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Racial Discrimination: Is Morally Justified or Not?

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Abstract:

Racial discrimination is one of the most debated issues in the perspective of applied ethics. A person when faces discrimination i.e., less favourable treatments in comparison to others because of his race, country, where he was born, his ethnic origin or his skin colour – is called facing racial discrimination. Racial discrimination can be direct and indirect. Direct discrimination happens when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation because of his race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin or immigrant status. However indirect discrimination happens when employers or service providers put in place conditions, requirements or practices which appear to treat the same but which basically causes disadvantage to some people because of their race, colour, descent etc.

Keywords: Discrimination, race, racial discrimination, equality, inequality, human rights, well-being and freedom.

Introduction: In our society in every stage there are differentiation between one and another. We see that a particular class of men get more opportunity than other class, e.g., whites get more facilities and advantages than blacks. So, everywhere there is discrimination in our society. Now, here we deal with the topic that racial discrimination is justified or not?

Those who opposed racial discrimination they argue that, racial discrimination is wrong because it denies equality principle, according to which every human being is equal. Now, the question is equal or every human being should be treated equality is an ethical principle? The answer is no, because everyone is different from another by virtue of intellect, qualification, etc. whatever lest we choose, it simply is not true that all human beings are equal. For example, some are tall, some are short, and some are good at mathematics. Newton and a layman should not have the same status. Here normally a question arises, that – do we here discriminate one man from another? The answer is no, because there is a distinction between difference and discrimination. Difference does not imply discrimination. In the above examples, we just differentiate one man from other that does not imply that, we are doing discrimination.

Here we can ask, that where the question of discrimination arises? The question is, when we differentiate a human being from other human being by virtue of his or her birth or race, and then the question of discrimination arises.

It is mentioned that, every human being should be treated equally, because, human being are different by virtue of birth, they should be treated differently, here, in this argument the notion of discrimination. So we see that there is a fundamental difference between differentiation and discrimination. [When we favour a particular class or persons due to their birth, then it is called discrimination.] For example, for a prestigious job we select a person not for his qualification or talent, but because he is white and comes from a royal family and at the same time we do not select a person though he has more talent than the white, just because he is black and comes from a lower middle class family. In such case racial discrimination takes place.

There are many arguments in support as well as against i.e., racial discrimination. Those who talk about equality or equal opportunity opposed racial discrimination. But this is not an easy task, because there is very strong argument in favour of racial discrimination.

The supporters of racial discrimination argue that from the beginning human beings are different from one another. Some men are born in a higher status royal family and others are in a lower class family. Those who are born in a royal family certainly have more physical and mental potentiality than those who are born in a lower class family. So it is obvious that prestigious jobs are done quite easily by the principle of royal family than lower class family.

To support the above view Jonson says that, there are genetic factors by which a particular race is more intelligent than others, or whites are more intelligent than blacks. If genetically whites are better performance a job than blacks, then there is nothing wrong in doing discrimination. If there are genetic factors in racial differences in IQ, there will be genetic factors in racial differences in occupational status, income and social class. So, if we give lots of effort to overcome the environmental disadvantages which less developed black children have in their homes and their schools, then also they would not become as talented as white, because of genetic factors.

To reply to the above arguments, those who believe in principle of equality also give counter arguments. But before we state those arguments are first state what does it mean by principle of equality? There are two parts in equal opportunity principle. First is, any position should be awarded to the individual by virtue of his or her qualities and abilities. The second is that individuals should have equal chances to acquire the qualification.

But the supporters of racial discrimination also argue that when according to principle of equality we differentiate one human being from other by virtue of qualification we are actually doing discrimination and ability, not due to birth, but still here we discriminate one individual from other.

Again the supporters of the principle of equality do not agree with the above view. They argue that there is no reason why we discriminate a individual by virtue of birth or race? Why not on whether a person was born is a leap year? Or whether is more than one vowel in her surname? All these characteristics are equally irrelevant.

The supporters of equal opportunity principle argue that racial discrimination is ethically wrong, because every human being is equal. John Rawls suggest that every human being is equal because they equally share a natural characteristic and he calls this natural characteristic as 'range property'. If we draw a circle, then all the points within the circle are called the 'range' and 'being with in the circle' is the property which all the points equally shared. Similarly, Rawls suggests that, property of 'moral personality' is In the natural property which all human being possess and if they possess it, they possess it equally, because all human being are in the range. Though every human being is different from other, yet everyone being is the range of human being they all equally shared the property of "moral personality". By 'moral personality' he does not mean morally good person. We can say that to be a moral person is to be the kind of person to whom one can make moral appeals.

But there are problems to use moral personality are a matter of degree. Some men are highly sensitive to the issues of justice and ethics generally, but the others for a variety of reasons have a very limited awareness of such principles. And the suggestion that being a moral person is the minimum necessary for coming within the scope of equality principle still open the question, that where this minimal line is to be drawn. Second objection is that, it is not true that all human beings are moral person, even in the animal sense. For example, infants and small children, some mentally defective human beings lack the required sense of justice. So, the possession of moral personality does not provide a satisfactory basis for the principle that all human beings are equal.

To answer this objection Rawls argues that though children and infants do not have any moral sense, yet they have the potentiality to be a moral agent. But still his argument is an ad-hoc argument, specially designated to square his theory with our moral institution, but his view cannot produce any independent argument. And Rawls also does not give any solution to the mentally defective ones.

