Ramrajya and Rawls's *Justice as Fairness*: A Comparative Study of Ideal Governance, Moral Community, and Utopian Aspirations

Vineet Dubey
JRF,
Department of English & MEL,
University of Lucknow.
vineet123om@gmail.com

Abstract:

The research article aims to examine John Rawls's concept of justice through his framework of justice as fairness, which he developed in collaboration with the Indian ethical-political concept of Ramrajya, and which he expressed through the Ramayana tradition and the *Ramcharitmanas*. Rawls develops his theory of justice through three fundamental elements: the Original Position, the Veil of Ignorance, and the principles that identify basic liberties as primary requirements and safeguard the needs of the least privileged. This study examines contractual fairness through major critiques of Rawls, which include libertarian, communitarian, egalitarian, feminist, and cosmopolitan perspectives, to reveal its potential in addressing structural social inequalities and moral social divisions, as well as the development of ethical citizenship. The Ramrajya concept functions as a utopian standard that requires people to uphold justice and complete their responsibilities while leading through compassion, democratic methods, and environmental protection. The paper argues that, although Rawls remains indispensable for designing fair institutions in plural societies, Ramrajya provides a more holistic vision of justice by addressing the deeper moral ecology required to sustain humane and welfare-oriented governance.

Keywords: Ramrajya, Rawls, Justice as Fairness, Dharma, Utopia, Ramcharitmanas, Constitutional Ethics.

Introduction

The issue of what constitutes a just society has never been a dull one. Throughout history and in all societies, philosophers have grappled with the same central issue: how to distribute power, resources, and moral responsibility in a way that enables human life to thrive without fear, oppression, or deprivation. John Rawls' 1971 masterpiece, A Theory of Justice, established the dominant 'justice as fairness' paradigm, arguably exerting a stronger influence on the field than any other modern Anglo-American work. The theory by Rawls confronted the utilitarian reasoning and demanded that the rights of individuals should not be sacrificed to the happiness of the majority. John Rawls based his theory of justice on a thought experiment known as the original position, in which rational individuals choose governing principles from behind a "veil of ignorance" regarding their own social status. This framework prioritizes fundamental liberties and the protection of the least advantaged, establishing Rawls as a cornerstone of modern political thought whose paradigm is engaged with by both critics and proponents alike.

But ideal governance is never a need of one tradition of philosophy or one epoch. The Indian cultural and ethical universe presents a durable concept of ideal rule, Ramrajya, which, in general, is interpreted as an ideal of just governing connected with the Ramayana. To the layperson, Ramrajya is commonly a golden era of harmony and equity. In academic contexts, Ramrajya should be viewed not merely as nostalgia, but as a normative governance model rooted in ethical leadership, social welfare, harmony, and moral responsibility. Contemporary studies emphasize that it is not a sectarian assertion of power, but rather a philosophical ideal based on dharma, compassion, and the collective interest. Furthermore, this ideal has been consistently reinterpreted through Gandhian and constitutional perspectives (Gupta, Kumar, and Jyoti Gupta, Vision of Ramrajya).The purpose of this paper is not to flatten either of the two traditions, but to look at

what each tradition has to talk about justice, fairness, community, and moral responsibility. The two frameworks are geared towards protecting human dignity, decreasing inequality, and creating stable social life circumstances. Each has significant limitations and criticisms also. But when these systems are juxtaposed, Ramrajya proves a better holistic example of a fair society since it combines the fairness of the institutions with moral character, welfare with duty, and civic governance with a greater goal of social harmony. Rawls presents a dramatic architecture of justice, and Ramrajya presents an ecology of justice, which addresses not only rules and rights but also ethical leadership, shared values, and lived welfare.

Rawls has an impact due to the simplicity of his approach. Until 1971, much political thinking was dominated by utilitarian thought: much justice was often reduced to maximisation of total welfare, even at the cost of individual rights. Rawls did not accept that solution. In his argument, he contended that a just society is not merely the one in which the aggregate happiness is maximised; it is one in which persons are treated as free and equal and are deserving of inviolable basic liberties. To establish an impartial standard of fairness, Rawls proposed the "original position," a hypothetical scenario where rational actors select principles of justice while unaware of their own social standing or personal characteristics. This is the Veil of Ignorance that is meant to do away with prejudice. Since nobody can predict whether he/she will be a rich or a poor, advantaged or a disadvantaged individual, healthy or a crippled, they would choose the principles that will safeguard them in case they are one of the unlucky ones (Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"). Rawls argued that rational actors would adopt two foundational principles: first, the Liberty Principle, securing maximum equal basic liberties, and second, the Difference Principle, allowing economic inequalities only when they benefit the least-advantaged members of society.

