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# UNIT 5 EQUALITY

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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Of all the basic concepts of social, economic, moral and political philosophy, none is more confusing and baffling than the concept of equality because it figures in all other concepts like justice, liberty, rights, property, etc. During the last two thousand years, many dimensions of equality have been elaborated by Greeks, Stoics, Christian fathers who separately and collectively stressed on its one or the other aspect. Under the impact of liberalism and Marxism, equality acquired an altogether different connotation. Contemporary social movements like feminism, environmentalism are trying to give a new meaning to this concept.

Basically, equality is a value and a principle essentially modern and progressive. Though the debate about equality has been going on for centuries, the special feature of modern societies is that we no longer take inequality for granted or something natural. Equality is also used as a measure of what is modern and the whole process of modernisation in the form of political egalitarianism. Modern politics and modern political institutions are constantly subjected to social pressures to expand opportunities equally irrespective of ethnicity, sexual identity or age. Equality is a modern value in the sense that universalistic citizenship has become a central feature of all political ideologies in modern industrial democracies. Again, equality can also be taken as a criteria for radical social change. It is related to the development of democratic politics. Modern

societies are committed to the principle of equality and they no longer require inequality as automatically justifiable. The principle of equality enunciated by the American and French revolutions has become the central plank of all modern forms of social change and the social movements for the reorganisation of societies.

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## 5.2 EQUALITY vs. INEQUALITY

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Before we discuss the meaning of equality, we must understand that equality is a relative concept. The demand for equality has always been against the prevailing inequalities of the times. The existence of social inequalities is probably as old as human society and the debate about the nature and cause of inequalities is an ancient topic of political philosophy. In classical Greece, Aristotle in his book *Politics* distinguished three social classes and noted the significant difference between *citizens* and *slaves, men* and *women* in terms of rational and civic capacities. Participation in the *Polis* was restricted to the citizens only. Similarly, in our Hindu Society, according to the classical text, the society was divided into four (varnas) categories: *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Shudras*. All rights and duties were based upon this classification. During medieval feudalism, legal privileges were based upon status and birth. In short, different types of inequalities have been long enduring, giving rise to the notion that inequality is inevitable in social relations. In fact, the pre-eighteenth century teachings argued that men were naturally unequal and that there was a natural human hierarchy. Different ideologies justified inequality on grounds of superior race, ancestry, age, sex, religion, military strength, culture, wealth, knowledge, etc. According to Turner, inequality is multi-dimensional and the elimination of one aspect of inequality often leads to the exaggeration of other aspects of social, political and cultural inequalities. In fact, all human societies are characterised by some form of social inequalities in terms of class, status, power and gender. While studying the concept of equality, the contradiction between equality as a general value of modern society and inequality at a practical level, as a fact of all human societies must be kept in mind.

### 5.2.1 Struggle for Equality

If inequality has been a universal phenomenon, protest against the inequalities based upon privileges and birth had also been voiced right from their emergence. Thus in the history of western political ideas, the doctrine of equality is practically as old as its opposite. For example, the most prominent star in the Greek philosophy was Zeno who founded the Stoic School and supported equality among men. The Stoics concluded that all human beings possess reason and thereby all mankind is differentiated from other animals and is united. Humanity does not admit of degree. As such all men are equal as men. The Stoic philosophers gave the idea of universal brotherhood and they were opposed to slavery. The promulgation of the law of the people by the Roman Empire was another way in which the Romans attempted to give effect to the principle that all men are equal and as an extension to that, they conferred citizenship both on the individuals and entire communities. The climax was reached in 212 AD when a notable edict of Emperor Caracalla conferred citizenship of Rome upon all free inhabitants of the empire. Similarly, St. Paul said to Galatians 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female, for year are one in Jesus Christ'. From the fifth to the fourteenth century, the demand for equality was a cry against serfdom, medieval gradations or rank and hereditary nobility and the equality for career opportunities in the church. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the cry for equality was against the landowners' status and religious intolerance and was raised by Puritans, Levellers, doctrine of natural rights and John Locke. Simultaneously, the movements of Renaissance and Reformation raised a powerful voice against the legal privileges of the clergy and nobility based upon birth and demanded equality by birth.

The affirmation that all men are born equal was to figure in the manifestoes all over the world. The revolutions in Britain in 1649 and 1688, in the USA in 1778 and in France in 1789 made right to equality by birth as their central plank. 'Men are born free and equal and they are free and equal in their rights'. During this phase, the demand for equality coincided with the abolition of special privileges of the nobility and the achievement of political and legal equality with the nobility. It meant only juristic equality i.e. all men are born equal and they are equal before law.' Whether it was Britain, France or America, the issue at stake was equality in the form of uniformity of legal rights. As stated earlier, since the demand for equality was primarily raised by the rising bourgeois class which had acquired wealth, but lacked legal status and which was anxious to achieve political and legal equality with the nobility, the demand for legal equality served the purpose well.

The economic and social dimensions of equality emerged during the nineteenth century and was the result of conflicts and struggles between the capitalist/ industrial classes on one hand and workers and peasants on the other. The *laissez faire* policy of the state in the economic affairs created wide economic disparities in the society. As a result, along with legal equality, demand for economic and social equality was raised by liberal socialists and Marxist writers alike such as JS Mill, TH Green, Babeuf, Karl Marx etc. Simultaneously, the demand for political equality also grew stronger. The movement to broaden the franchise was an offshoot of the industrial revolution which increased the social power of the urban middle class and converted a large section of the population into factory workers. The reforms act of 1832, 1876 and 1884 in Britain were steps towards political equality.

In the twentieth century, the demand for equality became more persistent. Today, it has become the *sine qua non* for the socio-economic mobility typical of a highly industrialist society. The national liberation movements against imperialism and colonialism, movements against apartheid, socialist revolutions in Russia, China and East European countries brought the issue of equality to the forefront. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 extended the recognition of equality which had hitherto been accepted as the aim of all strata of industrialised countries to the people of the third world countries who had been discriminated, thus contributing to the eventual emergence of an international society based upon socio-economic equality.

