

DELHI PUBLIC SCHOOL, JAMMU
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CLASS: - VII

Subject-Civics

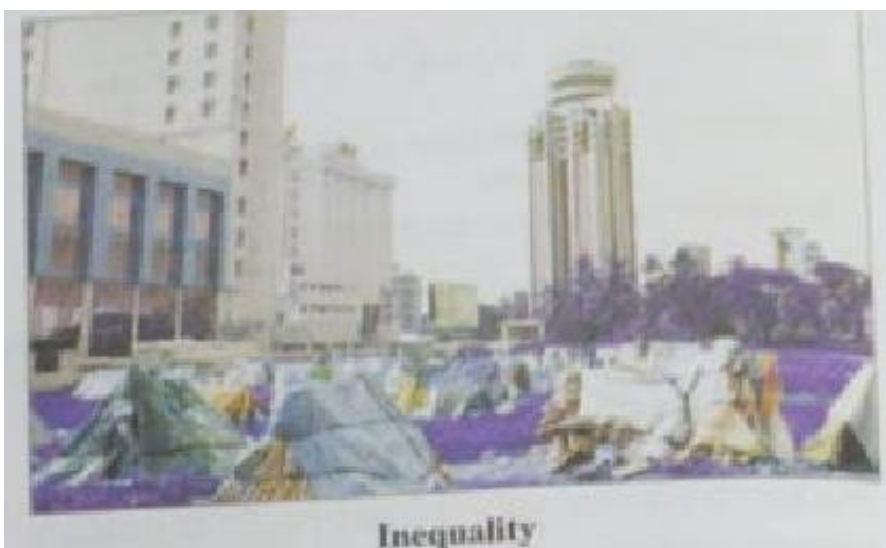
TOPIC: EQUALITY IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Democracy is the most popular form of government in the world. Active participation by the citizens, freedom to express one's opinion, resolving conflict through consensus and consultation, equality and justice are the main features of a democratic government. However, **equality** is the most important of a democratic setup. Treating everyone equally and holding the dignity of fellow citizens are core to democracy.

In a democracy, all adult citizens, regardless of their caste, religion, gender or class enjoy the right to vote. This is called **Universal Adult Franchise** which means that all adult citizens have the right to cast their vote and choose their representative. It is based on the principle of one person one vote & each vote has equal value. This system of government recognises the value of every citizen. Besides **political equality**, all democratic governments aim to achieve social as well as economic equality for their citizens.

INEQUALITY

In spite of the equal status granted by the Constitution, there are millions of people like Kanha and Aarti whose circumstances are far from equal. There are various forms of inequality prevalent in our society. **Unequal distribution of resources** is the main reason for the existence of inequality in the society. Due to lack of money, many people are deprived of even the most basic things, that is, food, clothing and shelter. People are discriminated on the grounds of class, caste, wealth, profession, gender and dis-ability. This leads to inequality and injustice.



CASTE INEQUALITY

The most common form of inequality in our society is the caste-system. **Caste system** is classification of society based on profession and this division has been there since ages. The term **Scheduled Caste** is used to refer to people belonging to lower caste. This system is more predominant in the **Rural areas**. Many renowned personalities like **B.R.Ambedkar and J.G.Phule** experience discrimination on grounds of caste. Even in the 21st century, in many parts of the country, underprivileged sections of the society can-not use the wells of the upper classes, enter temples, dine with upper class people, access public places and at times are even denied medical attention and even education.

When you flip through the newspaper, you find the numerous incidents of caste-based hostilities that point towards the existence of unfair caste practices. Homes of lower class people are situated outside the village limit as per the dictates of the powerful upper class. As a result, they are unable to benefit from amenities such as good roads, water, electricity, health-care and education. The government schools in some villages do not permit Dalit children to sit with upper caste children. In addition, even the census officers declined to record their information. So, most of the Dalit families do not exist in government record. This leads them without access to food and other welfare programs. Even in urban areas, people continue to practice caste system, though not in rampant and harsh ways as in rural areas.

GENDER-BASED INEQUALITY

Besides caste-based discrimination, **gender-based discrimination** is also wide-spread in our society. Women are paid less for the same amount in type of work done by men. Abortion, Neglect, abandonment and female infanticide are harsh realities of India as well as many other countries. The un-even sex ratio is due to dislike many people have for girl child.

EQUALITY IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

The Indian constitution recognises that all people are equal and no individual should be discriminated on the basis of caste, religion, tribe, economic standing or education. The following provisions have been made in Indian constitution for this :

- **All people are equal in the eyes of law**, be it the president or any ordinary citizen, and everyone has to abide by the laws laid down in the constitution.
- The Constitution **prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race. Caste, sex, disability or place of birth**. All citizens have equal rights to use wells, tanks, bathing ghats or roads developed by the government for the public.
- **Every citizen can access shops, hotels, parks and places of amusement** without any restriction.
- The Constitution also **forbids untouchability and it's practice in any form**.
- To promote equal service prospects, there is provision that grants **Equality of opportunity** in matters of public employment to any office under the government.
- To include people with dis-abilities in the main stream, the government enacted a **law in 1955**. It ensures them **Equal treatment and free education**. It emphasises that all public buildings should be dis-abled/friendly.



EQUALITY THROUGH WELFARE SCHEMES

The other way through which the government is trying to advance equality, as assured in the Constitution, is by promoting **welfare schemes**. The aim of these programmes is to provide better opportunities to all regardless of any caste, class, religious or economic differences.

