

Class VII

Social Science (Civics)

Chapter 1 - Equality In Indian Democracy. (Part I)

Equality means ensuring that every individual or group of individuals are treated fairly and equally without any discrimination.

Democracy and equality go hand in hand. Equality is the core of Democracy. All citizens, irrespective of their caste, Creed, religion, gender, place of birth, education or economic status are considered equal in a democracy.

FORMS OF INEQUALITY

1. GENDER INEQUALITY - Gender disparity exists in India in various forms. The stereotyping that male child is preferable to a female child gives rise to foeticide. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women exist in the society.

2. CASTE INEQUALITY - Caste inequality has existed in our country since ages. It has divided our society on the basis of caste and has deprived a vast section of our population of their right to live with dignity .

Untouchability has been declared a punishable offence by our constitution but even today we keep hearing of such cases.

3. RELIGIOUS INEQUALITY - Sometimes religious communities who are in minority suffer inequality and unfair treatment leading to friction between people of different religions.

**** How The Constitution Ensures Equality ****

The framers of our constitution were aware of the fact that various inequalities existed in our society at the time of Independence. Keeping this in mind they laid down certain provisions in the constitution of India which holds the principle of equality.

According to the constitution :

- * Right To Equality is a fundamental right. It provides equal status and opportunity to every citizen.
- * Article 14 - Equality Before Law- Law is same for every one - from Prime Minister to an ordinary citizen or from the rich to the poor.
- * Article 15 - No individual can be discriminated on the basis of race, caste, religion, place of birth or gender.
- * Article 16 - Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
- * Article 17 - Abolition of untouchability. Practice of untouchability is a punishable offence.
- * Article 18 - Abolition Of Titles. No titles other than military or academic can be awarded by state.

* Our Constitution guarantees Universal Adult Franchise. According to this, Right to Vote is given to every adult citizen.

**** How The Government Ensures Equality ****

The government seeks to implement equality in the country in two ways :

(1) It makes laws to protect the rights of the people who have suffered inequality.

For example :

(a) To empower women to participate in decision making at local levels, seats have been reserved for them in local bodies or panchayats and municipalities.

(b) Hindu Succession Act 2005 Ensures women equal share in the property of their father.

(c) Seeking dowry from women has been made a punishable offence.

(d) Equal Remuneration Act 1976 Ensures equal wages to men and women for equal work.

(e) The Disabilities Act of 1995 states that person with disabilities have equal rights. It also states that all public places should be accessible and provided with ramps.

(f) Reservation of a certain percentage of jobs for the schedule castes, schedule tribes and other backward classes.

(g) Some states provide for Reservation of jobs for religious minorities.

(2) Schemes And Programmes To Improve The Lives Of Disadvantaged Communities :

(a) Mid-day Meal Scheme has been introduced in all government schools.

(b) Education scholarships to Students belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in schools, colleges and higher education.

(c) Schemes for educating girls and children from tribal, dalits and Muslim Communities.

**** INEQUALITY STILL EXISTS ****

Even today many people in Indian society continue to suffer from inequality because of the following reasons : -

1. Poverty And Lack Of Resources - The poor people cannot afford the basic amenities like health and education. Being illiterate and ignorant, they are not aware of their rights and are often exploited.

2. Inequality On The Basis Of Caste, Religion Or Gender - Even today, low castes, especially in the rural areas, face discrimination. Preference for male child continues . In most households, women do not command the same position as men.

However success can be achieved only when the mindset and attitude of the people change and they learn to treat others with respect and dignity.

**** INEQUALITY IN OTHER DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES ****

The African - Americans had a long history of being used as slaves. Even after abolition of slavery, the African - Americans continued to suffer a life of segregation, humiliation and indignity.

It was in 1964 when the Civil Right Movement started by African-Americans, forced the American government to pass the Civil Rights Act to ban the segregation and racial discrimination in employment and education.

Despite all this, even today, the African - Americans suffer economic disparity.

Even in USA, women have always been a step behind men. Though women make up half of the U.S. workforce, the average working women earns only 77 percent of what the average working man makes.

In many European countries also, inequality and the gender discrimination are persisting even in present times.

**** CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRACY ****

Democracy can survive only if there is equality for everybody in all spheres of life. Age old beliefs, stereotyping, economic factors, illiteracy and ignorance are the factors which come in the way of providing equality in any democracy. Even though, the law of the land prohibits inequality, it is deeply rooted in the mindset and attitude of the people. Success of democracy is possible only if people change their attitude.