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### **5.3 WHAT IS EQUALITY?**

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While equality is one of the many concepts (others being rights, liberty, justice etc.) it is a crucial one in a world in which so many differences exist among men. Every modern political constitution has some notion of human equality inscribed as a fundamental law and every political theory of any importance has contributed to the nature and feasibility of socio-economic equality. However, it is as difficult to define it clearly as it is to achieve it politically. As mentioned earlier, the concept of equality is relative and it can be understood only in a concrete context. Equality is not identity of treatment or reward. There can be no ultimate identity of treatment so long as men are different in wants, capacities and needs. As Laski wrote, 'the purpose of society would be frustrated at the outset if the nature of a mathematician met with identical response with that of a bricklayer'. Also inequalities gifted by nature are an inescapable fact and it has to be accepted in society. Injustice arises as much from *treating unequals equally* as from *treating equals unequally*. And most importantly, apart from the natural inequalities, there are inequalities created by the society – inequalities based upon birth, wealth, knowledge, religion, etc. Claims for equality have always been negative denying the propriety of certain existing socio-economic inequalities. When liberalism urged that all men are equal by birth, it meant to challenge the property owning franchise. The Declaration of the Rights of Man explicitly

recognised that superior talent and qualities of character are a proper ground for distinction of wealth, honour and power. During the twentieth century, we have been dismantling an educational and social system in which opportunities for advancement depended on the family means and replacing it with one that makes skill in examination one of the principal criteria. Thus, what we have to keep in mind is that out of context, equality is an empty framework for a social ideal. It is concrete only when particularised. The movement of history is not towards greater equality because as fast we eliminate one inequality, we create another one: the difference being that the one we discard is unjustifiable while the one we create seems reasonable. Social, political educational and other equalities are always in need of re-enforcement and reinterpretation by each new generation. Thus, the idea of equality constantly erodes the foundations of every *status quo*.

Like liberty, equality can also be understood in its negative and positive aspects. Ever since the rise of the idea of equality, it has been engaged in dismantling certain privileges whether they were feudal, social, economic, etc. Thus negatively, equality was associated with 'the end of such privileges'. Positively, it meant 'the availability of opportunity' so that everybody could have equal chance to develop his personality. Explaining the meaning of equality in this context, Laski writes that equality means:

- i) Absence of special privileges. It means that the will of one is equal to the will of any other. It means equality of rights.
- ii) That adequate opportunities are laid open to all. It depends upon the training that is offered to the citizens. For the power that ultimately counts in society is the power to utilise knowledge; that disparities of education result above all in disparities in the ability to use that power. Opportunity should be given to everyone to realise the implications of his personality.
- iii) All must have access to social benefits and no one should be restricted on any ground. The inequalities by birth or because of parentage and hereditary causes are unreasonable.
- iv) Absence of economic and social exploitation.

Similarly, Barker writes that the idea of equality is a derivative value – derivative from the supreme value of the development of personality- in each alike and equally, but in each along its own different line and of its own separate motion. According to him, 'The principle of equality, accordingly means that whatever conditions are guaranteed to me in the form of rights shall also and in the same measure be guaranteed to others and that whatever rights are given to others shall also be given to me'. According to Raphael, 'The right to equality proper.. is a right to the equal satisfaction of basic human needs, including the need to develop and use capacities which are specifically human'. According to E.F. Carr, 'Equality is just to treat men as equal until some reason other than preference such as *need, capacity* or *desert* has been shown to the contrary'. Recently, Bryan Turner in his book *Equality* has given a comprehensive meaning of equality relevant to the contemporary world. According to him, the concept of equality should include the following:

- i) Fundamental equality of persons
- ii) Equality of opportunity
- iii) Equality of conditions where there is an attempt to make the conditions of life equal
- iv) Equality of outcome of results

The first kind of equality i.e., *equality of persons*, is common to cultural, religious and moral traditions typically expressed in statements such as ‘all are equal in the eyes of God’. This is concerned with the equality of men as men; something called ‘human nature’, ‘human dignity’, ‘personality’ or ‘soul’ by virtue of which they must be treated as fundamentally equal. A modern notion of this form of equality is found in Marxism when it talks about the ‘human essence’. In the Marxist tradition, it is claimed that all human beings are defined by *praxis*, that is all human beings are knowledgeable, conscious and practical agents. It asserts that ‘man is by his essence a universal free being who forms himself through his own self activity in the direction of an ever widening mastery of nature and an ever more universal intercourse, autonomy and consciousness’. Also, writers like R.H. Tawney often combined socialism and Christianity to provide a religious foundation for a commitment to social equality. However, this form of equality is not given importance in the contemporary welfare state based upon the notion of socio-economic equality.

The second meaning of equality is associated with the most common argument for equality as ‘*equality of opportunity*’. This means that the access to important social institutions should be open to all on universalistic grounds, especially by achievement and talent. The debate about equality of opportunity has been especially important in the development of modern educational institutions where promotion and attainment are in theory based upon intelligence, skill and talent regardless of parental and class background. This type of equality believes in meritocracy where the occupational structure of a society is filled on the basis of merit in terms of universal criteria of achievement and not on the basis of age, sex, wealth, caste, religion, etc.

Thirdly, the concept of equality of opportunity is closely related to and somewhat inseparable from the notion of *equality of conditions*. Equality of opportunity regards those who have ability and who are prepared to exercise their skills in the interest of personal achievement in a competitive situation. However, where parents can pass on advantage to their children, then the starting point for achievement is unequal, since, for example, working class children will start with disadvantages which they have inherited from their parents. In order for equality of opportunity to have any significant content, it is essential to guarantee equality of condition, that is, all competitors in the race should start at the same point with appropriate handicaps.

Fourthly, the most radical notion of equality is equality of results or *outcome*. In short, it means that through legislation and other political means, equalities of results are achieved regardless of the starting point or natural ability. A programme of equality of results would seek to transform inequalities at the beginning into social equalities as a conclusion. Social programmes of positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged (i.e. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, children, handicapped etc.) are meant to compensate for a significant inequality of conditions in order to bring about a meaningful equality of opportunity to secure equality of results.

Thus, in order to understand the meaning of equality, we have to keep the different notions of equality in mind. Historically, while the liberal democratic tradition has favoured the idea of equality of opportunity and conditions, the equality of outcome has been a part of the platform of socialist policies aimed at redressing the inequalities generated by competition and the market place.

