

## 7<sup>th</sup> – On Equality



**Equal right to vote:** India is a democracy. The key elements of a democratic government include people's participation, the resolution of conflict, and equality and justice. Equality is key feature of democracy and influences all aspects of its functioning. Universal adult franchise is an essential aspect of all democracies. The idea of universal adult franchise is based on the idea of equality because it states that every adult in a country, irrespective of their wealth and the communities she/he belongs to, has one vote.

**What Is The Government?** The government is the body that governs or administers a political unit like a country or state. The government has the authority to make laws, settle disputes, maintain security and enforce public order and discipline.

### Different Type of Government

1. **Monarchy:** It is a hereditary form of government in which a single ruler (king/queen, emperor) rules the country. Examples: Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
2. **Oligarchy:** It is a form of government in which a small group of people holds all the power. Examples: ancient Rome.
3. **Theocracy:** It is a form of government in which a group of religious leaders rule in the name of god and where governance is based on the tenets of that religion. Examples: Iran, Vatican City.
4. **Dictatorship:** It is a form of government where a person or group of people, who have seized power by force, rule (often military dictatorship). Examples: Germany under Hitler.
5. **Democracy:** It is a form of government in which the people govern the country, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through their elected representatives. Examples: Brazil, United States of America.
6. **Totalitarian Government:** In totalitarian governments, the state or the monarch exercises absolute control and regulates every aspect of citizen's lives. People have no participation in the making and implementation of laws.
7. **Democratic Government:** Democracy is a form of government where the people elect their representatives, who in turn govern the nation. In a democracy, people have all the power in their hands. Democracies can be of two types- direct democracies and indirect democracies. The earliest democracies were direct democracy, where power lay in an assembly of all people who chose to participate in the governance of the country. As countries grew bigger, people found that it was not possible or practical for everyone to be directly involved in governing the country; so the people elected representation who would govern on their behalf. This is called indirect or representative democracy. Here the majority is ruled by a small group of elected representatives.

### Other kinds of equality

- Kanta is one of many people who live in democratic India and who have the right to vote but whose daily living and working conditions are far from equal. Apart from being poor, people in India experience inequality in different ways. One of the more common forms of inequality in India is the caste system.
- '**Dalit**' is a term that the so-called lower castes use to address themselves. Dalit means 'broken' and by using this word, lower castes are pointing to how they were, and continue to be, seriously discriminated against. Omprakash Valmiki is a famous Dalit writer. In his autobiography, Joothan, he writes, "I had to sit away from the others in the class, and that too on the floor."

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- Mr. and Mrs. Ansari who were looking to rent an apartment in the city. When the landlady found out their names, she made an excuse about how she could not rent the house to someone who ate meat because the buildings did not have any non-vegetarian residents.

**Recognizing dignity:** The caste we are born into, the religion we practice, the class background we come from, whether we are male or female—these are often the things that determine why some people are treated unequally. When persons are treated unequally, their dignity is violated.

### The key elements of democracy

#### 1. Rule by the People

A democracy is a political system where the people choose the government through regular, free and fair elections. During elections, people choose their representatives from competing parties.

#### 2. Justice and Equality

Justice and Equality are the two pillars of democracy. Justice is to give each one what is due to him or her as a person. Equality means 'every citizen is equal before the law'.

#### 3. Guarantee of Basic Human Right to Every Citizen

- The right to freedom of speech and action
- The right to equality
- The right to information
- The right to freedom of religion
- The right to travel and settle anywhere in the country
- The right to assemble freely

#### 4. The rule of law

All citizens are equal in the eyes of the law. No one is above the law, not even a king or an elected president. No one may be arrested or imprisoned, without adequate reason. Torture or ill-treatment of prisoners is forbidden. This is known as the rule of law.

#### 5. Separation of powers

The three bodies of government—the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. The legislature is concerned with the making of laws. The executive deals with the actual execution of the laws. The judiciary enforces the laws made by the legislature. The courts are expected to be fair and impartial in their judgments.

