

Social Justice as *Loka-Sangraha* in Ancient India

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Abstract—*The Western concept of social justice gets a different and unique definition in the Indian context. The India ancient text as Gita and Mahabharata says that this dharma of king of the king must be done by the feelings of Lok-Sangraha. This duty of king or the king's dharma is a form of social justice. The meaning of Loka-Sangraha is the Indian definition of social justice. The nuances of Lok-Sangraha and its implications brings out the true concepts related to social justice like equality freedom, duty, and respect etc. This concept of Loka-Sangraha is a foundation in forming the meaning of social justice in India.*

John Rawls in his gospel of social justice, in *A Theory of Justice*, said that “justice is the first virtue of the society”. Justice as virtue is well-known fact to all of the human civilizations. It has its roots deep in human nature thus it reflects in the human societies. Whether it is Greeks, Roman, or Mesopotamian civilization or in Indian or Chinese civilization. All the human civilizations have the concept of justice in various forms. In Greeks it was in form of harmony and happiness, in Roman it was in form of equal law for all. Even in an Eastern word, the Chinese and Indian civilization gave great importance to the concept of justice. Justice is the basic rule and operating force of any society if any society runs on any principle which is fair and same for all the members of the society then it is the principle of justice. As Aristotle said Justice is the inter-personal virtue of society. It is not only a golden mean between too less and too much it is also a virtue which is good in itself. [1] He divided justice into tree types and distributive justice was one of the one types of justice. The modern concept of social justice is understood by the distributive justice, but social justice is much more and beyond just distributive justice. In the west the concept of justice is mainly manifested in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, later it developed in Saint Thomas Aquinas and John Locke's philosophy. In contemporary time the concept of justice transforms in a very innovative way where it got a new meaning the social justice. Nowadays everybody talks about the social justice and tried to secure social justice, but what is the social justice. “The concept of social justice has often referred to the process of ensuring that individuals fulfill their societal roles and receive what was their due from society.” [2] The importance of social justice can be seen in the in IOL preamble where it treats social justice as a matter of human right education. John Rawls considered distributive justice as a form of fair distribution of duties and burdens. He has a model

of justice as a system of fairness in interpersonal relationships and the relationships between the agency and the agency in society. For this fair system, he propounded two principles as 1.the principle of Equality, 2. Difference Principle. These principles became the guideline in a modern socio-political state where any state follows these principles and treat every citizen in a fair manner. In the concept of social justice, three parts are essential the institution, the agency, and the people. Here institutions are means to provide facilities by the agency in the form of state or government and the end is the people (the society). These three parties have to work in a manner where they must recognize the need, and merit of the individual in maintaining equality in society. Social justice has to do with the means of obtaining welfare of individual not with the welfare itself. [5] In this concept of social justice the agency plays a major role in the welfare of the individual, if the agency follows the principle of justice and force institution then they can get the aim of the welfare of an individual in society. Here one must not forget that the equality is as much as important as for merit and need of the individual. The Indian society it has the concept of justice in various form. The concept of Dharma is itself is a concept of justice in Indian civilization. In Indian society, dharma has various definitions it can be said as religion, duty, nature or something which is desirable to all.in Kautilya words “Dharma is the differentiating character of a man from all other animals”. [6] In the west the dharma only means religion but in Indian society, the Word Dharma is made from the Sanskrit root “DHR” which means something which a bear or support or hold. The meaning of Sanskrit word Dharma has ethical, social, political, spiritual and cultural meaning and relevance to individual life. In India, every aspect of an individual's life is affected by his dharma and as well as defined by the Dharma. An individual has to follow the four Purushārtha and the four ashrams are the in order to perform his dharma. Here this Purushārtha and āshrama not only guide individual life but it also shapes and defines individual life. The Dharma is the first and important of all Purushartha.it is the dharma which handles Kama and Artha in life so one can get moksha in life. This dharma also guides that how one can perform duties in various stages of life in form of Ashram. Here Dharma is a form of order, justice, and harmony in life. Thus this dharma plays a fundamental role in bringing out justice for the individual as well as for society. In Mahabharata's Shanti

Parva Bhismā gives a definition of dharma as “to support or to sustain.” [7] Here Bhismā further explains that what can be called or what are the sources of the Dharma and he mentions three sources of the Dharma in individual life as 1. The teachings of Vedas, 2. The details and teachings of Dharma Sutras, 3. The conduct of virtuous man. [8] According to ancient Indian texts, the Dharma is the highest moral good or highest moral maxim of human life “*yato dharma tto jyha*” [9] in Mahabharata in order to explain dharma Bhismā divides Dharma into three types.