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## **5.4 DIMENSIONS OF EQUALITY**

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Equality is a multi-dimensional concept. The need for equality is felt in different fields of social life. Historically also, the demand for different dimensions of equality was neither raised

simultaneously nor with the same intensity. While liberalism laid more emphasis on legal-political dimensions of equality, the socialists preferred socio-economic equality. The different dimensions of equality are:

- 1 Legal Equality
- 1 Political Equality
- 1 Economic Equality
- 1 Social Equality

### 5.4.1 Legal Equality

Classical liberalism, when it was fighting against feudal and religious privileges, held that equal distribution of opportunities required merely equal allocation of basic rights of life, liberty and property. If legal privileges are abolished and legal rights are protected, no obstacles will stand in the way of one's pursuit of happiness. It means two things: *Rule of law* and *Equality before law*. Rule of law means that the law is sovereign and no person, no matter how great he is or thinks he is, can declare himself above the law because that would be tantamount to arbitrary rule. Equality before law means that law guarantees freedom to each citizen. This is popularly explained as i) Equality before Law and ii) Equal Protection of Law.

- a) **Equality before Law** consists in 'equal subject of all classes to the ordinary law of the land administered by the ordinary law courts'. It means that amongst equals, the law should be equal and should be equally administered and that the 'like should be treated alike'. In other words, the law is not to make any distinction between rich and poor, feudal lord or peasant, capitalist or workers. In the eyes of law, all are equal. It also implies equality of rights and duties in law i.e., equal protection of life and limb of everyone under the law and equal penalties on everyone violating them. However, since law creates classes with special rights and duties such as landlord vs. tenant, police vs. people, member of parliament vs. judges etc., in such circumstances, differences in rights are inevitable. And last not but the least, equality before law also implies equality in the actual administration of laws. In spite of the fact that people may be equal before law, the judges may be corrupt or biased. Equality before law must ensure that the judges are free from political pressures, free from corruption, bias etc. The inequality in the application of law may also arise if poor men are kept from the cost of a legal action i.e. if a rich man can force a settlement on less favourable terms than a poor opponent would get in court by threatening to carry the cause of appeal.
- b) **Equal Protection of Law:** Equality before law does not mean absolute equality. While the law will not make any distinction between the people, equal protection means that on grounds of reasonable circumstances, certain discriminations can be made. The law, in certain special circumstances, can make rational discriminations. It means 'equal laws for equals and unequal laws for unequals'. This can be understood very well in the context of the Indian constitution where the law, while not recognising any distinction based upon birth, caste, creed or religion, does accept certain rational discriminations like reservation of seats or special queues for ladies, concessions given to students in railway journeys etc. Such discrimination based upon backwardness, sex, ability etc. are considered rational discriminations. In such cases, law protects the people by unequal rather than equal application.

Talking about legal equality, J.R. Lucas writes that equality before law does not necessarily mean that the law will treat all alike, but rather it determines that the law will be within the reach

of everybody. In other words, nobody will be small enough that he will be unable to take the shelter of law and nobody will be big enough that he will not be accountable to law. It means that anybody can ask for the help of courts, everybody is bound to obey its orders, and the courts will also take decisions impartially. Equality before law means equal subjection to law and equal protection of law.

However, legal equality becomes meaningless in the absence of equal opportunities to get justice. In liberal societies, people need both time and money to have justice to protect their equality. All may possess equal rights, but all do not have an equal power to vindicate those rights, so long as the vindication demands expenditure and so long as some are more able than others to meet the expenditure demanded. Thus, in actual practice and operation of the courts, as distinct from the rule of law of the land, inequality still prevails though it is being steadily diminished by reforms in their operations.

### **5.4.2 Political Equality**

As Lipson writes, normally and customarily, many had always been governed by few for the benefits of the few. Humanity as a general rule has lived under the regimen of inequalities and privileges. The basis of inequality in political matters has been knowledge (Plato), religion and God (monarchy), birth (aristocracy), money (plutocracy), colour (South Africa), race (Hitler), elite (Pareto, Mosca) etc. Against all these, political equality is associated with democratic institutions and the right to participate in the political process. The demand for political equality is summarised in 'one-man-one-vote'. This is the basic principle of political equality which has now found unqualified support in almost all the countries of the world. The principle is expressed in the right to vote, the right to stand for elections, to hold public office with no distinction (made) on the basis of caste, colour, sex, religion, language etc. According to Laski, political equality means the authority which exerts that power must be subject to rules of democratic governance. However, in recent years, it is being realised that the principle of political equality is not as simple as the liberal meaning conveys. If the word politics means the ability and the skill to influence others which an individual exercises in controlling, managing and arranging things according to his will or to the will of the party to which he may belong, obviously we cannot say that the people are politically equal. In modern times, functioning of the government has become very complex and real political power vests in the bureaucracy, the police and the army over which people have no control. In fact, political power and political equality are distinct categories. There are many constraints put upon the common man and the multiplicity of factors which include different abilities, the ability to assert oneself and above all the differentiation imposed by the maladjusted property system. However, the merit of political equality lies in recognising the basic truth that if men are equal in law, then there should be equality amongst them regarding the right to governance.

### **5.4.3 Economic Equality**

The twentieth century has witnessed a sharpening of concern for the economic aspect of equality and the means of securing it, either within the framework of the liberal system or by establishing a socialist society. Rapid industrialisation brought about an increasing awareness that equality of opportunity cannot be achieved by the equality of law which forbids the rich and the poor alike to steal bread or to sleep under the bridges. Equality of opportunity does not only pre-suppose the equal allotment of certain rights, but also requires application of another rule of distribution: equality of the satisfaction of certain basic needs. It means privileges for the economically underprivileged. As Tawney wrote, 'Equality of opportunity is not simply a matter

of legal equality. Its evidence depends not merely on the absence of disabilities, but the presence of abilities. It obtains in so far as, and only in so far as, each member of the community, whatever his birth or occupation or social position, possess in fact and not merely in form equal chances of using to the full his natural endowments of physique of character and of intelligence'.

Early liberals meant by economic equality an equality of choosing one's trade or profession irrespective of his caste, creed or economic status. It was also understood as freedom of contract or that everybody is equal in so far as the contractual obligations are concerned. Many a time, it was also understood as equalisation of wealth and income. However, all these measures were considered insufficient. Explaining economic equality, Rousseau wrote, 'By equality we should understand that not the degree of power and riches be absolutely identical for everybody, but that no citizen be wealthy enough to buy another and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself. Economic equality is concerned with the apportionment of goods. To bring the poor to the general starting line, law must compensate them for those initial disadvantages by means of social legislation and social services such as minimum wages, tax exemption, unemployment benefits, free public schooling, scholarship etc.

