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Diversity and Discrimination

In the previous chapter we discussed the meaning and nature of diversity. In this chapter we shall learn how diversity also leads to inequality and discrimination at various levels. We will also see how the constitution of India strives to remove inequality and discrimination in our society. In fact, it proposes social and economic justice for all.



Diversity in dress and appearance

DIFFERENCE AND PREJUDICE

We have read how India is a land of diversities. More than 1600 languages are spoken by Indians, out of which 22 are officially recognised. We have followers of all religions of the world. People eat various types of dishes, celebrate different festivals and put on several kinds of dresses. But unfortunately we don't always respect or tolerate diversity. By nature most of us feel comfortable with people who eat, dress, talk and behave like we do. We feel uncomfortable with people who are dissimilar and unfamiliar. We all carry certain negative attitudes and opinions about people from certain castes, communities, regions or religions.

We generally feel that villagers are dirty, ill-fed and ill-clothed, narrow-minded and superstitious. But at the same time we think

ACTIVITY

Tick mark those you agree with. Afterwards, exchange notes with fellow students.

1. Fair complexioned girls are more beautiful than dark ones.
 2. Town-dwellers are well-dressed whereas villagers are not.
 3. Those speaking English are superior to those speaking Hindi.
 4. Villagers are simple and town-dwellers are clever and intelligent.
- What do you find?

they are simple and honest. On the other hand, people living in towns are generally believed to be well-fed, well-dressed, educated and liberal in attitude and behaviour; but money-minded and not so straight-forward. When our opinions about certain people are always negative, these become prejudices that we carry about them.

Prejudice means to judge others negatively or see them as inferior. We are generally prejudiced against people who are physically or mentally challenged. This is unfair. The government has provided them with reservation in government jobs in addition to various other facilities. They are now called 'people with special needs.'

When we feel that a particular way or method is the best and the most appropriate way to do things, we are likely to disrespect others who act or behave differently. For example, we can be prejudiced against a person, a community, a religion, a caste or a region. We generally feel that people who speak fluent English are superior to those

speaking in vernacular languages. Thus, we are prejudiced against people speaking in their mother tongues. In colleges, the prejudice is so strong that there are various circles of friends who don't mix up with each other. It is a negative emotion which is good neither for a person nor for our society and nation. Our Constitution does not favour this, nor our ethics and morals allow this.

We ought to judge a person purely on individual basis. Being free from any kind of prejudice is healthy for all. Prejudice leads to discrimination and disunity.

CREATING STEREOTYPES

When we are born, our mind is as pure and clean as crystal. Gradually, when we grow up we start forming ideas and attitudes, i.e, this is wrong – that is right, this is bad – that is good. This depends on what our parents and siblings think and feel. We start thinking : girls are weak, stupid, timid and beautiful; boys are bold, strong and intelligent. Likewise, when we see a person who is lame, blind, deaf or dumb, we pity them as helpless, unfortunate and poor. We say all sorts of things about them.

When we fix people into one image we create a **stereotype**. When people say that those belonging to a particular country, religion, race, caste or sex or economic background are 'dirty', 'lazy,' or 'criminal,' they are using stereotypes. Till very recently India was considered a backward nation, a country of snake charmers and mysterious rituals and tribal customs. People from Europe looked down upon us.



Earlier these people were seen as 'disabled'. Now the term used is 'people with special needs'. There are so many stereotypes about them.

Long ago Europeans considered the Asian people as corrupt, backward and lazy. Thus they created a stereotype about Indians and Asians.

ACTIVITY

List the common stereotypes about physically/ mentally challenged persons.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Let us consider some common stereotypes in our society. People of a particular community were considered illiterate, backward and orthodox. A common stereotype about them was that they deliberately keep girls away from schools. However, studies have shown that poverty is the chief reason for illiteracy among Muslims and vice-versa. Muslims from Kerala are educated, well-off, and liberal. A common stereotype about Christians is that they are well-educated, speak fluent English, and are liberal.

ACTIVITY

Tick mark the stereotypes about a mother.

1. A mother is an epitome of love.
2. She is cruel and harsh.
3. She is beautiful.
4. She is always at daggers drawn with grandma.

However, stereotypes are often incorrect and misleading. Stereotypes stop us from looking at each person as a unique individual (which one is) with his or her own special skills, virtues and vices, that are different from others. They fit a large number of people into a fixed pattern or type. We get affected by stereotypes and feel comfortable to live or act within them. A girl may be bold and strong to join the armed forces but stereotypes about her deprive her of working in the armed forces. Stereotypes also prevent us from judging people and situations correctly. They also lead to discrimination. Thus, they are harmful for society.

INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

When people act on their prejudices or stereotypes, it gives birth to discrimination. And discrimination breeds inequality. Let us see an example. During the Apartheid era in South Africa, Blacks and Indians were discriminated against. They were not allowed access to clubs, parks, hotels, first class railway compartments, etc., that were exclusively reserved for Europeans. Gandhiji launched protest and **Satyagraha** against the discrimination against Indians in South Africa. He was himself thrown off a train in South Africa despite having a proper first class ticket, because he was not a 'White'.



Sudha Chandran is a famous dancer and TV actress. One of her legs had to be amputated. She got a 'Jaipur foot' fixed. She continued dancing. Her determination and fierce will prevailed over her disability.

In India itself, caste based discrimination has been followed since ages. People from lower castes were maltreated by upper caste people. Even a touch or shadow of an untouchable or a 'dalit' was supposed to pollute a member of the upper caste. He was not allowed to draw water from the common well or attend a common dinner.

Did you know?

The government has categorised the castes as below :

1. Upper Castes/General Category
2. Other Backward Classes (OBC)
3. Scheduled Castes or Dalits (SC)
4. Scheduled Tribes or Adivasis (ST)

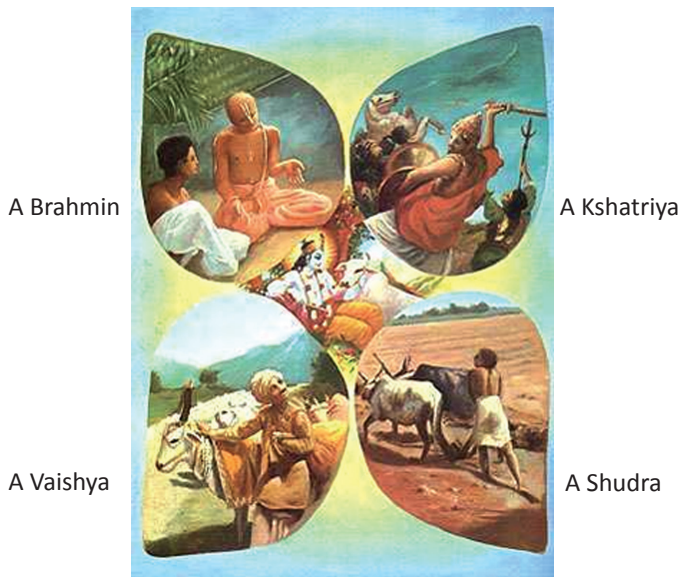
Caste based discrimination is well brought out in many stories by Premchand, a celebrated Hindi story-writer and novelist. In his story "Thakur Ka Kuan" ("Thakur's Well"), a low caste wage-earner is forced to drink dirty and stinking water. His wife goes to fetch clean water from the Thakur's well under the cover of darkness. As she tries to lower the bucket into the well, the Thakur gets up to enquire about the noise. Out of fear, she drops the bucket into the well and returns home empty-handed. Her waiting husband is compelled to quench his thirst by drinking impure water. Such was the fear of punishment!

People who lack resources and don't have money to buy basic needs like food, dress and housing are discriminated against in schools, colleges, offices, public places etc. Tribals or people from the Scheduled Tribes (STs) were also treated badly. They were looked down upon as untouchable, impure, poor, backward and illiterate. Their black skin, uncouth appearance and semi-naked body added to hatred and dislike against them.

We follow discrimination on the basis of activities and professions too. Activities like cleaning, washing, hair cutting, garbage picking are looked down upon. Those who are engineers, doctors, lawyers and officers are appreciated and praised. Their status is higher in our society.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

Have you ever thought why this happens? In ancient times, our society was divided into four classes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmins were supposed to be the priests and teachers. It was the duty of the Kshatriya to rule as kings and administrators. The Vaishyas had to work as peasants and merchants. The Shudras were supposed to do manual and lowly jobs for the three upper classes. Thus, occupation-based discrimination has its origins in the **Varna** system of ancient Indian society. For the same crime, punishment was harsher for Shudras than that for other three classes. Only



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

He had the greatest influence on Indian Constitution. Hence, he is known as the father of Indian Constitution. He was a great Dalit leader who fought for the rights of the 'Harijans' or the downtrodden castes. He was born in Maharashtra in a Mahar family which was considered untouchable. He went to England to study law and became a lawyer. Throughout his life he championed the cause of Dalits and fought for granting equality and justice to Dalits. He encouraged Dalits to send their children to schools. Youth were encouraged to join various government jobs. He urged them to take up other occupations and professions and give up the hereditary occupation. He advocated the entry of Dalits into all Hindu temples. He led a protest on many occasions. Later on, he converted to Buddhism as he thought it treated all people equally.

