As industries are privatized and jobs are outsourced, many people lose their jobs or experience declining wages.
- **Cuts to social programs:** Governments may reduce spending on social programs in order to balance budgets, leading to further hardship for marginalized communities.
- **Concentration of wealth:** Neoliberal policies can lead to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, while many others struggle to make ends meet.

These factors can contribute to the marginalization of vulnerable groups, such as low-income individuals, people of colour, and women.

D. Authoritarian Regimes and Corrupt Governments: Authoritarian regimes and corrupt governments can suppress dissent and limit the ability of marginalized communities to advocate for their rights. These regimes may use violence, intimidation, or legal restrictions to silence opposition and maintain their power. This can create a climate of fear and repression, making it difficult for marginalized communities to organize and challenge systemic injustices. These systemic barriers are interconnected and can reinforce one another, making it difficult to address them effectively. Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach that challenges existing power structures, promotes equality, and creates more inclusive societies.

E. Challenges in Implementation: Even in societies with strong legal frameworks protecting human rights, challenges can arise in the implementation of social justice policies. These challenges can be political, cultural, economic, or institutional in nature.

Lack of political will: Governments may be reluctant to implement policies that challenge the status quo or threaten powerful interests. For example, policies that seek to redistribute wealth or address systemic discrimination may face opposition from wealthy individuals, corporations, or political elites. This can make it difficult to enact and implement progressive social justice policies.

Resistance from Powerful Groups: Those who benefit from existing inequalities may resist efforts to promote social justice. For example, powerful corporations may oppose policies that regulate their activities or increase taxes on the wealthy. Similarly, individuals who hold discriminatory beliefs may resist efforts to promote equality and inclusion.

Cultural and Religious Barriers: Cultural and religious beliefs can hinder the acceptance of social justice principles, particularly in societies with conservative values. For example, some cultures may have traditional gender roles that limit women's opportunities or discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals. Religious beliefs may also be used to justify discriminatory practices or oppose progressive social change.

Lack of Resources: Adequate funding and resources are essential for implementing effective social justice policies. This includes funding for education, healthcare, social programs, and enforcement of

anti-discrimination laws. However, governments may face budgetary constraints or prioritize other spending areas, limiting their ability to invest in social justice initiatives.

These challenges can make it difficult to implement social justice policies, even in societies with strong legal frameworks. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves building political will, overcoming resistance from powerful groups, addressing cultural and religious barriers, and securing adequate resources.

Conclusion:

Therefore, I would like to conclude with the concept that John Rawls developed a theory of justice that emphasizes fairness and equality. His two main principles of justice are: first, **The Liberty Principle:** "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar liberties for others." This principle emphasizes the importance of individual rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to vote. Second, **The Difference Principle:** "Inequalities in social and economic positions are to be arranged so that both the positions and offices to which these inequalities are attached are open to everyone under conditions of fair equality of opportunity, and the greatest benefit of these inequalities must go to the least advantaged members of society." This principle allows for inequalities in society, but only if they benefit everyone, especially the most disadvantaged. Rawls argued that these principles could be derived from a hypothetical situation called the "original position," where individuals are behind a "veil of ignorance" and do not know their own social or economic status. In this state, they would be more likely to choose principles that ensure fairness and equality for all. Rawls' theory of justice has been influential in political philosophy and has been applied to a wide range of issues, including economic inequality, social justice, and international relations. However, it has also been criticized for its emphasis on individual rights and its neglect of certain aspects of social justice, such as the importance of community and shared values.

The pursuit of social justice is a complex and ongoing struggle. While significant progress has been made in recent decades, numerous challenges persist. Understanding the historical context of social justice movements, the contemporary challenges faced by marginalized communities, and the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality is crucial for developing effective strategies to achieve a just and equitable society for all. We can gain insights into the strategies and tactics that have been effective in the past by examining the historical context of social justice movements. This can help us to learn from

the successes and failures of previous generations and adapt our approaches to contemporary challenges. Recognizing the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities is essential for developing targeted interventions. By understanding the unique experiences of these communities, we can identify the most pressing needs and tailor our efforts accordingly. As we have seen recently the **Quota movement** in our neighbour country Bangladesh since a section of the students' community began to feel like they have a limited opportunity based on their merit but the Government is unable to realize the pulse of the community and fails to establish justice in the society. Therefore, addressing systemic barriers is crucial for achieving lasting social justice. These barriers are deeply ingrained in societal structures and require systemic change to overcome. By identifying and challenging these barriers, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Developing effective strategies for promoting social justice requires a multifaceted approach. To achieve a just and equitable society, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This involves a combination of advocacy, policy reform, community organizing, education, and international cooperation. Advocacy and activism are essential for raising awareness of social justice issues and mobilizing public support. Policy reform is crucial for addressing systemic injustices and creating a more equitable society. Community organizing empowers marginalized communities to advocate for their own rights and interests, while education and awareness-raising promote understanding and empathy for marginalized groups. International cooperation is essential for addressing global inequalities and human rights violations and by combining these strategies, we can work towards creating a more just and inclusive world. Therefore, we can develop more effective strategies for achieving a just and equitable society by understanding the historical context, contemporary challenges, and systemic barriers. This requires a commitment to ongoing learning, collaboration, and perseverance in the face of setbacks.

References:

1. Anderson, Elizabeth, 1999, "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics*, 109: 287–337.
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Roger Crisp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

3. Fraser, Nancy. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Post-Communist Transition*. Routledge, 1997.
4. Gilliam, James. "Racial Disparity in School Exclusion: A Meta-Analysis." *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 3 (2000): 377-416.
5. Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
6. Rawls, John, 1958, "Justice as Fairness," *Philosophical Review*, 67: 164–94.
 - —, 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
 - —, 1993, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
 - —, 1999, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
 - —, 2001, *Justice as Fairness: a restatement*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
7. Schlosberg, Harold. "Environmental Justice and the Political Theory of Democracy." *Environmental Ethics* 17, no. 1 (1995): 53-71.
8. Sen, Amartya, 1980, "Equality of What?" in *Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Volume 1*, ed. S. McMurrin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
9. Sen, Amartya. *Inequality Reexamined*. Harvard University Press, 1992.
10. Valenzuela, Angela. "Queer Theory and Social Justice: A Critical Perspective." *Social Justice* 25, no. 4 (1998): 3-18.
11. West, Cornel. "Race, Class, and Gender: Intersections and Interconnections." *Critical Social Theory* 15, no. 2 (1995): 123-142.
12. Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, 1990.