According to Laski, economic equality is largely a problem of proportion. It means that the things without which life is meaningless must be accessible to all without distinction in degree or kind. All men must eat and drink or obtain shelter. Equality involves, up to the margin of sufficiency, identity of response for primary needs. The equal satisfaction of basic needs as a precondition for equality of opportunity does require economic equality i.e. reduction of extreme inequalities in the distribution of commodities. Economic equality is two fold: i) it is a matter of status and ii) it is a matter of property and income. The matter of status raises the issue whether the state should seek to turn industrial production into something like a 'partnership of equals' and should introduce a system under which the directing and managing elements stand on an equal footing. With regard to property and income the issue is what methods the state should seek to correct inequality in their distribution. The liberal state through its policy of mixed economy, methods of differential taxation, regulation and raising the wages by methods of social expenditure and other welfare services has been making corrections in the wide disparities of wealth. The state taxes the rich to provide welfare to the poor. While liberal sociologists like Dahrendorf, Raymond Aron, Lipset feel that through the extension of welfare services to all strata of society and redistribution of income and wealth through progressive taxation, the state has been able to lessen economic disparity and assure satisfaction of basic needs of all. Galbraith has gone to the extent of declaring that economic inequality has ceased to be an issue in men's mind in Western democracies.

However, the liberal socialists feel that inspite of the fact that state action has resulted in greater diffusion of property, the permanent ownership of capital resources and the disparity between rich and poor continues and is still greater. State action 'only touches the fringe of the problem of finding a general system of its more equitable distribution'. The state is yet to grapple with the problem of finding a general system of profit sharing.

#### **5.4.4 Social Equality**

Social equality is concerned with equality of opportunity for every individual for the development of his personality. It means abolition of all kinds of discrimination based upon caste, creed, religion, language, race, sex, education, etc. The cardinal question which confronts us today is how the state and its law should go to promote equality of different castes, classes and races, emancipation of women so far as equality in property and voting rights is concerned, and



equality of rights in the admission to educational institutions. Equality of races and colour denies that the class whose cause it champions is not inferior to any. Inferiority implies two considerations: i) the refusal to extend the principle of equal considerations to the class in question such as the Negroes, Blacks in South Africa, Jews etc., and ii) to prove the inferiority by means of dubious biological evidence that some races are superior to others.

The case of equality of sexes can be understood as i) that inspite of physical and psychological difference between men and women, there is no evidence that women are in general inferior to men in intelligence, business capacity, soundness of judgements etc., and that discrimination resting on such assumed inferiorities is misplaced, and ii) the admitted differences will not support discrimination between the sexes in respect of voting rights, entry to profession, educational opportunities, level of remuneration etc. Thus 'equal pay for equal work' means that men and women should be paid equally if they do the same type of work; and there are admitted biological and psychological differences in the functions within the family. A mother is expected to occupy herself with house and children, a father with earning the family living. But this does not justify elevating the husband to the position of a lord and a master, nor the complete sacrifice of women's personality to the demands of the family. The emancipation of women has to be expressed itself not only in law and economics, but also in changes in conventional marital relations. For example, many husbands now recognise that the domestic burden carried by mothers of families in previous generations was out of all proportions to the difference in function implied by the difference in sex. Their readiness to share household functions and baby minding is a sign of practical extension of the principle of equal consideration.

Social equality also depends upon the openness of educational institutions on an equal basis to facilitate social mobility. This is a field where extreme inequalities prevail. In almost all the liberal countries, education has been very much organised on the lines of social classes and educational opportunities are very much associated with wealth and position. There are different kinds of schools, serving different social strata of society such as the elite, the middle classes, the lower middle class and the poor masses. In prestigious schools where children of the affluent section of society receive their education, the boys are encouraged to regard themselves as one of the ruling classes, whether in the field of politics, administration or business. On the other hand, an elementary school education, mostly run by the government, is always and still remains a cheap education. An elementary book is a cheap book adapted to the needs and powers of the children of a certain section of society, who are supposed not to require the same kind of education as the children of parents who have money. Even if the elementary school boy, in today's changed circumstances, is not taught that the world is divided by God into the rich who are to rule and the poor who are to be ruled, the circumstances in which he is put provide ample proof of it. He is taught in an atmosphere of unhealthy buildings, deficiency of playing fields, lack of school libraries and laboratory facilities for practical work, shortage of books, non-availability of teachers, lack of funds etc. The opportunities for the children of the poor masses are rationed like bread.

Moreover, public opinion is so much convinced by the influence of the long standing traditions of educational equality that they have accepted it as a social fact. Equality of educational opportunity is still largely only a paper realisation. The inequality in educational opportunity could only be eliminated if the society becomes unstratified or the school system is totally differentiated. Neither outcome appears likely in liberal countries and the present inequality in education and occupations will persist.

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## **5.5 RELATION OF EQUALITY WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE**

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The relation between equality and liberty has been one of the interesting controversies of liberalism. The root of the controversy is: Are liberty and equality opposed to each other or are they complimentary to each other? In the modern constitutions, we find a frequent association of both liberty and equality in the list of fundamental rights. But they have not always been the same. The English liberal tradition seemed to place more emphasis on liberty while the French tradition had always sought to secure recognition of the principle of equality. Historically speaking, early negative liberalism preferred liberty to equality. It held preservation of liberty in the sense of 'absence of restraints' as the principle function of the state and any concession to equality beyond 'equality before law' was deemed as exceeding the proper scope of the functions of state. Positive liberalisation as developed in the twentieth century takes the opposite view. It considers equality as something good and basic to liberty. It holds both the attainment of liberty and equality as complementary to each other. Let us consider both these arguments in detail.

### **5.5.1 Liberty and Equality As Opposed to Each Other**

That liberty and equality are opposed to each other has been an important current of early liberalism. Classical liberalism gave so much importance to liberty that equality became a slave of it. It believed that liberty is natural and so is equality. So by nature liberty and equality are opposed to each other. Early liberal thinkers like Locke, Adam Smith, Bentham, James Mill, and Tocqueville felt that there should be minimum restrictions on the liberty of the individual. For example, Locke did not include equality in the list of three natural rights. Similarly, men like Lord Acton and Alexis de Tocqueville insisted that equality and liberty were anti-thetical. They argued that the desire for equality has destroyed the possibility of having liberty. Liberalism, during this era was based upon the concept of free market and open competition among the egoistic rational individuals and it believed that the outcome of economic competition, though unequal, is benevolent and progressive. This legitimisation of inequality had a strong emphasis on and commitment to the doctrine of individualism. At the political level, it asserted that there is a necessary contradiction between liberty and equality. Just as liberty is associated with the individual, equality is concerned with social intervention. Thus, any attempt to remove inequality involves considerable social and political intervention to equalise conditions and to remove existing privileges. However, this intervention must interfere with the individual and his private exercise of freedom. Early liberals believed that no individual will voluntarily give up wealth and privileges in an unequal society and as a result, programmes of social equalisation must interfere with the democratic rights of the individual. Only the individual is fully able to know and express his peculiar needs and interests; it is inappropriate for the state or some other body to interfere in the life and liberty of private citizens. Liberty, choice and money were closely related in early liberalism. The wealth of the rich also constituted their liberty and being coerced to part away with their wealth meant a double encroachment on their freedom.