### Equality in Indian democracy

- The Indian Constitution recognizes every person as equal. This means that every individual in the country, including male or female persons from all castes, religions, tribes, educational and economic backgrounds are recognized as equal.
- This is not to say that inequality ceases to exist. It doesn't. But at least, in democratic India, the principle of the equality of all persons is recognized.
- While earlier no law existed to protect people from discrimination and ill-treatment, now there are several that work to see that people are treated with dignity and as equals.
- This recognition of equality includes some of the following provisions in the constitution: every person before the law. Every person, from the President of the country to Kanta, a domestic worker, has to obey the same laws. No person can be



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discriminated against on the basis of their religion, race, and caste, place of birth or whether they are female or male.

- Every person has access to all public places including playgrounds, hotels, shops and markets all persons can use publicly available wells, roads and bathing Ghats. Untouchability has been abolished.

- Two ways in which the government has tried to implement the quality that is guaranteed in the constitution is first through laws and second through government programmes or schemes to help disadvantages communities.

- There are several laws in India that protect every person's right to be treated equally. The government has also set up several schemes to improve the lives of communities and individuals who have been treated unequally for several centuries. These schemes are to ensure greater opportunity for people who have not had this in the past. One of the steps taken by the government includes the midday meal scheme. This refers to the programme introduced in all government elementary schools to provide children with cooked lunch.

- Tamil Nadu was the first state in India to introduce this scheme, and in 2001 the Supreme Court asked all state governments to begin this programme in their schools within six months. This programme has had many positive effects. These include the fact that more poor children have begun enrolling and regularly attending schools. The Midday meal programmes also help reduce the hunger of poor students who often come to school and cannot concentrate because their stomachs are empty.

- While government programmes play an important role in increasing equality of opportunity, there is much that still needs to be done. While the midday meal programme has helped increase the enrolment and attendance of poor children in school, there continues to be big differences in our country between schools that the rich attend and those that the poor attend.

- Even today there are several schools in the country in which Dalit children, like **Omprakash Valmiki** are discriminated against and treated unequally. This is because people refuse to think them as equal even through the law requires it. One of the main reasons for this is that attitudes change very slowly. Even though persons are aware that discrimination is against the law, they continue to treat people unequally on the basis of their caste, religion, disability, economic status and because they are women. It is only when people begin to believe that no one is inferior, and that every person deserves to be treated with dignity, that present attitudes can change.

- Establishing equality in a democratic society is a continuous struggle and one in which individuals as well as various communities in India contribute to and you will read more about this in this book.

### Issues of equality in other democracies

- You are probably wondering whether India is the one democratic country in which there is inequality and where the struggle for equality continues to exist.

- The truth is that in many democratic countries around the world, the issue of equality continues to be the key issue around which communities struggle. Rosa Parks was an African-American woman.

- Tired from a long day at work she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a work refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man on 1 December 1955. Her

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refusal that day started a huge agitation against the unequal ways in which African-Americans were treated and which came to be known as the Civil Rights Movement.

- The civil rights act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion or national origin. It also stated that all schools would be open to African-American children and that they would no longer have to attend separate schools specially set up for them. However, despite this, a majority of African-Americans continue to be among the poorest in the country. Most African-American children can only afford to attend government schools that have fewer facilities and poorly qualified teachers as compared to white students who either go to private schools or live in areas where the government schools are as highly rated as private schools.

- In America, Rosa Park and Martin Luther King started the Civil Rights Movement.

### Challenge of democracy

- No country can be described as being completely democratic. There are always communities and individuals trying to expand the idea of democracy and push for a greater recognition of equality or existing as well as new issues.

### The Limits and Requirements for Democracy

- People must respect the law and reject violence. Groups with different interests and opinions must be willing to sit down with one another and negotiate. Every citizen must respect the rights of fellow citizens, and their dignity as human beings. People can question the decisions of the government, but they should not reject the government's authority.