This framework is appealing because of the moral prudence. Rawls does not allow the exploitation of minorities by the majority in society. He provides a model, which is procedural, rational, and more appropriate in plural societies where individuals are at odds in religious and moral values. Rawls tries to find a ground in a world of competing identities and moral claims. It is this that makes Rawls at the centre: his thought experiment provides contemporary democracies with a means of justifying freedom and justice without giving preference to a specific religious or cultural view. H. L. A. Hart, in his part, discussed Rawls directly on the priority of liberty, which means that Rawls rekindled moral seriousness on rights and freedom (Hart).

Nevertheless, the theory of Rawls has been strongly criticised. According to libertarians like Robert Nozick, a major mistake that Rawls commits is the distribution of wealth, in that the wealth is viewed as a common pool that can be centrally planned. According to the Entitlement Theory of Nozick, justice is historical: if the acquisition and transfer of property are just, the distribution that is achieved is just, even though it may be unequal. The imposition of a patterned distribution such as that of the difference Principle proposed by Rawls would necessitate the continual interference, and not only would it infringe on liberty, but would be against liberty (Nozick). Rawls is put in another line by the communitarian critique. According to Michael Sandel, the model presented by Rawls starts with the abstract, unencumbered self that is not tied to any community, history, religion, or attachments constitutive of the self. To Sandel, people are relational and moral selves who are defined by relationships and moral traditions. According to Sandel, Rawlsian liberalism creates citizens who are procedurally oriented but not purpose-oriented to maintain justice, undermining civic virtues that support justice (Sandel). Charles Taylor also posits in the same direction that liberal neutrality is capable of devising a thin public life which cannot develop moral depth and shared identity (Taylor).

There are limitations in terms of egalitarian critiques, as well. Amartya Sen believes that Rawls accentuates the distribution of primary goods, which lacks an important reality that human beings possess varying capacities in turning resources into valuable results in life. Thus, it is the capabilities, rather than goods, that should be used as a measure of equality (Sen). G. A. Cohen, in the meantime, criticises the justification of inequality by incentives as done by Rawls. Rawls allows the talented to be rewarded more, provided this encourages economic productivity that would benefit the less fortunate. The moral sense of the argument is called into question by Cohen, who claims that acting in true commitment to justice would not require an added benefit as the price of giving back to a just world (Cohen). The model by Rawls is further complicated by feminist and global justice criticisms. Susan Moller Okin argues that Rawls presumes the family is a just institution while overlooking how gendered injustice shapes citizenship and moral learning (Okin). Charles Beitz contends that Rawls's framework cannot remain confined to domestic borders because nationality is morally arbitrary in a globalised world; justice requires a wider lens that takes global inequality seriously (Beitz).

The concept of Ramrajya enters this conversation from a different philosophical ground. While Rawls begins with a hypothetical contract among rational choosers, Ramrajya begins with an ethical vision of governance rooted in dharma and moral duty. Contemporary scholarship interprets Ramrajya as an ideal social order characterised by justice, welfare, and harmonious social life, where governance is inseparable from the character of leadership and the moral expectations of society (Kumar and Jyoti). In this vision, the state's legitimacy flows not only from fair rules but from Rajdharma, the ruler's duty to cherish the people as dear as life.

Goswami Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas supplies a compact but profound ethical test for kingship:

"रहहु करहु सब कर परितोषू। नतरु तात होइहि बड़ दोषू॥

जासु राज प्रिय प्रजा दुखारी। सो नृपु अवसि नरक अधिकारी॥"

which may be understood as declaring that the ruler whose subjects remain miserable, despite the king's claim to value them, becomes worthy of condemnation. The same section warns that a king who does not know policy and does not love the people as his own life fails in governance:

"सोचिअ बिप्र जो बेद बिहीना। तजि निज धरमु बिषय लयलीना॥

सोचिअ नृपति जो नीति न जाना। जेहि न प्रजा प्रिय प्रान समाना॥॥"

The above-mentioned verse states that one should not think of the Brahmin who does not know the Vedas and abandons his duty and indulges in sensual pleasures. One should also not think of the king who does not know policy and does not love his people as much as his life.

This moral demand deepens into the text's broad description of Ramrajya in Uttar Kand. In the reign of Rama, the text declares that upon Shri Ram's accession to the throne and his subsequent administration, the three worlds—heaven, mortal, and underworld—were overjoyed, and all their sorrows vanished. Rama's brilliance eradicated any discrimination or wickedness in everyone's minds, meaning no one harboured any animosity toward anyone. Those belonging to the four castes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, and the four ashramas of Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and Sanyasa, performed their respective duties diligently and followed the path prescribed by the Vedas. Therefore, they always found happiness. They were never troubled by disease, sorrow, or fear. In Rama's kingdom, there was no suffering from physical diseases like fever, divine famine, or physical animals like lions. Everyone lived with great love and followed Vedic rituals and performed their respective religious duties. During Rama's reign, righteousness was being fully practised in all its four stages. Sin was unseen even in dreams. All

men and women were immersed in devotion to Rama, and hence, all were entitled to attain salvation.