In the twentieth century, the theory has been supported by Bagehot, May, Stephen, Hayek, Milton Friedman, Mosca, Pareto etc. They believe that given the financial and social inequalities, a political programme to secure social equality of conditions or equality of outcome would require massive social and political regulation by the state resulting in a totalitarian and authoritarian regime. 'The pursuit of equality has in practice led to inequality and tyranny. This is not a mere accident. It is the direct result of the conditions which are inherent in the very concept of equality. Egalitarianism relies on the achievement of its objective on the coercive power of the state as they are bound to do by the nature of human material with which they deal. A society in which the choices fundamental to the human existence are determined by coercion is not a

free society. It follows irresistibly that egalitarians must choose between liberty and equality. Similarly, according to Hayek, 'From the fact that people are very different, it follows that if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. The equality before law which freedom requires leads to material inequality. The desire of making people more like in their conditions cannot be accepted in a free society and is a justification for further and discriminatory coercion'.

In other words, the price of significant equality would be political despotism which would subordinate individual talent and achievement. In the name of equality, the state unnecessarily increases its powers and restricts the rights and liberties of the people.

Radical equality of persons and outcome requires a totalitarian system of regulation. However, even this is no guarantee to equality. In practice, the so-called authoritarian regimes have never achieved total regulation. Since human beings are averse to absolute regimentation, some degree of inequality of outcome appears inevitable despite all social and political attempts to eradicate such inequalities. Hence regardless of ideology, the achievement of equality is a problem.

The supporters of the elite theory of democracy believe that people are politically unequal and to save democracy and liberty from monocracy, it is essential that only elites (i.e. individuals and groups who are superior and hence unequal) should participate in the political process. In other words, to retain political liberty, inequality and not equality is the basis of liberty.

In short, liberty and equality are incompatible, liberalism stands for liberty, equality is desirable only before law, political equality should be limited to the right to vote and elections of the elite; social and economic equality in so far as it increases the powers of the state is a threat to liberty.

## **5.5.2 Equality and Liberty Are Complimentary To Each Other**

The early liberal argument that equality and liberty are mutually exclusive assumed an inevitable conflict between personal interests and social requirements. But this dichotomy of individual versus society proved false historically. The demand for economic and social equality raised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the socialists and positive liberals made equality the prime requirement of liberty. Positive liberals maintained that liberty and equality are complementary to each other and the state was assigned the task of correcting the social and economic imbalances through legislation and regulation. The supporters of this viewpoint are Rousseau, Maitland, T.H. Green, Hobhouse, Lindsay, R.H. Tawney, Barker, Laski, Macpherson, etc.

Positive liberalism saw the individual as a social being whose personal desires could be satisfied in the context of a cooperative social relationship within a social environment. It interpreted liberty as 'equality of opportunity' which means that opportunity should be given to everyone to realise the 'implication of his personality'. To provide such opportunity, deliberate social restraints need to be placed upon individual freedom. As Tawney wrote, 'The liberty of the weak depends upon the restraint of the strong and that of the poor upon the restraint of the rich. Everyman should have this liberty and no more to do upon others as he would that they should do him'. Liberty demands that none should be placed at the mercy of others. By securing opportunities for all to be their best selves, liberty makes equality real. Without liberty, equality lapses into dull uniformity.

Without the satisfaction of economic needs, liberty cannot be realised. In a society of economic

unequals, gross inequalities make liberty the privilege of a few. As Laski wrote, an interest in liberty begins when men have ceased to be overwhelmed by the problem of sheer existence; it is when they have a chance of leisure, economic sufficiency and leisure for thought, these are primary conditions of free man. Equality, which aims to put an end to gross inequalities of wealth and power, is the true basis of liberty. Whenever there is inequality, liberty is thwarted. To quote Tawney again, 'A large measure of equality far from inimical to liberty, is essential to it. A society, which permits gross inequalities, cannot secure political or civil liberty. Where there are rich and poor, educated and uneducated, we find masters and servants'. Inequality of wealth results in the division of society between rich and poor where the rich use their wealth to capture power and use it for their selfish ends. Likewise, if there is a social inequality, people cannot enjoy liberty. For example, the untouchables, scheduled castes and tribes who are both socially and economically unequal cannot enjoy liberty. Similarly, equality in justice is a primary condition for the attainment of civil freedom, but the inability of the poor to employ skillful lawyers becomes a fatal bar to get justice. Thus, as Pollard writes, 'There is only one solution of liberty and it lies in equality. Liberty without equality can degenerate into a license of the few.'

Positive liberals did not agree with the view that state regulations in the economic and social spheres will lead to authoritarianism. On the other hand, as Hobhouse wrote, the state has been driven by the manifest teachings of experience that liberty without equality is a name of 'noble sound and squalid results'. Rightly understood, the welfare legislation appears not as an infringement of the two distinct ideals of liberty and equality, but a necessary means of their fulfillment. The social legislation in the field of unemployment, health, insurance, old age pension, free education, increase in the general amenities etc. have gone a long way to reduce the inequalities in society. Rather, the limits of improvement in this direction of greater equalisation is yet to be reached. Both equality and liberty are complementary and one is not complete without the other. Both have a common end; the promotion of individual personality and the spontaneous development of his personality. In this context, both liberty and equality complement and supplement each other. Without liberty, there can be no equality and without equality, there can be no liberty. Both have to be reconciled. As Dean writes, 'Liberty and equality are not in conflict or even separate but are different facets of the same ideal... indeed since they are identical, there can be no problem of law or to what extent they are or can be related: this is surely the nearest; if not the most satisfactory solution ever devised for a perennial problem of political philosophy'. Similarly, Gans writes, 'there is no inherent conflict between liberty and equality. The society we must create should provide enough equality to permit everyone the liberty to control his or her own life as much as possible without inflicting undue inequality on other'.

