

Sample :

Q. Compare Rawlsian Justice with Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. What are their implications for redistributive justice?

ANS: Comparing Rawlsian Justice and Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach: Implications for Redistributive Justice

John Rawls and Amartya Sen are two of the most influential thinkers in modern political philosophy, particularly on the subject of justice. Both critique utilitarianism and advocate alternatives that prioritize fairness and human dignity. However, their approaches diverge fundamentally in both conceptual foundations and implications for redistributive justice.

Rawlsian Theory of Justice:

Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), constructs a theory of “*justice as fairness*” using the hypothetical *original position* and the *veil of ignorance*. His two principles of justice are:

1. **Equal basic liberties** for all.
2. **Social and economic inequalities** are just only if they benefit the *least advantaged* (the *difference principle*) and are attached to positions open to all under conditions of *fair equality of opportunity*.

Rawls emphasizes the *distribution of primary goods* — income, wealth, opportunities, rights, and liberties — assuming that individuals will pursue their own life plans more effectively if these goods are distributed fairly. Justice, for Rawls, lies in establishing institutions that ensure fair access to these goods.

Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach:

Sen, in contrast, argues in *Development as Freedom* and *The Idea of Justice* that Rawls' reliance on primary goods is insufficient. He introduces the *capabilities approach*, focusing not on what resources people possess but on what they are *actually able to do and be* — their *capabilities and functionings*. For example, two individuals with the same income may achieve vastly different outcomes due to personal, social, or environmental factors (e.g., disability, discrimination, or lack of public services).

Sen's theory emphasizes **individual freedom to achieve valuable functionings** (e.g., being nourished, educated, mobile, or politically active). He criticizes Rawls for being too institution-focused and for insufficient attention to *real-life differences in human diversity and social conversion factors*.

Implications for Redistributive Justice:

Both theories support redistributive justice but differ in emphasis:

- **Rawlsian redistribution** is justified insofar as it maximizes the position of the least advantaged by equalizing the distribution of primary goods. Institutions (like taxation and welfare) must be designed to ensure that inequalities work to everyone's advantage, especially the most vulnerable.

- **Sen's redistribution** focuses more on *enhancing individuals' real freedoms* — such as access to healthcare, education, and social participation. Redistribution is not just about material resources but also about enabling individuals to convert those resources into meaningful capabilities. For Sen, justice requires correcting structural disadvantages and ensuring conditions for people to lead lives they value.

Comparative Insights:

- **Metric of Justice:** Rawls uses primary goods; Sen uses capabilities.
- **Equality Focus:** Rawls seeks fairness in resource distribution; Sen emphasizes freedom to achieve outcomes.
- **Redistribution Rationale:** Rawls supports redistribution to uphold fairness within institutions; Sen supports it to promote real opportunity and remove unfreedoms.

Conclusion:

While Rawls provides a powerful institutional framework for fairness, Sen adds depth by focusing on individual agency and diversity. Together, they offer complementary visions: Rawls helps structure just institutions; Sen ensures that justice reflects the lived realities of individuals. For effective redistributive justice, both resource equality and real freedom must be considered.

Here is a **detailed evaluation** of your answer on *Rawlsian Justice vs Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach and their implications for redistributive justice*, based on standard HPSC answer writing parameters (like clarity, structure, conceptual depth, analytical balance, and word economy):

✓ STRENGTHS

1. **Clear Structure and Logical Flow:**
 - The answer follows a well-organized format: introduction, individual theories, comparative section, and conclusion.
 - Subheadings enhance clarity and make the answer easier to follow.
 2. **Conceptual Accuracy:**
 - Rawls' principles are correctly explained (original position, veil of ignorance, primary goods, difference principle).
 - Sen's approach is also well-articulated — especially the focus on *capabilities*, *functionings*, and *conversion factors*.
 3. **Effective Use of Examples:**
 - The example of two individuals with the same income but differing outcomes is an excellent way to highlight Sen's critique of Rawls.
 4. **Balanced Comparative Insights:**
 - The "Comparative Insights" section neatly summarizes key differences in metrics, focus, and rationale — a helpful analytical device for evaluators.
 5. **Strong Conclusion:**
 - The synthesis offered in the conclusion — seeing Rawls and Sen as complementary — shows mature understanding and evaluative skill.
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⚠ AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. **Limited Critical Engagement:**
 - The answer does not engage enough with *criticisms* of either theory. For instance:
 - Rawls has been criticized for being overly idealistic and not addressing global justice.
 - Sen's approach is vague in operationalizing capabilities — there's no fixed list or institutional framework.
2. **Insufficient Real-world or Policy Examples:**
 - The answer could be enriched by **contemporary illustrations**, such as:
 - India's *welfare schemes* (e.g., MGNREGA or Ayushman Bharat) as applications of the capabilities approach.

- Scandinavian-style taxation models that reflect Rawlsian redistribution.
3. **Lack of Mention of Martha Nussbaum (Optional but Helpful):**
 - A brief reference to Nussbaum’s refinement of Sen’s approach through a defined list of capabilities would show advanced understanding.
 4. **Slight Redundancy:**
 - Some ideas are repeated — e.g., “freedom to achieve outcomes” vs. “real opportunity” appear in both the Sen and the comparative sections.

■ EVALUATION (Out of 10)

Criteria	Score
Structure and Organization	2/2
Conceptual Clarity and Accuracy	2/2
Depth of Analysis	1.5/2
Critical Thinking & Evaluation	1/2
Use of Examples/Applications	1/2
Total	7.5/10

✓ How to Upgrade to 9+/10

- Add **real-life policy examples** to show relevance of theories in practice.
- Include **critiques or limitations** of both Rawls and Sen.
- Consider inserting 1–2 lines showing where **their theories converge/diverge on global justice or practical policy-making**.
- Briefly mention **Nussbaum’s elaboration** for academic depth (if space permits).