



SOCIAL EQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF INEQUALITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EQUALITY

SUBMITTED BY;

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the notion of equality and how it is related to our social life. As we know the principle of equality states that all human beings have the same moral worth and everyone should be treated equally irrespective of their caste, class, race, religion and nationality etc.

But equality is a relative concept and the demand for equality has always been against the prevailing inequalities in the society. In order to reduce the inequality first of all we have to know the causes of inequalities. Inequality acts as a hindrance on the path of development and also it affects the socio-economic growth of the society. Thus, equality is called as the need and requirement of human society.

Equality is essential to create a fair and just society where everyone has the same chances to succeed. Equality is necessary to achieve a fairer and more socially inclusive world.

Key terms – Equality, social inequalities, discrimination, impact of inequality, causes of inequality.

INTRODUCTION

The term equality refers to the fact of being equal in rights, status and advantages. Equality can be defined as the situation in which everyone has same rights and advantages. Undoubtedly, everyone is different from others in respect of biological construction, mental states and temperament but equality is to treating them with same level of respect. Equality implies the absence of unequal social privileges. It means to put aside social class, gender, race, sexual orientation and to give everyone equal opportunity to express themselves. Equality is a levelling process. It is significant only on the basis of its effect. Equality is a derivative value. The idea of natural equality of all men was a dominant theme from the seventeenth century onwards; philosopher like Thomas Hobbes took it for granted that in the state of nature men are equal in right. Basically, there are five kinds of equality such as (i) Social equality, (ii) Political equality, (iii) Economic equality, (iv) Civil equality, and (v) Equality of opportunities and Educational equality. But here our main concern is with social equality. Social equality means equivalent treatment of all the members of different groups within society regardless of individual distinctions of race, gender, age, class etc. It means all the citizens are entitled to enjoy equal status in society and are entitled to special privileges. There should not be any distinction of caste, group, class, clans and tribes.

The term equality has a key role in political discourse as well as in Philosophy. Since, complete equality among persons being impossible so it became more controversial. However, the concept of social equality plays an important role in Ancient Greek philosophy. According to Stoic philosophers' human reason is universal and, on this ground, all human beings are equal by possessing reason. In the *Republic* Plato considered the nature of equality when building a society. With regard to the concept of citizenship Aristotle has also developed a conception of equality. But the contemporary notion of social equality was developed by political Philosophers such as John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Amartya Sen in the 20th century. Robert Nozick challenged Rawls' conception of social equality.

A very clear-cut distinction has been made between natural inequalities and social inequalities. We should never confuse natural inequalities with social inequalities. On one hand natural inequalities are considered to be the result of the different characteristics and abilities with which people are born. On the other hand, social inequalities are those created by the society. Differentiation is the central to human society. No two human beings are similar. Differences is there but there should not be any kind of discriminations. Unfortunately, every society is divided into more or less distinct groups. No society is unstratified. Where there is social stratification there is social inequalities. However, social stratification refers to the process through which groups and social categories in societies are ranked as higher or lower to one another in terms of their relative position on the scales of prestige, privileges, wealth and power. This stratification involves the distribution of unequal rights and privileges among the members of a society. Inequality of statuses is the remarkable features of social stratification.

CAUSES OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Prior to discuss why equality is necessary for human society, we must understand that equality is a relative concept. The demand for equality has always been against the prevailing inequalities of the times and the existence of social inequalities is probably as old as human society. There are also different types of social inequality such as gender inequality, racial inequality, caste inequality, age inequality and class inequality. Recent research has shown that high levels of inequality have a consistently negative impact on welfare indicators such as literacy, life expectancy, mental illness and social mobility. So, to establish equality in the society as well as to reduce inequalities first of all we need to know what are the causes of inequalities. There are so many reasons behind social inequalities. The major reasons are as follows:

- **Slavery System**

Slavery was introduced in North America as early as in the sixteenth century. Slavery is an extreme form of inequality wherein some individuals are literally owned by others as property. In this system every slave has his master and he (master) has unlimited power over his slaves. The slaves have no political rights and they are treated as socially inferior. This slavery raises inequality and in particularly racial inequality.

