
Chapter 3

Equality

❖ Concept of Equality

- The smooth functioning of society requires division of work and functions and people often enjoy different status and rewards on account of it.
- At times these differences of treatment may appear acceptable or even necessary.
- The commitment to the ideal of equality does **not** imply the elimination of all forms of differences.
- It merely suggests that the treatment we receive and the opportunities we enjoy must **not** be pre-determined by birth or social circumstances.
- The concept of equality implies that all people, as human beings, are entitled to same rights and opportunities to develop their skills and talents, and to pursue their goals and ambitions.
- It is **not** the lack of equality of status or wealth or privilege that is significant but the inequalities in people's access to such basic goods, as education, health care, safe housing, which make for an unequal and unjust society.

❖ Natural and Social Inequalities

- Natural inequalities emerge between people as a result of their different capabilities and talents and characteristics based upon birth.
- These kinds of inequalities are different from socially-produced inequalities, which emerge as a consequence of inequalities of opportunity or the exploitation of some groups in a society by others.
- Differences of this kind reflect the values of a society and some of these may certainly appear to be unjust.
- It is difficult to use the natural or socially-produced distinction as a standard by which the laws and policies of a society can be assessed.



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- For this reason, many theorists today differentiate between inequality arising from choices and inequalities operating on account of the family or circumstance in which a person is born.

❖ Dimensions of Equality

- **Political Equality**

- It includes the grant of equal citizenship to all the members of the state.
- These are rights that are considered necessary to enable citizens to develop themselves and participate in the affairs of the state.
- These rights are legal and guaranteed by the Constitution and laws.

- **Social Equality**

- The pursuit of equality requires that people belonging to different groups and communities also have a fair and equal chance to compete for those goods and opportunities.
- Thus, it is necessary to minimise the effects of social and economic inequalities and guarantee certain **minimum** conditions of life to all the members of the society.
- A society in which equality of opportunity does **not** exist, a huge pool of potential talent tends to be wasted.
- The problem regarding equal opportunities in India arises **not** only due to lack of facilities but also some of the customs that may prevail in different parts of country, or among different groups.

- **Economic Equality**

- Economic inequality exists in society due to significant differences in wealth, property or income between individuals or classes.
- Most democracies try to make equal opportunities available to people in the belief that this would at least give those who have talent and determination the chance to improve their condition.

❖ Feminism

- It is a political doctrine of equal rights for women and men.

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- Feminists are those men and women who believe that many of the inequalities visible in society between men and women are **neither** natural **nor** necessary and can be altered so that both women and men can lead free and equal lives.
 - According to feminists, inequality between men and women in society is the result of patriarchy.
 - Patriarchy produces a division of labour by which women are supposed to be responsible for “private” and “domestic” matters while men are responsible for work in the “public” domain.

❖ **Marxism**

- Marx was an important nineteenth century thinker who argued that the root cause of entrenched inequality was private ownership of important economic resources.
- He pointed out that such private ownership did **not** only make the class of owners wealthy, it also gave them political power.
- Therefore, he advocated the need to go beyond providing equal opportunities and try and ensure public control over essential resources and forms of property to eliminate inequality.

❖ **Liberalism**

- Liberals uphold the principle of competition as the most efficient and fair way of distributing resources and rewards in society.
- They believe that while states may have to intervene to try and ensure a minimum standard of living and equal opportunities for all, this cannot by itself bring equality and justice to society.
- Competition between people in free and fair conditions is the most just and efficient way of distributing rewards in a society.

❖ **Promotion of Equality**

- **Formal Equality**
 - Formal inequality is constituted by social, economic and political inequalities all over the world that are protected by customs and legal systems that



prohibit some sections of society from enjoying certain kinds of opportunities and rewards.

- Formal inequality should come to an end in order to promote equality.
- Attainment of equality requires that all such restrictions or privileges that have social and legal sanction should be brought to an end.

- **Differential Treatment**

- It is necessary to treat people differently in order to ensure that they can enjoy equal rights.
- Certain differences between people may have to be taken into account for this purpose.

- **Affirmative Action**

- It is based on the idea that it is **not** sufficient to establish formal equality before law.
- Most policies of affirmative action are designed to correct the cumulative effect of past inequalities.
- Special assistance in form of affirmative action is expected to be a temporary or time-bound measure.
- The assumption is that special consideration will enable these communities to overcome the existing disadvantages and then compete with others on equal terms.
- According to the critics of positive discrimination, any provision of reservations or quotas for the deprived of admissions in higher education or jobs is unfair as it arbitrarily denies other sections of society their right to equal treatment.