1. *Yug Dharma*- the actions and conduct according to the need of era and morality of society.
2. *Svah Dharma*- the Āshrama and Varna Ashram Dharma
3. *Sadhara Dharma*-the right, the just conduct of human in life, the conduct and dharma of King also comes in this category which is called the Raj Dharma.

Now we come again to the concept of social justice where a right and powerful agency is needed for the just conduct of society and welfare of an individual in society. To help and operate society the king needs the Kosha and the Daṇḍa. Here the Kosha means the wealth and the Daṇḍa mean the system of regulation and punishment. Thus king’s duty becomes the procurement of wealth for society and welfare and maintaining the law so the individual can enjoy the virtues of Kama Artha and attains the Moksha at the end of life. According to Kautilya, the king must maintain a society with the help of the Dand and the Dand-Niti as he says “the scepter on which the wellbeing and progress of state depends is known as the Daṇḍa.” [10] Kautilya in his book *Arthshāstrā* gives three meaning of Daṇḍa as the Scepter, the Army, and the Punishment. According to Manu, the Daṇḍa maintains the social order in society and the king has a duty to maintain the Varna Sharma Dharma so the state can prevent the Matsya-Nya. The maintaining of order and avoiding of Matsya-Nya is the main duty of king in ancient India. [11] This account of social justice in Indian tradition shows that concept of Social Justice Works in a very implicit manner on a dual level. One the one level it works on a social level where it has the responsibility of empowerment of all members of society and gives them equal treatment in society in their interactions and with respect to the state. On the other level, it works on the level of the individual where every individual works as a part of the whole in society. Here the concept of Dharma plays the part of motivating force for an individual where he gives importance to his Dharma “The Duty” of the individual. Yudhister explains in Mahabharata that “I do not aspire for the fruit of all that I do, but I just perform my duty, I give only because a thing has to be given. I perform sacrifice because I should perform it. [12] The concept of Social Justice is another reflection of the Indian concept of Dharma in Indian society. All the aims and the principles of Social Justice reflect and emerge in the Indian concept of Dharma (Social Justice). This dharma like the social justice is the instrument in bringing order and equality in society and the welfare of the

individual. The social justice in a way also scrutinizes the existing system and principles of society in order to make them just and fair the same thing goes with the concept of dharma in Indian tradition. Here the agent the king or state must work in a manner of social justice for the welfare of all the Indian tradition also explain that how the king or agent must work or perform his duty. The nature of this duty is defined by Lord Krishna as *Loka-sangraha* in Karma Yoga of *Bhagwat Gita* when he explains it to Arjun and says “Even having regard to public welfare you must perform the actions. [13] This *Loka-sangraha* is the true concept of social justice where the aim is public welfare, not the self-interest or other gains. This meaning of *Loka-sangraha* can be further understood by the definition of B. G. Tilak as he defined in his book *Gita-Rhasya*, where he says “*Loka-Sangraha* means binding men together and protecting, maintaining and regulating them in such a way that they might acquire the strength which results from mutual cooperation, thereby putting them on the path of acquiring merit while maintaining their good condition. [14] Thus the agent must become trusty of people power and wealth. The concept of *Loka-sangraha* is a clear reflection of the idea of social justice where the fair rule and equal treatment of an individual in society are utmost important. Even Bhismā in Santi-Parva of Mahabharata says that *Loka-sangraha* is a prime duty of doer and if one does not perform the duty with the *Loka-sangraha* the Loka (World) will be destroyed. [15] There is no other better explanation of social justice as *Loka-Sangraha* of Indian tradition. This concept not only completes the demand of justice on a social level but it also fulfills it on an individual level. On both levels, the aim of the agent is the welfare of all which is a social justice in a true sense. The agent does not take any self-interest or personal gain in his duty he performs his duty for the welfare of other. Thus no other definition of social justice defines it in totality as the concept of *Loka-Sangraha*. This *Loka-Sangraha* is not only inherently Indian but it also incorporates all the themes of concepts of social justice as equality, liberty, fair treatment, fair distribution of benefits and distributions of duties. One can identify that this concept of *Loka-Sangraha* is true Indian reflection of the concept of social justice, no other Indian concept justify its name and meaning rather than *Loka-Sangraha*. The Western concept of social justice deals the individual and society on the different level and has different treatment for both of them. The individual is just a part of the whole. But the Indian concept of social justice (*Loka-Sangraha*) deals in both levels simultaneously. In it the individual is not just a part of the whole, the individual is the maker of part and whole as well. The individual himself determine his part and the social part altogether. Thus there is no mistake in calling social justice as *Loka-Sangraha* in Indian tradition.

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- [3] Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
- [4] Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.
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