Dr. Ambedkar himself had to face severe discrimination at the hands of the upper castes. Let's recount some of his bitter experiences of caste discrimination.

Brahmins were allowed to read the **Vedas** and other sacred literature.

Gradually the four Varnas got subdivided into several castes. The castes proliferated into dozens of subcastes. The descendants of Shudras came to be known as 'Harijans' or Dalits.

ON BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956) was the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Case Study

THE FIRST EXPERIENCE OF CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION BY B.R. AMBEDKAR

One summer day, he and his elder brother, with their little nephew, set out to meet their father who worked as a cashier in Koregaon. They got in at Padali railway station and travelled up to Masur. As their father had not received their letter in time, so he didn't turn up at the station. After they had waited for an hour at the station, the station master turned up and asked questions. As they were well-dressed children, he thought that they were Brahmins. On being asked his caste, Bhim Rao replied honestly that he belonged to the Mahar community. Suddenly the station-master's attitude changed. He went away. When he returned the children requested him to hire a bullock cart. As the information had gone round among the cartmen that the children were untouchables, no one was ready to carry them. They were afraid of being polluted. The children were prepared to pay double the fare but no cartman was ready. Ultimately, one cartman who didn't know their identity, agreed to take them. Hardly had the cart gone a few yards when the cartman came to know their caste. In a fit of rage the children were thrown out. But the boys soothed the cartman's anger by sweet talk and by paying double the fare. Bhim's elder brother drove the cart, with the cartman following the cart on foot, because of the fear of being polluted. Nowhere did they get drinking water on the way. Every time people either pointed to the filthy water or asked them to go away.

This was the first rude shock for the young and budding mind of Bhim. That day he knew that he belonged to a family that was untouchable, condemned to drink and eat filthy things. A few days later, this impression became confirmed. Mad with thirst, one day, Bhim was drinking water stealthily at a public well. He was discovered and was beaten black and blue. On another occasion, a barber refused to give him a haircut on the pretext that his hair would defile the purity of his razor and him as well. So Bhim's sister cut his hair.

DISCUSS

Why were Ambedkar and his brothers thrown out of the cart?

Why did the barber refuse to give a haircut to Ambedkar?

What would have been the reaction of the stationmaster had the children been caste Hindus?

These incidents show the intensity of discrimination against Dalits. Even innocent children were not spared. All the cartmen refused to take the children; one who agreed, eventually followed the cart on foot from fear of being polluted!

The above stories tell us the extent of caste-based discrimination. Dalits were denied respect and dignity befitting human beings.

But these shocking and shattering experiences failed to break the spirit and determination of young Bhim. He was the first person from his caste who completed college education and went abroad for study. Later on, he drafted the Indian Constitution. He became the first law minister in Nehru's cabinet.

Did you know?

The so called lower classes did not want to be called untouchables or even 'Harijans'. They preferred to be called 'Dalits'. They wanted this name to show the world how they have suffered discrimination and social prejudices which have 'broken' (this is what Dalits means) them. The government calls them Scheduled Castes (SC).

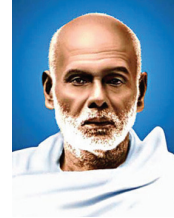
STRIVING FOR EQUALITY

The struggle for removal of caste-based inequality and for abolition of untouchability gathered momentum during the British Raj. Many prominent personalities – Jyotiba Phule, Sri Narayan Guru, E.V. Ramaswami Naiker and B.R. Ambedkar – came to the forefront of the movement. In the 20th century, the national movement became the main propagator of social reform. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi coined

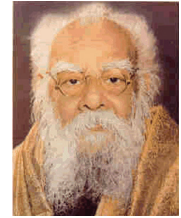
the term 'Harijan' for untouchables and called for removal of social discrimination against them.



