

## PLATO'S THEORY OF JUSTICE

The concept of Justice occupies the most important part of Plato's *The Republic*. Sabine says: "The theory of the state in *The Republic* culminates in the conception of justice". He has treated justice as the bond which holds a society together. Hence, it is the true principle of social life. *The Republic* deals with the bond and true principle of social life.

The purpose of *The Republic* is to ensure justice. The failure will invariably disintegrate the whole society. The philosopher king will take care to establish justice. That is why *The Republic* is called a "treatise concerning justice". However, Plato wanted to combat the false notions which the Sophists spread. The Ideal state is the highest manifestation of morality, goodness and idealism and naturally in such a state justice cannot be relegated to an inferior position.

Rather, it holds the highest position in the state. Different social classes are combined by the bond of justice and this makes the ideal state a perfect one.

The purpose of his *Republic* is not simply to provide peace and order and at the same time,

protection, but all the opportunities for social change which make up the necessities and <sup>in-</sup> amenities of civilized existence.

### Four Virtues of Good Community

Plato has analyzed the virtues or nature of a good community. In his view a community will be called good if it possesses the four cardinal virtues of the Greeks. Plato says that every nation has its own virtues and the Greeks consider that wisdom, courage, temperance or self-control and justice are the four virtues. Among these four virtues justice is the most important.

The essence of wisdom is good cause or deliberation. Wisdom resides in those persons who perform the deliberative functions of the government. This deliberative faculty is not to be found in men of large number. Naturally this quality is treated as rare. Plato says that very small number of men have the capability to participate in the deliberative function of the state. He thinks that only the guardians class can exercise the deliberative

After wisdom comes courage. Plato has defined courage as the power of resisting fear. Although bravery is not confined to army, it is a fact that battle-ground is the proper place where it is tested. That is, bravery is proved only in war. Generally the soldiers through their courageous activities can protect the integrity and unity of a state. Plato also asserts that by courage it means firm belief and conviction. The conviction encourages individual to fight against injustice and irrationality. In this way, courage establishes justice.

The Republic, Plato has made the following observation. "in the case of citizens generally each individual should be put to the use for which nature inclined him, one to one work and when every man would do his own business and be one and not many; and the whole city would be one and not many". Plato wants to say that nature has made some men physically strong and other men intelligent and wise. It has also made some men brave. Naturally, one man will be unfit for another man's job. If we accept this natural phenomenon it is expected that men will cooperate with nature in all respects. This constitutes the central

idea of justice. When this is achieved, Plato says, justice in the society will start to flourish.

Plato in his *The Republic* has said that justice demands that each man shall do his own business and to that business only to which he is best adapted. Meddlesomeness and interference, according to Plato, breed great injustice.

Again, he says just actions cause justice and unjust actions cause injustice. All these observations about justice prove one thing - specialization is the central idea of justice.

We have already noted that Plato strongly advocated justice to prevent in any civil dissension and discord among the several classes and individuals. He thought that if each class were engaged in performing its own duty ordained by nature then there should not arise any ground for dissatisfaction.

It was his belief that absence of specialization was the prime cause of dissension among the citizens - with the advent of specialization selfish aspiration for government office and

Plato has further said that there are three elements of soul - reason, spirit and appetite. Goodness is identified with justice in relation to those three elements of soul. In the same way we can say that the goodness of the community is identified with the justice in relation to the members of the state.

Plato's own theory, as it stems from the discussion which went on among characters such as Cephalus, Polymarchus, Thrasymachus, Glaucon, Adeimantus and Socrates, appears to be as under:

(a) Justice is nothing but the principle that each one should pursue a function for which one is fitted by nature - each one to do one's own for one's own and for common good. Plato says, "I say justice is that very thing... each one must practice... for which his nature was best fitted... this in a sense appears to be justice... to do one's own business... and meddle in no other business, meddling in many business would be ruin for the city".

(b) Justice means specialisation and excellence.

(c) Justice helps people to be in a society; a bond that holds society; a harmonious union of classes individuals, of classes with the state. It is a bond that brings together individuals, classes

and state into one frame.

(d) Justice is both a "public" and "private" virtue.  
It aims at the highest good of the individual  
(private), and of the whole society (public).

However, Plato's theory of Justice leads to division of labour, specialisation and efficiency. It is, therefore, a principle of specialisation, non-interference and harmony. This notion of Justice implies social virtues, private and public ethics and a moral dictate. And yet Plato's theory of justice is totalitarian in the sense that it subordinates individual to the state.