"रामराजबैठेत्रैलोका।

हर्षितभएगएसबसोका॥

बयरुनकरकाहूसनकोई।

रामप्रतापबिषमताखोई॥

वरनाश्रमनिजनिजधरम, निरतवेद-पथलोक।

चलहिंसदापावहिंसुखहिं, नहिंभयरोगनसोक॥

दैहिकदैविकभौतिकतापा।

रामराजनहिंकाहुहिंव्यापा॥

सबुनरकरहिंपरस्परप्रीती।

चलहिंस्वधर्मनिरतश्रुतिनीती॥

चारिउचरनधर्मजगमाहीं।

पूरिरहासपनेहुँअघनाहीं॥

रामभगतिरतनरअरुनारी।

सकलपरमगतिकेअधिकारी॥"

Ramrajya is represented as a condition where social life is not driven by suspicion but by trust, ethical discipline, and collective affection. Another verse expands the moral universe of the reign

by depicting dharma as fully established and sin as absent even in dreams. The language of justice here is clearly utopian, and scholars acknowledge that Ramrajya's perfect form may never be fully realised, yet it persists as a moral horizon by which governance may be evaluated (Gupta, Kumar, and Jyoti).

The utopian ideal of Ramrajya serves not as an escape from reality, but as a framework for active moral transformation. Neerja A. Gupta argues that utopian ideals gain strength through literature because they preserve social hopes and ethical standards, enabling communities to imagine reforms and better future. In this sense, Ramrajya functions as a cultural compass. It sustains an imaginative standard that encourages societies to measure governance by human well-being rather than merely administrative output (Gupta). Gandhi's reinterpretation reinforces this universal relevance. Gupta explains that Gandhi rejects any communal reading of Ramrajya as Hindu Raj and instead presents it as Divine Raj, oriented toward truth, justice, and the well-being of the weakest. This framing is vital because it translates an epic ideal into a democratic ethic.

The ethical image of welfare in Ramrajya becomes still more concrete in the description that there is no untimely death, no suffering, and no poverty:

"अल्पमृत्यु नहिं कवनिउ पीरा। सब सुंदर सब बिरुज सरीरा॥

नहिं दरिद्र कोउ दुखी न दीना। नहिं कोउ अबुध न लच्छन हीना॥"

The vision extends further by claiming that people are free from vanity and deceit, and are learned and grateful:

"सबनिर्दंभधर्मरतपुनी।नरअरुनारिचतुरसबगुनी॥

सबगुनग्यपंडितसबग्यानी।सबकृतग्यनहिंकपटसयानी॥"

Even if taken symbolically, the verses reveal the deep structure of the ideal: justice is not merely a state policy but a human condition, an atmosphere of life where dignity, welfare, and ethical character support one another.

Other kandas offer additional governance cues that align Ramrajya with public duty and political prudence. In Kishkindha Kand, the narrative expresses anxiety over the decline of good rule and the rise of wicked activity, implying that governance shapes moral ecology:

"अर्क जवास पात बिनु भयऊ। जस सुराज खल उद्यम गयऊ॥"

The same section shows Rama's commitment to legitimate and stable authority by directing that the kingship be granted rightly:

"रामकहाअनुजहिसमुझाई।राजदेहुसुग्रीवहिजाई॥"

Another moment dramatises consultative and public deliberation when Lakshmana summons the townspeople and Brahmin assembly to resolve the political question of rule:

"लछिमन तुरत बोलाए पुरजन बिप्र समाज।

राजु दीन्ह सुग्रीव कहँ अंगद कहँ जुबराज॥"

These passages do not describe a modern electoral democracy, but they do emphasise consensus, stability, and legitimate succession, all central concerns of governance.

In Aranya Kand, a striking statement links governance, ethics, and practical resources:

"राजनीतिबिनुधनबिनुधर्मा।हरिहिसमर्पेबिनुसतकर्मा।।"

The force of this line is its realism: devotion and intention are not enough without ethical action, wise policy, and responsible administration. It implies that governance requires both moral

purpose and practical competence (Tulsidas, Aranya Kand). Even in Sundar Kand, where governance references are less direct, the text connects righteous conduct to stable rule, suggesting that an "unshakeable rule" must be grounded in devotion and ethical discipline:

"राम चरन पंकज उर धरहू। लंका अचल राज तुम्ह करहू।।"

and that auspicious policy is the pursuit of righteous conduct:

"जासु सकल मंगलमय कीती। तासु पयान सगुन यह नीती।।"

These passages extend the governance idea beyond one kingdom and suggest that political stability is inseparable from moral grounding.