Jyotiba Phule

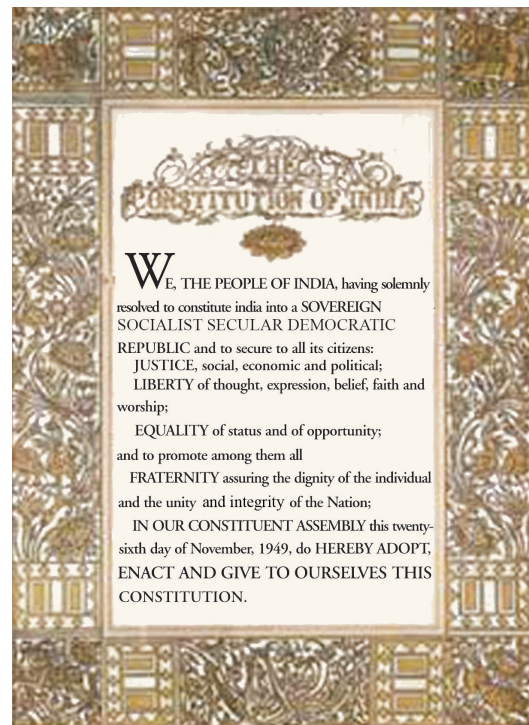


Narayan Guru



E.V.R. Naiker

When India became free, our leaders were concerned about removing social and economic inequality. Therefore, when the Constitution was written, untouchability was abolished. The Fundamental Rights guaranteed dignity, freedom and equality to all individuals. Women, children, old people and minorities are given special protection by the Constitution. To bring the lower castes at par in government jobs, the government has provided for reservation in jobs for **Scheduled Castes (SC - 15%)**, **Scheduled Tribes, (ST - 7.5%)** and **Other Backward Classes (OBC - 27%)**.

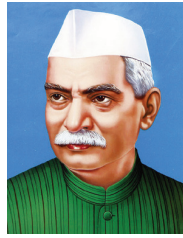


Preamble of the Indian Constitution

The goal of the Constitution-makers was that all citizens must be considered equal.



Jawaharlal Nehru



Rajendra Prasad



Abul Kalam Azad



Vallabhbhai Patel

Prominent members of the Constituent Assembly

This equality is seen as a key that unites all citizens of India. Everyone has been given equal rights and opportunities. People are free to follow and preach any religion they like. India is a secular country. The government does not show favour to or discrimination against any religion. Everyone is free to take up any profession or occupation. No discrimination is made on the grounds of caste, colour, creed, gender, place of

birth and religion in matters of access to public places and facilities.

All citizens enjoy the right to freedom of speech and expression. The citizens can assemble or gather peacefully at any place. They are also free to form associations or unions. All Indians are free to reside and settle in any part of India.

A person who thinks that his Fundamental Rights have been denied can move the Supreme Court or any High Court to restore these rights.

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

1. Right to equality.
2. Right to freedom of speech and expression.
3. Right against exploitation.
4. Right to freedom of religion.
5. Cultural and educational right.
6. Right to constitutional remedies.
7. Right to education

In spite of all these provisions in our Constitution, inequalities exist in our society at various levels. It is our collective responsibility to strive for removal of discrimination and inequality from our midst.

Points to Remember

- Prejudice means to judge other people negatively or see them as inferior. We can be prejudiced about many things : people's religious beliefs, the colour of their skin, the region they come from, etc.
- When we fix people into one image we create a stereotype. When people say that those who belong to a particular country, religion, race or sex are 'stingy', 'corrupt' or 'criminal', they are using stereotypes.
- Prejudice and stereotypes lead to inequality and discrimination. There is discrimination against people on the basis of caste, religion, region and socio-economic background. Poor people experience discrimination in offices, hospital, schools and colleges etc.
- In our country caste-based discrimination has been followed since centuries. Lower caste people and untouchables were badly treated. They had to face inequality and discrimination at the hands of upper caste people, especially Brahmins.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar belonged to a Mahar family of Maharashtra and it was considered untouchable. He had to face shocking discriminations since childhood. He studied hard and went abroad to study law. He was a great Dalit leader who fought for their rights, equality and privileges.
- The Fundamental Rights enshrined in the constitution guarantee equality and justice to all of us.

Glossary

- DALIT** : A term now being used to refer to so called 'Harijans' or 'Untouchables'. The government refers to this group as Scheduled Castes (SCs).
- DISCRIMINATE** : To treat someone unequally and disrespectfully.