Midday Meal Scheme

One Important step for promoting equality is the **midday meal scheme**. Tamil Nadu was the first state to introduce this scheme in 2001. This programme has many advantages. It has led to an increase in the number of enrolments. The attendance also improved. Earlier children went home on the pretext of having food and did not come back. It is not so now. It also helped in reducing caste discrimination as persons of different castes are employed to cook these meals. Moreover, children of all castes have their meals together. It also ensures that children get a healthy diet every day.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

The **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** also seeks to make education accessible to the maximum possible number of children in the age group of 6-14 years, especially girls and the depressed sections of the society.

The government is promoting many more schemes to bridge the gap between the various segments of society, but what is critical is that there is a need to respect every individual's uniqueness and to change the mindset of the people. It is necessary that people change their outlook; only then it will be possible to end inequality in society. Establishing equality in a diverse country like ours is a constant fight, as it involves changing the way of thinking prevalent since ages. Some other important programmes and acts implemented by the government are **MGNREGA, i.e., Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** (since 2009) which aims to generate employment opportunities for the youth in villages and to help in curbing migration to urban area. Then, there is **National Rural Health Mission (NHRM)**, which is supposed to provide better medical facilities to people in villages.

ISSUE OF EQUALITY IN OTHER DEMOCRACIES

India is not the only country in the world that has been fighting to promote equality. The truth is that there are many more countries in the world that are struggling against injustice and inequality in the society. In class VI, we read about **Apartheid** and **Nelson Mandela's** long struggle to end this discrimination in **South Africa**. Similarly, present generation African-Americans in United States of America, whose ancestors came to this continent as slaves, continue to face discrimination and inequality. This is despite the fact that in the late 1950's there were mass movements and agitations by African-Americans, led by people like **Rosa Parks** and **Martin Luther King Jr**, for equal rights. Ultimately, **Civil rights Act passed in 1964**, prohibited discrimination on grounds of race, religion and nationality. Prior to the passing of this law, African-American children attended separate

schools. They could not enter public places like restaurants meant for whites and even in public transport they had to sit at the back and whenever, a white person wanted to sit they had to leave their seat. Rosa Parks' refusal to vacate her seat for a white man stirred up a huge movement among the seething African-American community. However, laws are not sufficient to promote equality in society. Even today, after implementation of so many laws, the African-American community continues to be the poorest in the country. A majority of these people cannot afford to send their children to private schools and colleges and in many cases are even deprived of the most basic facilities.

Thus, we can conclude from the above discussion that no nation in the world is completely democratic. In every country, there are sections of society fighting for greater recognition and equality. As discussed in the chapter, human dignity is core to democracy & people throughout the world are constantly fighting against injustice and inequality.

Laws alone are not sufficient to bring about change. What is required is **rigorous implementation of these laws and changing the attitude of the people.**

SOLVED QUESTIONS

Q1) - What is the main feature of Democracy?

Ans – Equality

Q2) – What do you mean by Universal Adult Franchise?

Ans – All the citizens above the age of 18 years have the right to vote.

Q3) – What is the main reason for existence of inequality in the society?

Ans – Unequal distribution of resources is the main reason.

Q4) – What does the law enacted by the government in 1955 ensure?

Ans – It ensures equal treatment and free education to the people with disabilities.

Q5) – What is the aim of MGNREGA?

Ans – It aims to generate employment opportunities for the youth of the village and to help curbing migration to urban areas.

Q6) – Explain the most common form of inequality in our society.

Ans - The most common form of inequality in our society is the caste-system. **Caste system** is classification of society based on profession and this division has been there since ages. The term **Scheduled Caste** is used to refer to people belonging to lower caste. This system is more predominant in the **Rural areas**. Many renowned personalities like **B.R.Ambedkar and J.G.Phule** experience discrimination on grounds of caste. Even in the 21st century, in many parts of the country, underprivileged sections of the society can-not use the wells of the upper classes, enter temples, dine with upper class people, access public places and at times are even denied medical attention and even education.

Q7) – Discuss the key elements that make democracy the most popular form of government.

Ans – Democracy is the most popular form of government in the world. Active participation by the citizens, freedom to express one’s opinion, resolving conflict through consensus and consultation, equality and justice are the main features of a democratic government. However, **equality** is the most important of a democratic setup. Treating everyone equally and holding the dignity of fellow citizens are core to democracy

Q8) – Explain the gender discrimination prevalent in Indian society.

Ans - Besides caste-based discrimination, **gender-based discrimination** is also wide-spread in our society. Women are paid less for the same amount in type of work done by men. Abortion, Neglect, abandonment and female infanticide are harsh realities of India as well as many other countries. The un-even sex ratio is due to dislike many people have for girl child.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q1) – Which of the following are the inequalities present in our society even today?

- a) Unequal distribution of resources
- b) Caste Inequality
- c) Both a & b

Q2) – What did the Government to include people with disabilities in the mainstream?

- a) Government ensured equal treatment & free education to the disabled
- b) Government passed an act in 1955
- c) Both a & b

Q3) - Which of the following are linked to gender discrimination?

- a) Women & men are paid equally
- b) Infanticide of female child
- c) There is a balance in sex ratio

Q4) – What does discrimination on the basis of religion show?

- a) Act against the basis of Democracy
- b) Sheer violation of the dignity of people belonging to particular religion
- c) None of these

Q4) – What can actually bring about a change in order to remove inequality in the society?

- a) Changing the attitude of people
- b) Fights & fire works
- c) None of these