- **Existing Casteism**

Caste system often used to justify inequality and oppression. It provides a way to rationalize why some people are born into poverty or low social status. Mahatma Phule has pointed out that such oppressions continue in the society because of ignorance and superstitions which are actually harmful to society. Such dogmatic thinking should be change and there is a need of social change. According to Phule A social change can be brought by mass education. Education is the key to emancipate the subjugated lower caste and women and to transform the unequal socio-economic power structures.

- **Class System**

In each and every society there are different classes and these classes are neither legally defined nor religiously sanctioned groups. Classes are relatively open and closed. Class differs in many respects and the major bases for class difference are wealth and occupation. In Karl Marx theory, he has also stated that in all stratified society there are two major social groups (I) Bourgeoisie (a ruling class) and (II) Proletariat (a subject class). As per Marx's view the capitalist systems create tremendous inequality and the process of exploitations is such that the rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer.

- **Race and Ethnicity**

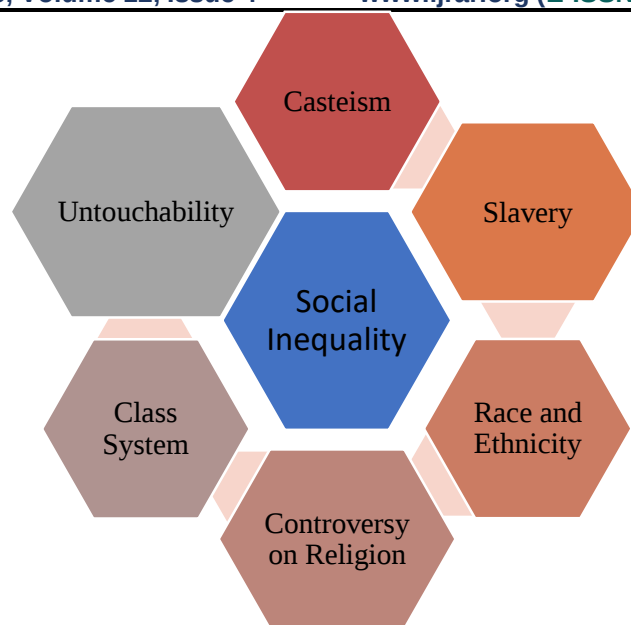
Race as a biological concept stands for a large category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics – colour of skin, facial features, size of head etc. On the other hand, ethnicity based on cultural traits. Ethnic group is defined as a common group of peoples with a common cultural heritage. In racist society physical characteristics are believed to be intrinsically related to moral, intellectual and other non-physical attributes and abilities, which also leads to inequality.

- **Untouchability**

In Indian culture we believe on the Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' which means that the whole world is one single family. In Vedic tradition it is described as all living beings on the earth belongs to one family. We all are the offspring of the cosmic father. But social discrimination and oppression as untouchability is such a form of social inequality, wherein we fail to acknowledge the plight of 'God's children'. After so many years of independence untouchability is still prevailing in some society. Untouchability divides society into touchable and untouchable groups. Those who are untouchable, they are treated as inferior having less access to resources. Untouchability is closely related to casteism.

- **Controversy on freedom of Religion**

No religion promotes social inequality, social conflict and violence. No religion is superior or inferior to other. But we live in such a passive society where people promote their own religion strictly. Extremists exhibit narrow-minded, hypocrite and orthodox fanaticism by contrasting freedom of religion and by offending other religions to prove their religion supreme. Tensions pertaining to religion not only hurt the sentiments of people, but also adversely affect the psychology, behaviour and intelligence of people.



THE IMPACT OF INEQUALITY ON SOCIAL LIFE

However, the above-mentioned points are the various reasons of social inequality or we can say these are the forms of inequality prevailing in the society. Now-a-days inequality is a serious problem. It acts as a hindrance on the path of development. It adversely affects the socio-economic growth of a country. Let's discuss on the impacts of inequality. They are as follows:

❖ Low living standard of the people

Due to unequal distribution of wealth and resources some people do not lead to a healthy lifestyle. One obvious reason for distributing resources is a way of making the poor better off. Many people in the world are poor and improvement in their life is possible through the equal access of resources. Because of inequality lifestyle of some people is degrading. The average quality of life also decreases in societies as inequality increases.