To avoid this difficulties, the supporters of this view say, that equality is a basic ethical principle. When I make an ethical judgement, I must go beyond a personal or sectional point of view and take into account the interests of all those effected. So a basic principle of equality is the principle of equal consideration of interests. From this points of view race are irrelevant to the consideration of interest.

But the supporters of racial discrimination do not agree with the view of principle of equality. They argue that, in many cases though there have equal interest between two individuals, still there we are justifiable going discrimination. For example, in a medical school, most of the schools graduate of urban practice in the cities, so that people in rural area do not get adequate medical care. But the students of rural area practice anywhere of

the country. Then if the students of rural areas get extra opportunity at the time of admission, there is nothing wrong. So doing discrimination is not wrong all the time.

Though the supporters of racial discrimination trying to justify their view, yet their arguments are not satisfactory. Though they try to establish racial discrimination by virtue of genetic factors, IQ test, yet their arguments are not acceptable. The supporters of equal opportunity principle raise three main objections against them.

First, the genetic hypothesis does not imply that we should reduce our effort to overcome environmental disadvantages which backward classes or blacks have. But we can argue opposite conclusion that, if IQ is important black should have superior environment in order to component for the position of disadvantage from which they start.

Second, in the result of IQ test the average results of blacks. But the point is, that these results are average and say nothing about individuals. Many blacks can score higher than the average white and many whites can score below the average of blacks. It remains true that, individual blacks and whites must be treated as individuals, irrespective of their race.

The third argument is the most fundamental to prove, why the genetic hypothesis gives no support for racial discrimination. The principle of equality is not based on any actual equality which all people shared. The only defensible basis for the principle of equality is equal consideration of interests, like the interest in avoiding pain, in satisfying basic needs food and shelter and many others – are not affected by difference in intelligence. So equal statue does not depend on intelligence.

In the context of equal interests, the opposition of racial discrimination talks about human rights. They told that the equal interest of every human being like the interest in avoiding pain, needs for food and shelter etc. are secured or enjoyed by the human rights. Actually when we deny the human rights then racial discrimination takes place. So the supporters of racial discrimination deny the fact that there any such right which we can call human right. And they also said that if there are no human rights which every human being equally possesses, then the question of equality or equal interest does not arise. But this is not true, there are some rights without which we cannot live a life as a human being and these rights are human rights.

Before we answer the question, whether there any human rights or not, we first answer the question that – what is human right? The right which every human being enjoy morally is called human right. To have a human right is to have a moral claim to exercise that right. Human right in this proper sense of the term is not something which is given us by a person or a group of person or an institution, because it is not a favour given to anyone. If my right is denied by anything, then the action of that person is considered as immoral action.

So, the general characteristics of human rights are first, it must be possessed by all human beings as well as only human beings. Second, because it is the same right that all human beings possess, it must be possessed equally by all human beings. Third, there are no higherchry so far as human being is concerned. Fourth, if there is any human right, they have

the additional characteristic of being assertable, in a manner of speaking ‘against the whole world’. Since this right is not given by someone, it cannot be taken away by anyone. And lastly, since this right does not accure at particular points of time it must be present all the time since birth.

Now the question is, whether any such rights are or not. According to Vlastos wellbeing and freedom are two rights which we can call human rights, because they have intrinsic value to be human rights. And in all cases where human beings are capable of enjoying the same goods this intrinsic value of their enjoyment is the same. So one man’s well-being and freedom are as valuable as others.

But this is not enough to say that well-being and freedom are human rights. Here we must answer three important questions. First, why should anyone have a right to the enjoyment of any goods at all, and, more specifically, well-being and freedom? Second, for what reasons might we be warranted in believing that the intrinsic value of the enjoyment of such goods is the same for all persons? And third, even if someone ought to have a right to well-being and freedom and even if the intrinsic value of person’s enjoyment of these things is equal, why should all men have the equal right?

To answer the third question is simplest than others. If anyone has a right to well-being and freedom and if the intrinsic value of any person’s enjoyment of the goods is equal, then all men should have equal right to enjoy the goods. Because it would be irrational as to the possession of these rights.

To answer the first question Vlastos says that, these enjoyments are values. If well-being and freedom are something valuable and especially intrinsically valuable, then it seems to follow that this is the kind of thing to which one ought to have a right. So, though well-being and freedom are intrinsically valuable, yet they are human rights.

As to the first question more general answer is also possible. If we are asked why ought anyone to have a right to anything or why not have a system in which there are not rights at all, and then the answer is that such a system would be a morally impoverished one. And by these rights one ought to be able to proceed those minimal things without which it is impossible develop one’s capabilities and to live a life as human being.

To answer the second question is why the intrinsic value of the enjoyment of such good, is the same for all human beings equally are capable of enjoying the same goods, e.g., relief from acute physical pain.

Conclusion: so, by the above arguments we prove that, there are human rights which all human beings equally possess. Through inspection of human history as well as our own lives, the denial of human rights makes it impossible to live either a full or a satisfying life. And by proving human rights we also prove that racial discrimination is something immoral or justifiable by any reason. So, we cannot support racial discrimination. Though there are human rights which equally shared by all a human being, yet all human beings are equal due to human rights.

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