However, in spite of reconciliation between liberty and equality, even positive liberalism prefers liberty to equality. For example, Barker writes that whatever claims be made in the name of equality, it cannot be viewed in isolation, for the principle stands by the principles of liberty and fraternity. But still there are reasons for thinking that liberty matters even more than equality. It is greater because it is more closely connected with the supreme value of the personality than the spontaneous development of its capacities. It is greater because 'the cause of liberty unites men together in something which each and all can possess, while the cause of equality, exclusively pressed, may make them sink into jealousy of supposed forms of invidious differences and produce division rather than unity'. Equality, if pressed to the point of uniformity, would defeat its own purpose, 'the subject will become the master and the word is turned topsy-turvy'.

### 5.5.3 Equality and Justice

Like liberty, the relation between equality and justice is also a controversial one. As we have discussed above, what we find in society are a number of inequalities based upon age, sex, ability, education, social status, wealth, opportunity etc. Inequalities of wealth and social status lead to inequalities of power and dependence and subordination of many to the will of the few. Historically, such inequalities have not only been justified but also perpetuated. The Greek society was based upon birth, status and caste. Early liberalism while championing the cause of legal and political equality did not bother about the economic and social inequalities resulting from freedom of contract, open competition and private property.

However, with the advent of socio-economic equality, the struggle against the prevailing inequalities became an important element of justice. Today, equality is invoked by every theory of justice in one form or the other. Justice demands that politics should operate to produce equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, uniform distribution of goods and services, one-man one-vote etc. Again, only by applying the principle of equality before law and equal protection of law, one can be sure that his case will be treated at par with others. Equality thus becomes central to the theory of justice.

No discussion of the relationship between equality and justice would be complete without talking about John Rawls who has attempted to outline a social theory of justice which would reconcile the liberal theories of rights and liberties with the social egalitarian conception of economic and social equality. According to him, a just society would involve the maximisation of equal basic liberties where the liberty of one person would not conflict with the liberty of others. Also, he outlines a set of proposals which would establish a sense of justice with respect to social and economic inequalities. These inequalities, according to him, should be so arranged that i) they contribute to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged in the society, and ii) the offices and positions should be open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity. His general concept of justice is that all essential social goods should be distributed equally among all, unless an unequal distribution of these goods would be to the advantage of the least favoured members of the society. In simple words, it means that the inequality above the income median is socially desirable from the point of view of justice only when it helps to reduce the inequalities which exist before the median. Equality is desirable because the principle of justice based on equality brings an increasing benefit to all members of society, especially the least favoured. But it must be noted that Rawls does not rule out inequalities altogether in the case they serve; for example, as incentives, creating a greater stock of goods for distribution to the least advantaged.

The relationship between equality and justice can also be understood at a more abstract and fundamental level; namely, the idea of equality not in the sense of equal distribution but as 'treating people as equals'. Justice demands that at least at the theoretical level, government treat its citizens with equal consideration. Each citizen is entitled to equal concern and respect. According to Kymlicka, this more basic notion of equality is found in Nozick's libertarianism as well as in Marx's communism. While libertarianism believes that equality means equal rights over one's labour and property, the Marxists take it as equality of income and wealth. Any theory which claims that some people are not entitled to equal consideration from government, or if it is claimed that certain kinds of people just do not matter as much as others, then most people in the modern world would reject that theory immediately. In this context, Dworkin has gone to the extent of saying that 'every plausible political theory has the same ultimate value, which is equality and that 'each person matters equally' is at the heart of all contemporary theories of justice'.

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## 5.6 TOWARDS EQUALITY

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There is no doubt that all societies are unequal. The rise of capitalism replaced one set of inequalities based upon birth and privileges with another set of inequalities based upon private property; yet there are a number of historical changes which promoted trends towards equality and egalitarianism. Positive attempts to eradicate inequality are often undermined by the paradoxical relationship between personal liberty and social equality. But the important thing here is to distinguish between equality of *opportunity* and other forms of equalities such as equality of *conditions* and equality of *results*. While most democratic societies have achieved equality of opportunity and to a large extent equality of conditions, they have yet to go a long way to achieve equality of results. The citizenship rights, first developed in Europe and then spread to other parts of the world, helped in evolving a society based upon equality of opportunity, merit and competition. Legal citizenship was associated with freeing the individual from arbitrary, legal constraints and it opened the professions and public administration on the basis of educational qualifications. Similarly, political citizenship rights gave the people an opportunity to participate in the affairs of the government. Social citizenship attempted to reform capitalism through legislation. The gradual development of universal provision for basic education, health and social security was a modest attempt to bring about an equality of condition. The expansion of the welfare state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an extension of social legislation. Legislation on minimum wages, hours of work, unemployment allowance, work conditions, occupational safety etc have made the employees less vulnerable as a mere commodity on the labour market. At the same time, we cannot forget that these changes do not transform the economic basis of capitalism in terms of private appropriation of wealth. Bryan Turner has called it a 'hyphenated system' because it combines a progressive expansion of egalitarian citizenship rights with continuity of inequalities in terms of class, status and power.

Apart from citizenship rights, according to Gellner, there have been a number of important processes in modern industrial societies which tend to bring about an egalitarian ideal, partly as a consequence of the decline of hierarchical social structures and weakening of cultures which traditionally legitimised equality. For example, modern industrial societies are characterised by a high degree of social mobility which make the enforcement of traditional forms of rank difficult. The movement of youth from villages and towns to cities was associated with the decline of parental authority. Similarly, many features of modern capitalism, especially, the involvement of women in the work force has weakened the patriarchal authority within the household. The rise of the nuclear family has contributed to the changing status of women in society. Also, the development of mass media and emergence of modern consumerism have produced a leisure society where traditional standards of tastes and forms of cultural inequality associated with them has declined. The capacity of the working class to enjoy the new commodities has increased significantly with hire purchases, mortgages and other loan facilities. Again, radio and television contribute to the evolution of a uniform culture for all social classes. Modern egalitarianism also owes a great deal to contemporary means of mass transport. Mass surface transport and railways have helped in removing the immobility, provincialism and isolation of the traditional social classes.

In conclusion, we can say that in a world of inequalities, there are trends which promote equality in human societies. Firstly, there is a sense of justice which appears to be a necessary feature of all social relations. Inequality is on the defensive. Secondly, the politics of democratic societies is not coercive control, but a set of institutions which enable people to achieve desired goals. Thirdly, social groups and movements such as the working class and the feminist movements successfully mobilise to achieve substantive social rights.