Contemporary academic tradition reinforces this interpretive frame with the association of Ramrajya to constitutional politics. Khushi Gupta holds that Ramrajya is intelligible as a sacro-civic model, a divine-democratic ethic in which spiritual responsibility is a supportive of civic order. This is an alternative principle to make Ramrajya a king, but consultative decision-making and welfare orientation are also important, something that may resonate with the constitutional framework and popular responsibility (Gupta, *Vision of Ramrajya*). The current societies find this reading relevant since it can make Ramrajya a valid normative horizon of democratic rule and not a concrete guideline of how political organisation is to be. Kumar and Jyoti are also as emphatic about the welfare orientation of Ramrajya and the moral ground of governance, in which they refer to it as a criterion of good governance, in which failures of modern times can be measured.

This is where the analogy between Rawls is more evident. Rawls gives a process of justice; Ramrajya gives a world of moral justice. Rawls is an institutional theorist; Ramrajya is an ethical governance and utopian social philosophy. Both are directed at decency and the defence of the least privileged. Rawls expresses this objective in the form of the Difference Principle; Ramrajya

envisions a social state where there is no deprivation and fear. Nevertheless, the underlying distinction is the issue of moral formation. Rawls uses the framework of rational agreement and institutional design, but the criticism by Sandel and Taylor demonstrates how a society can be fair in theory but not have a common civic virtue. Ramrajya provides direct answers to this missing factor by stating that justice needs a culture of virtue, compassion, and love for each other. It is not just about inquiring what fair rules are. It poses the question: What sort of people should we be to get justice in reality?

Rawls has some significant strengths. His Liberty Principle affords great safety against despotism. His Veil of Ignorance presents an interesting moral way to eliminate prejudice, and his Difference Principle will not allow one to ignore the poor. The approach provided by Rawls can serve as a common moral language in plural societies because it does not put justice in the framework of a specific religious tradition. There are also weaknesses with Rawls. Nozick cautions that redistributive patterns can put liberty at risk; Sen claims that the primary goods are inadequate; Cohen observes that incentives are bound to weaken moral community; Okin uncovers gender blind spots; Beitz widens the horizon beyond the nation. These criticisms demonstrate that the architecture of Rawls must be repaired and extended at all times. It is solid as a framework, but unsatisfactory as a comprehensive vision of social flourishing.

Ramrajya, on the other hand, is not an architecturally procedural one but is complete ethically. Its most powerful feature is its combination: justice is paired with duty, care with charity, leadership with responsibility, and peace in society with its moral restraint. It also encompasses an ecological sensitivity in the broader perspective of harmony and safeguarding of living creatures, which contemporary science has pointed out as applicable in current governance discourse (Gupta, *Vision of Ramrajya*). Ramrajya is therefore providing a solid language of judging political prosperity and

moral degradation, not by measurements of money and freedom, but by experienced happiness and ethical action.

The shortcomings of Ramrajya still have to be told as they are. Its idealistic image can be deemed unrealistic, and the general political misuse of the word can corrupt its moral essence. However, the Gandhian and scholarly framing lessens these dangers by stressing that Ramrajya is not sectarian power, but moral reign, and that utopian ideals are useful exactly as guides to orientation and not as road plans (Gupta). Moreover, Ramrajya can be changed into modern values of welfare and accountability through constitutional readings, so as to avoid being entangled in mythic nostalgia.

It is due to these reasons that we can say that Ramrajya is conceptually a better theory than justice as fairness in the writings of Rawls, not that Rawls is not correct, but rather, he is not complete. Rawls is a just structure; Ramrajya is a just civilisation. Rawls obtains rights by the process of reasonableness; Ramrajya maintains justice by moral culture. Rawls safeguards the least privileged by distributive provisions; Ramrajya envisions a world in which suffering has become a moral issue that cannot be tolerated by the leadership. Justice in a world of significant disparity, civic mistrust, and ecological crisis cannot be satisfied only by just institutions. It demands ethical leadership and a common moral horizon that unites the strong to the weak, but not as a relationship of mutual benefit, but as a responsibility of humanity. This is the essence of Ramrajya. It is a utopia that corrects the present. It is an ideal that brings the injustice to light. And in so doing, it is not a cultural memory at all, but a living vocabulary for a humane future.

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