

# On Equality Class 7

Equality is a condition in which adequate opportunities are given to all. It is the soul of Indian democracy.

## Equal Right to Vote

In a democratic country like India, adults, irrespective of their religion, caste education, status or place of birth, are given the right to vote under Universal Adult Franchise.

## Does Equality Exist

- In reality, a difference exists between rich and poor.
- The caste system is also rigid.
- Dalits in India and minorities are denied the right to dignity and equality.

## Equality in Indian Democracy

- The Indian Constitution recognizes every person as equal. However, it does not mean that inequality does not exist in India.
- Universal Adult Franchise gives political equality, not social and economic equality.
- Dignity is the thinking or state of being worthy of esteem or respect.
- The dignity of an individual is violated on the basis of their caste, religion or gender.
- The government has tried to implement equality first through laws and second through government programmes or schemes to help disadvantaged communities.
- Everyone is equal before the law. There is no discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, religion, race, gender; everyone has access to all public places and untouchability has been abolished.
- Programmes like the mid-day meal scheme have been launched to improve the attendance and enrolment ratio of children in schools.

## Issues of Equality in other Democracies

In the USA also the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's restored the dignity of Afro-American based on colour.

Equality is the soul of Indian democracy. It influences all aspects of its functioning.

In a democratic country like India, all adults irrespective of what religion they belong to, how much education they have had, what caste they are, or whether they are rich or poor are given the right to vote, which is called Universal Adult Franchise.

Universal Adult Franchise gives political equality to the people but it does not ensure social and economic equality.

Kanta Devi is a domestic worker. She has gone to vote. She is standing in the queue and is waiting for her turn like others. She is happy that she is equal to all of the others because of each of them lies one vote. It gives her a good feeling that even wealthy and influential persons are standing in the queue.

But the world beyond it is something else. In this world, there is no equality. When Kanta has to face the bitter reality of this world, she becomes sure that she is prey to social and economic inequality. She cannot compare herself with the members of her Saheb's family, where she works as domestic help.

The only guarantee of voting rights to all adult persons is not the solution of all the problems. There are many people like Kanta in our country who have the right to vote but whose daily living and working conditions are far from equality.

There are several kinds of inequalities that exist in our country. Just take the example of the caste system which has been in existence in India for centuries. This deeply-rooted evil has created divisions among people.

The lower caste people and Dalits are the exploited lot. They have always been discriminated against.

Dalit means broken. Dalits belong to the unprivileged class.

Omprakash Valmiki is a famous Dalit writer who writes about his bitter experience for being a Dalit in his autobiography, Jonathan. His headmaster tortured him greatly. He made him sweep the school and the playground. While other children in his class were studying he was sweeping. This was very much insulting for him.

The Ansaris were also exploited, people. They were not given a flat by the landlady simply because they belonged to other religion.

Both Omprakash Valmiki and the Ansaris are badly treated. Their dignity is hurt.

The Indian constitution recognises every person as equal. While earlier no law existed to protect people from discrimination, now there are several that work to see that people are treated with dignity and as equals.

Every person is equal before the law. What this means is that every person from the president of the country to a domestic help like Kanta has to obey the same laws.

No person can be discriminated against on the basis of their religion, race, caste, place of birth etc.

Thus, there are several laws in India that protect every person's right to be treated equally.

In addition to laws, the government has also set up several schemes to improve the lives of communities and individuals who have been treated unequally for several centuries.

The Midday meal scheme is one of the various steps of the government in this direction.

Under the midday meal scheme, all government elementary schools provide children with cooked food.

This scheme has helped increase the enrolment and attendance of poor children in school.

In spite of all these efforts to increase equality of opportunity, there continue to be big differences in our country between schools that the rich attend and those that the poor attend.

India is not the only country where there is inequality. There are many democratic countries around the world where the issue of equality continues to be the key issue around which communities struggle.

In the United States of America, the African-American were seriously discriminated against. They were considered to be social inferiors.

In the late 1950s there took place a movement known as the Civil Rights Movement for equal rights for African-Americans. Rosa Parks became the leader of this movement.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion or national origin.

The struggle for the recognition of all persons as equal and for their dignity should be maintained so that we may be hopeful for a society of equals.

**Universal Adult Franchise:** It means that all adult citizens have the right to vote irrespective of their social or economic backgrounds. Here, adult means those who are 18 and above.

**Dalit:** It means broken.

**Dignity:** Thinking of oneself and other persons as worthy of respect.

**Constitution:** A document that lays down the basic rules and regulations for people and the government in the country to follow.

**Civil Rights Movement:** This movement took place in the USA in the 1950s in which the African- Americans demanded equal rights and an end to racial discrimination.