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## 5.7 PLEA FOR INEQUALITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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As mentioned earlier, equality is a relative concept and has to be understood in the context of prevailing inequalities. Inequality is a universal feature of all societies and its opposition has been fundamental to all social relations. Yet, inequality is still legitimised in contemporary society by reference to a variety of ideological systems which explain the necessity and legitimacy of all forms of inequality. Hence, in order to understand equality, it is desirable to know the arguments against equality.

Most forms of traditional ideology legitimising inequality between persons have been religious in character. For example, all major religions – whether Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism – believed in the transmission of a special type of knowledge to a cultural elite via a period of training and adherence to rituals which guaranteed purity. Virtually all religions are grounded in the notion of inequality. If Hinduism justified varna-system, similar was the case of Christianity and Islam where slavery was accepted. With the secularisation of industrial capitalist societies, religious inequality became less significant socially. But it brought in racial and economic inequality justified in the name of ‘Social Darwinism’ which gave a special significance to the notion of ‘survival of the fittest’. It was an application of the notion of evolution and natural selection to the historical growth of human society. While it legitimised competitive capitalism in the economic field, it justified the natural superiority of white races over other races and groups and an inevitable outcome of fixed laws of natural development and selection. This found its extreme form in the fascist theories of human inequality to produce a political outlook justifying policies of racial purification and extermination.

Thirdly, the classical political economy of modern capitalism and utilitarianism also justified inequality. This view of economic struggle is associated with the notion of possessive individualism, achievement and initiative. The economic doctrine of inequality associated with utilitarianism is fundamental to the general culture of capitalist society. It is difficult to distinguish between political theories of inequality and the classical economic analysis of inequality arising from the market place. Locke’s political arguments were based upon the right to unequal possessions. Similarly, Adam Smith’s model of the market assumed three significant social classes, namely, the owners of capital who acquire profits, the landowners who depended upon rents and the working class which depended upon wages. He provided the basis for free market explanations of inequality, especially in the form of income inequality. Though there has been considerable criticism of Smith’s economic policies, there has been in the modern period a revival of free market economic doctrine by economic theorists like Milton Friedman and F.A. Hayek, whose theories have been very much influential in reviving classical economics in the form of libertarianism.

Apart from the above, there are many common arguments against equality. Firstly, it is argued that there are different components of equality which are mutually incompatible. For example, equality of opportunity and conditions are likely to result in inequality of results because if a society is competitive, then it is found to produce inequality since every person cannot be the winner. The liberal notion of equality of opportunity is bound to result in inequality. Secondly, the political programmes of equality are not feasible. To secure radical equality of conditions or equality of outcome require massive social and political regulations by the state resulting in a totalitarian and authoritarian regime. Thirdly, equality is not desirable since achievement of equality may be incompatible with other values which are also desirable such as liberty. Equality

of conditions may bring equality, but would limit certain personal freedoms. Fourthly, the functional theory of stratification believes that there are some social positions which significantly contribute to the maintenance and continuation of the whole social system. They require special skills for their performance. The transformation of talent into skill also requires a training period of some duration involving sacrifices made by those undergoing the training. Hence, these functional positions must carry a significant inducement in the shape of a social differential, involving privileges and disproportionate access to scarce rewards. In short, societies are stratified in terms of rights and rewards which induce people to undergo sacrifices and training for social roles which are demanding while also being rewarding. It follows that social inequality among different social strata is positively functional for the continuity and maintenance of society.

Fourthly, it is suggested that inequality in economic terms has a number of important social functions both for society and for specific social groups. For example, low pay and associated poverty guarantees that 'dirty work' will be accomplished in an affluent society. If a person receives the same economic wages regardless of the task, then dirty or demeaning work would never be accomplished. The stigmatisation of the poor has an important economic function in forcing people to work and contribute to general productivity.

Fifthly, inequalities of wealth are important in subsidising the living standards of upper and middle classes by making their lives more comfortable and enjoyable. It is also the case that the lower paid subsidise the public sector because they typically contribute a higher percentage of their income in taxes than the more wealthy sectors of the population who can normally avoid taxation by employing the services of accountants and by claiming tax allowances for aspects of their employment. The proponents of inequality go to the cynical arguments that suggest the functional importance of the poor is also to be found in their contribution to professional employment such as doctors, welfare services, social workers and religious sects. Since the poor are the main clients for these groups, the poor function to provide employment for not only professional groups but also for owners of pawnshops and brothels. Also the poor prolong the usefulness of certain items such as day-old breads and fruits, second-hand clothings and poor quality consumer goods. In short, some form of inequality whether in the form of wealth, power or prestige, is inevitable as well as desirable.

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## **5.8 MARXIST CONCEPT OF EQUALITY**

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In the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, equality is defined as 'abolition of classes and equal social status for all'. It denotes identical conditions of people in a society, but having different contexts in different historical epochs and among different classes. In liberal society, equality has been taken as equality before law, while the exploitation of man by man, economic and political inequality and the actual absence of rights for the working people remains intact. Liberal theory proceeds from the right of every man to own property, but the main thing i.e. relation of the means of production is not taken into account. Marxism proceeds from the premise that whether it is economic equality, i.e. in the sphere of production, distribution and consumption of material wealth, political equality i.e. classes, national or international relations, or cultural equality i.e. in the sphere of production, distribution and consumption of cultural values – all of them are impossible without the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and liquidation of exploiting classes.' As Marx wrote, 'we want to abolish classes and in this sense we are for equality'. Similarly, Engels wrote that the demand for equality has either been the spontaneous reaction against the crying social inequalities, against the contracts between rich and poor, feudal lords and serfs, slaves and masters, surf - fitters and the starving; or the demand has arisen as a reaction against the bourgeois demand for equality and serving as an agitational



means in order to stir up the working class against the capitalists. In both cases, the demand is for the abolition of classes. In the same vein, Lenin felt that only the abolition of classes will achieve social equality and help promote the all round development of human personality.

Just as the bourgeois demand for equality was made in relation to feudalism, the same demand is made by the proletariat against the capitalist state and the capitalist class. For the proletariat, equality means: i) abolition of the private ownership of the means of production ii) end of human exploitation iii) elimination of classes and iv) eradication of all political and cultural discrimination against the proletariat. Socialisation of the means of production must precede the universal obligation to work and equality of pay regardless of age, sex or nationality, though wages may be according to quality and quantity of work. Marx emphatically rejected the possibility of establishing equality between men in the sense of equality of physical and mental capacities; for him, the aim was not leveling but an enhancement and differentiation of personal needs. Marx claimed that only by collectivising the means of production and by material incentives would the productive forces be developed to a point where every human need is finally satisfied in a fair measure.