O.B.C.	: Other Backward Classes.
PREJUDICE	: Pre-judging an individual, activity or situation negatively without any actual knowledge or basis.
SATYAGRAHA	: Protest against injustice, based on truth and non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi fought the British through Satyagraha.
S.C.	: Scheduled Castes.
STEREOTYPE	: Having a fixed notion or image about people or community.
VARNA	: The word means colour. Originally it was used to denote the four varnas of Hindus : (i) Brahmin, (ii) Kshatriya, (iii) Vaishya, (iv) Shudra.
VEDAS	: Most sacred literature of the Hindus. The Vedas throw light on the life and beliefs of the Aryans. The four Vedas are (i) Rigveda, (ii) Samaveda, (iii) Yajurveda, (iv) Atharvaveda.

TIME TO LEARN

A. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

- Choose the incorrect statement.
 - We always respect and tolerate diversity.
 - We don't always respect and tolerate diversity.
 - We generally feel comfortable with people who are similar to us in dress, habits and behaviour.
 - We generally feel uncomfortable with people who are dissimilar and unfamiliar.
- Choose the incorrect statement.
 - Prejudice means to judge others negatively or see them as inferior.
 - We ought to judge a person purely on individual basis.
 - Prejudice is healthy for individual and society.
 - Prejudice leads to discrimination and disunity.
- Choose a correct statement.
 - When we fix people and society into a particular image, we create a stereotype.
 - Stereotypes are often correct and justified.
 - Stereotypes stop us from looking at each person as a unique individual which one is not.
 - None of the above.
- Where people act on their prejudices or stereotypes, it gives birth to

(a) discrimination	(b) equality	(c) inequality	(d) both (a) and (b)
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- The caste system in India was based on

(a) inequality	(b) discrimination	(c) both of these	(d) none of these
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- Why did the cartmen refuse to carry Bhim Rao and his brothers?
 - Because they were Brahmins.
 - Because they were considered 'untouchables'.
 - Because they were tidy and well-dressed children.
 - Because they looked ugly and uncouth.
- Which of the following leaders campaigned against 'untouchability'?

(a) Jyotiba Phule	(b) Narayana Guru
(c) E.V. Ramaswamy Naikar	(d) All of these

8. Which of the following practices is not allowed/banned by the Constitution of India?
- (a) Caste-based discrimination (b) Gender-based discrimination
(c) Religion-based discrimination (d) All of these

B. Fill in the blanks

- All citizens enjoy the right to freedom of _____ and _____.
- _____ were supposed to be the priests and teachers.
- In ancient India, only “pure castes” were allowed to read _____.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was born in _____.
- The government has provided reservation to _____ to bring them at par with upper castes.

C. Very short answer type questions

- What is prejudice?
- Write two negative consequences of prejudice.
- Recall two stereotypes you may come across in daily life.
- What is inequality?
- Who is a Dalit?
- What is the main difference between discrimination and stereotypes?

D. Short answer type questions

- Describe an incident when young Ambedkar faced discrimination.
- Mention some provisions in our Constitution which guarantee equality.
- Who was the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee? Write a few lines about him.
- How does prejudice lead to discrimination? **[HOTS]**
- Mention caste-based discrimination practised in India.
- State five beliefs about girls and five about boys based on fixed notions in people’s minds or stereotypes.

E. Long answer type questions

- How are stereotypes created? What effects do they have on individuals and society?
- How was Indian society divided in ancient times? How did this lead to caste-based discrimination later on? **[HOTS]**
- Mention the contribution of Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi for removal of caste-based inequality in India.
- Mention the Fundamental Rights given in the Indian Constitution. Which values do these support?

[Value Based Question]

F. Project

Prepare a project report on caste-based discrimination in India.

- Method :
- Trace the history of development of caste-system from ancient times (varna system) to modern period.
 - Mention the contribution of social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, E.V. Ramaswamy Naikar, Narayana Guru, B.R. Ambedkar and M.K. Gandhi towards removal of caste-based discrimination.
 - Narrate your own experiences of caste-based discrimination.
 - Describe the provision in the Constitution aimed at ending social discrimination.

G. Activity

1. Visit a school for the blind or 'people with special needs'. Talk to them and share their experiences on discrimination.
2. Visit a village of Harijans or Dalits. Talk to the elderly people about caste-based discrimination.

LIFE SKILLS

- As you have learnt, any sort of discrimination based on caste, religion, gender, race or place of birth is not only ethically and morally wrong, it has also been legally banned in our society.
What will you do if you find any of the above type of social discrimination being practised in your locality?
- Read the biographies of Mahatma Phule, Narayana Guru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Develop and cultivate the habits and attitudes based on humanity, as enunciated by them.
- Read the Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi, '**My Experiments with Truth**'. Which life skills enabled Mohandas to become the revered leader of millions of people? Explain your views.