❖ Risk for national development

With growing inequality, the rich are pushed into ever more expensive luxury consumption (lavish weddings and parties, houses, aeroplanes, jewellery, etc.) to maintain their status among upper class groups. If every rich people wish to has a private jet, bungalow, yachts etc. then definitely national development will be impossible. Because development is not that only few will be rich and rest will die due to hunger. Inequality has a direct impact on growth, the concentration of wealth, the economic opportunities of populations, social cohesion, well-being, crime, political stability etc.

❖ Impaired moral capacity

In an unequal society some people are treated as superior and some as inferior and being treated as superior could foster cruelty, a lack of empathy and inhumanity. In some cases, the so-called superior group people don't even feel hesitate to harm the other group people. In this way they became more uncaring, less compassionate, less humane and therefore less human.

❖ Cognitive distortion

Cognitive distortion is negative or irrational pattern of thinking that cause individuals to perceive reality inaccurately. Being treated as superior leads to self-deception and also develops a false notion. This distorted conception also make them convinced that humiliation and degradation of others is justified for the society. There is nothing wrong with humiliating and treating people unequally.

❖ Emotional costs

Inequality also has some psychological effects. It affects people's mental health. Being treated as superior could have severe emotional costs including heightened stress, anxiety and aggression. Think of traditional norms of masculinity which could demand of men that they remain strong and in control, and provide all types of facility to their families. Thus, the pressure men may feel to meet these expectations or

the failure they experience if they do not meet them could be linked to emotional breakdowns, stress-related illnesses and even aggression and violence.

WHY DOES EQUALITY MATTER?

Equality is the need and requirement of human society. Equality is necessary to achieve a fairer and more socially inclusive world. It is essential to create a fair and just society where everyone has the same chances to succeed. Equality is a powerful moral and political ideal that has inspired human society for many centuries. There is an implicit belief almost in all religions that we all are the creation of God. As a political ideal the concept of equality invokes the idea that all human beings have an equal worth irrespective of their colour, gender, race, or nationality. Equality as an ethical and political thought centers on the belief that all human beings deserve the same moral consideration and the same treatment. The principle of equality states that all humans have the same moral worth. In the modern period the equality of all human beings has been used as a rallying slogan in the struggles against states and social institutions which maintain inequalities of rank, wealth status or privilege, among people. The demand for equality continues to be raised by struggling groups such as women or *dalits* who feel marginalized in our society. Today, equality is a widely accepted ideal which is embodied in the constitutions and laws of many countries. Articles 14,15,16,17 and 18 of the Indian constitution draw attention to the right to equality in detail.

However, it is inequality rather than equality which is most visible around us in the world as well as within our own society. In our country we can see slums existing side by side with luxury housing, schools with world class facilities and airconditioned classrooms along with schools which may lack even clean drinking water facilities or toilets, waste of food as well as starvation. There are glaring differences between what the law promises and what we see around us. Therefore, to restore peace and prosperity in human society equality is the urgent need.

CONCLUSION

Form the above discussion we can conclude that equality is about no one having less opportunity or choice. It can be understood as a situation in which everyone has equal rights and advantages. The concept of equality invokes that all human beings have an equal worth regardless of their colour, race, gender or nationality. Each individual is different from other. Differences are real but discrimination should not be accepted. Equality indicates the absence of unequal social privileges. No one should be treated inferior or superior than others. Each individual must enjoy equal status in the society. But in the present-day society we can witness that inequality, unjust discrimination is prevailing. In order to eradicate such inequalities, we need to know the root causes of inequality. Once we know the causes and ways to reduce inequality, we can make ourselves free from the harmful effects of social inequality. Hence, equality is an urgent need of the society and to restore peace and prosperity in human society equality is the urgent necessity.

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