The question of establishing equality in socialist/communist societies came to the forefront after the Russian Revolution. During the phase of the Dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin declared that the socialist system retains some elements of social inequalities owing to the inadequate development of material production, the survival of substantial distribution between mental and physical labour, between town and country. Political inequality must also operate to the detriment of the former class of exploiters for whom there would neither be democracy nor rights. This is because classes as such would not be entirely abolished despite class antagonism. After the collectivisation, Stalin claimed that the economic antithesis and social gaps between the industrial workers and the peasants were decreasing and becoming blurred. Classes still existed, but they were now harmonious and they tended to draw closer prior to the formation of a classless society. All the citizens had the same political rights; all enjoyed electoral franchise and eligibility for getting elected to the soviets. On the other hand, there would be no equality for the non-conformists or equal opportunities for the potential opposition – an aspect which was criticised by Rosa Luxemburg after the revolution.

The Constitution of the (erstwhile) USSR established equality of rights of Soviet citizens in all spheres of economic, cultural, social and political life. During the early years after the revolution, the policies of the state were tilted towards equality. Examples of this were: virtually equal remuneration for all types of work, equal ration, equalisation of property, abolition of ranks and titles. However, subsequently, when industrialisation was launched, the demands of technology necessitated the training and employment of skilled labour and specialisation. This in course of time led to the emergence of a new class of intelligentsia with the result that several scientists, artists, leading party functionaries, senior government officials were sometimes paid around 20-30 times higher salary than the ordinary worker. The end of 1930s saw the establishment of a class structure which was highly differentiated.

The extreme inequalities of the Stalin era were largely overcome by raising minimum wages, socialisation of the means of production, uniform wage fixing, a relatively standardised supply of consumer goods etc. Similarly, social and political control over the process as of basic foodstuffs, fares, rents etc. helped greatly in achieving economic equality. Difference in status and income were also mitigated by welfare facilities and services available to all citizens such as free medical care, crèches, day nurseries etc. Considerable progress was achieved in the equality of women. Again, in 1956 all the tuition fees were abolished in educational establishments.

A systematic large scale development and promotion of educational facilities enabled, at least in law, any soviet citizen to receive education suited to his needs and ability.

However, the political field offered a different picture. The system of government remained centralised and authoritarian and the whole apparatus continued to be controlled by the politbureau of the CPSU. This group virtually controlled the means of production and distribution of national resources, formulated ideological policy and manipulated public opinion through strict control over press, radio and television. This prevented the masses from becoming fully aware of the prevailing inequalities and their implications.

In the Western liberal societies, where equality is constitutionally guaranteed as a political and legal principle, one's attitude towards its acceptance or its opposition is tolerated as an expression of ideological opinion. Toleration of the most diverse opinion is essential to the principle of political equality. When comparing the extent to which such a demand has been met in the liberal or in the communist regimes, on the Soviet model, one finds that the latter is lagging far behind.

To invoke an ideal of society in the name of equality when in practice justifying inequality in the form of repression of those who are unequal – whether through the dictatorship of the proletariat or by some other authoritarian regime – is so out of keeping with the normal trend of industrial society that one is compelled to question the principle of economic and social equality propounded by Marxism and practiced in the erstwhile communist states.

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## **5.9 SUMMARY**

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From the above discussion, we can sum up the concept of equality as follows:

- 1 Equality is a value and a principle essentially modern and progressive. It is related to the whole process of modernisation in the form of political egalitarianism. It is also taken as a criterion for radical social change. It is related to the development of democratic politics.
- 1 Equality can be understood only in the context of prevailing inequalities. All human societies are characterised by some form of social inequalities of class, status, power and gender. Talking about equality, while Laski associated it with the absence of hereditary privileges, availability of opportunities and universal access to socio-economic benefits, Bryan S. Turner has gone a step forward and talks of equality in terms of availability of opportunities, equality of conditions and equality of outcome or results.
- 1 The rise of liberalism was associated with fighting against feudal and religious privileges. It talked of only legal equality which meant two things: Rule of law and Equality before law. The advent of democracy called for equality in the political sphere i.e. the right of every citizen to participate in the political process. This principle was expressed in the right to vote, the right to stand for elections, to hold public offices and no distinction on the basis of caste, colour, sex religion, language etc. The attention to the socio-economic equalities was drawn by Marxist writers. While Marxism believed that equality can be achieved only through the abolition of classes and the creation of a classless society, liberal writers claimed that this could be achieved through social legislation and social services such as minimum wages, tax exemptions, unemployment benefits, free education etc. Social equality talked of discriminations based upon caste, creed, religion, language, race, sex, education etc. The contemporary liberal concept of equality is summed up in the concept of egalitarianism.

- 1 An interesting controversy within liberalism has been the relation of equality with liberty and justice. While early negative liberalism saw an inherent contradiction between equality and liberty and saw the former as a threat to the latter, positive liberalism believes in the reconciliation between liberty and equality through regulated capitalist economy. Similarly, although philosophers like Rawls have made equality as the basis for their theory of justice, yet, they have no hesitation in justifying inequalities though with the condition that these inequalities should help the least advantaged in the society.
  
- 1 There has been a continuous debate whether adequate equality has been achieved in liberal countries. To a considerable extent, the problem of equality in the liberal countries boils down to the complex relationship between politics and economics. Although people are more equal socially than they were before the advent of the welfare state, yet basic inequality in terms of power, prestige and wealth continues. There are massive inequalities in the distribution of wealth both through inheritance and personal achievements in the occupational field. The government, inspite of being a welfare state, cannot ignore the welfare and redistribution of resources but at the same time, it has to pay attention to the requirements of a free capitalist economy. Recently, American sociologists like Talcott Parsons and Kingsley David have declared that inequality is a necessary condition of all social organisations. Instead of worrying about the origin of inequality, they have attempted to demonstrate that social differentiation and stratification are essential to social structures. However, since the history of the idea of equality has been to a considerable extent intermittent and sometimes violent, it is desirable that the debate over equality should be an unending one with every new resolution a beginning for a new one.

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## **5.10 EXERCISES**

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1. Explain the meaning and nature of equality and its relation with inequality.
2. Discuss different dimensions of equality.
3. Explain the relation of equality with liberty and justice.
4. Discuss the role of equality in contemporary societies.
5. Write a note on inequality in the contemporary world.
6. Explain the Marxist conception of equality.