Mains Practice Question

Q. What do you understand by the term 'distributive justice'? How can it be a better philosophy to bring social justice? (150 words)

30 Jan, 2020   GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Give the definition of distributive justice and different types of distributive norms.
- Give the definition of social justice.
- Explain how distributive justice can support social justice.
- Explain how distributive justice and social justice are in opposition.
- Give way forward or conclusion giving a balanced approach.

Introduction

- Distributive justice concerns the socially just allocation of goods. Principles of distributive justice provides moral guidance for the political processes and structures that affect the distribution of benefits and burdens in society.
- The basic principle of distributive justice is that equal work should produce equal outcomes and some people should not accumulate a disproportionate amount of goods.
- There are **5 types of distributive norms:**

  - **Equality:** Regardless of their inputs, all group members should be given an equal share of the rewards/costs. It is also known as 'Strict Egalitarianism'
  - **Equity:** Members' outcomes should be based on their inputs. Equals should be treated equally and unequal, unequally
  - **Power:** Those with more power should receive more than those in lower-level positions.
  - **Need:** Those in greatest needs should be provided with the resources needed to meet those needs.
  - **Responsibility:** Group members who have the most should share their resources with those who have less.

Social justice

- Social justice is a concept of fair and just relations between groups within society as opposed to justice for individuals. It is based on the premise that, individual justice or injustice is intricately related to the social group he or she belongs. Eg. according to feminist scholars, a woman does not get equal income for equal work just because of her gender as proved by the Global Gender Gap Index by World Economic Forum.

Distributive justice as a better philosophy to bring social justice

- Reservation policy was used in India to give special preference to sections of society that were earlier being deprived of equality of opportunity for centuries. Eg. Reservation to SC/ST, Other Backward Classes, Transgenders, Persons with Disability, etc.
- Rawls' difference principle allows for the greatest benefit to the least advantaged, which will allow

the least advantaged social group to prosper at a faster rate.
- Distributive justice targets towards balanced empowerment eg. economic empowerment go along with political empowerment, which maintain harmony even during social changes.

Distributive justice is inadequate to bring social justice

- There is no one fixed theory of distributive justice, which might create conflict in different social justices eg feminists rights are sometimes in conflict with transgenders' rights
- While distributive justice concerns itself with the welfare of an individual, social justice concern itself with the welfare of a social group. Sometimes they both come in conflict. **Eg.:** poor from privileged class should be preferred according to distributive justice, but rich from underprivileged class should be preferred according to social justice.
- Distributive justice concern about what society owes to a person. While social justice also includes legal justice (what people owe society) and commutative justice (what people owe to each other)
- According to libertarian scholars, social justice is a mirage as we should not divide the 'cake of freedom' to ensure 'equal shares for all'.

Way forward

A balanced approach is required to create harmony between social justice and distributive justice. Eg.: while reservation based on social group should continue to provide social justice, the creamy layer should be introduced to prevent a section of underprivileged group to secure all benefits to provide distributive justice.