

Lesson at a Glance

- **Equality** is the soul of Indian **democracy**. It influences all aspects of its functioning.
- In a democratic country like India, all adults irrespective of what religion they belong to, how much education they have had, what caste they are, or whether they are rich or poor are given the right to vote, which is called **Universal Adult Franchise**.
- **Universal Adult Franchise** gives **political equality** to the people but it does not ensure social and economic equality.
- Kanta Devi is a domestic worker. She has gone to vote. She is standing in the queue and is waiting for her turn like others. She is happy that she is equal to all of the others because each of them has one **vote**. It gives her a good feel that even wealthy and influential persons are standing in the queue.
- But the world beyond it is something else. In this world there is no equality. When Kanta has to face the bitter reality of this world, she becomes sure that she is prey to **social and economic inequality**. She cannot compare herself with the members of her Saheb's family, where she works as a domestic help.
- Only guarantee to voting rights to all adult persons is not the solution of all the problems. There are many people like Kanta in our country who have the right to vote but whose daily living and working conditions are far from equality.
- There are several kinds of inequalities that exist in our country. Just take the example of the **caste system** which has been in existence in India for centuries. This deeply-rooted evil has created divisions among people.
- The lower caste people and *dalits* are the exploited lot. They have always been discriminated against.
- *Dalit* means broken. Dalits belong to the unprivileged class.
- Omprakash Valmiki is a famous Dalit writer who writes about his bitter experience for being a dalit in his autobiography, *Joothan*. His headmaster tortured him greatly. He made him sweep the school and the playground. While other children in his class were studying he was sweeping. This was very much insulting for him.

- The Ansaris were also exploited people. They were not given a flat by the land lady simply because they belonged to other religion.
- Both Omprakash Valmiki and the Ansaris are badly treated. Their dignity is hurt.
- The Indian constitution recognises every person as equal. While earlier no law existed to protect people from discrimination, now there are several that work to see that people are treated with dignity and as equals.
- Every person is equal before law. What this means is that every person from the president of the country to a domestic help like Kanta has to obey the same laws.
- No person can be discriminated against on the basis of their religion, race, caste, place of birth etc.
- Thus, there are several laws in India that protect every person's right to be treated equally.
- In addition to laws, the government has also set up several schemes to improve the lives of communities and individuals who have been treated unequally for several centuries.
- The *Midday meal* scheme is one of the various steps of the government in this direction.
- Under midday meal scheme all government elementary schools provide children with cooked food.
- This scheme has helped increase the enrolment and attendance of poor children in school.
- In spite of all these efforts to increase equality of opportunity, there continues to be big differences in our country between schools that the rich attend and those that the poor attend.
- India is not the only country where there is inequality. There are many democratic countries around the world where the issue of equality continues to be the key issue around which communities struggle.
- In the United States of America, the African-American were seriously discriminated against. They were considered to be social inferiors.
- In the late 1950s there took place a movement known as **Civil Rights Movement** for equal rights for African-Americans. Rosa Parks became the leader of this movement.
- The **Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion or national origin.
- The struggle for the recognition of all persons as equal and for their dignity should be maintained so that we may be hopeful for a society of equals.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS SOLVED

Q. 1. Do you think Kanta has enough reason to doubt whether she really is equal? List three reasons from story above that might make her feel like this.

(NCERT Textbook, page 6)

Ans. Yes, Kanta has enough reason to doubt whether she really is equal.

Here are three reasons that might make her feel like this:

- (i) Her daughter is in bed but she cannot take a leave.
- (ii) She lives in a basti which is never cleaned.
- (iii) She has to stand in a queue at a government hospital and wait for her turn to show her daughter to the doctor.

Q. 2. Circle the reference to caste in the matrimonial advertisements given below: (NCERT Textbook, page 7)

✓ **ALLIANCE** invited for
32/MMS/5'4"/fair/b'ful
girl

working in IT Co. Mumbai
from BE / MBA boy working
in Mumbai/Abroad from IT
Industry Caste no bar. SC/
ST excuse. Send BHP (must)

PROF Qlfd B'ful tall girl 4
Gupta Boy 28/6" CA Working
MNC TXS USA \$ 80k.

TAMIL BRAHMIN Iyengar groom,
1981 born, Naithruvakashyapa Goth-
ram, Swathi Star, 180cms, tall, fair

Ans.

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Q. 3. Why do you think Omprakash Valmiki was being treated unequally by his teacher and his classmastes? Imagine yourself as Omprakash Valmiki and write four lines about how you would feel if you were in the same situation as him. (NCERT Textbook, page 8)

Ans. Omprakash Valmiki was being treated unequally by his teacher and his classmates because he was a dalit boy. If I were in the same situation as Omprakash Valmiki I would feel greatly humiliated. Dalits are also human beings and they, like others, have full right to live a life with dignity. Dalit children are also entitled to get education. It is shocking if they are made to feel that they are dalits and simply because of this reason they have no access to education.

Q. 4. Why do you think the Ansaris were being treated unequally? What would you do if you were in the Ansaris' position and could not find a place to live because some people did not want to live next to you because of the religion you practice? (NCERT Textbook, page 8)

Ans. The Ansaris were being treated unequally on the basis of differences of religion.

If I were in the Ansaris' position, I would go to live in the locality where people of my religion live in majority.

Q. 5. If you were one of the Ansaris how would you have responded to the suggestion that you change your name? (NCERT Textbook, page 9)

Ans. If I were one of the Ansaris, I would have decided not to change my name at any cost. The decision to change the name would deeply hurt self-respect.

Q. 6. Can you think of an incident in your life in which your dignity was violated? How did this make you feel? (NCERT Textbook, page 9)

Ans. I was in class VI. I forgot to take my maths homework copy to school. That day, many to the students had not brought that particular copy. This provoked the anger of the teacher. He made a few students stand outside the classroom. It was not humiliating because it was a common punishment. But the teacher upheld the rest students in the classroom and told them to give two slaps on their own cheeks. I was among these students.

The teacher looked at that time so ferocious that we could not dare to request him to replace that punishment with something else. Finally, we had to do what we were told.

It was deeply insulting. I never forget this incidence.

- Q. 7.** *What is the midday meal programme? Can you list three benefits of the programme? How do you think this programme might help promote greater equality?*

(NCERT Textbook, page 11)

Ans. The midday meal programme is an initiative taken by the government. This programme has been introduced in all government elementary schools to provide children with cooked lunch.

Three benefits of this programme:

- (i) More poor children have begun enrolling and regularly attending school.
- (ii) With the midday meal being provided in school children's attendance has improved. Their mothers, who earlier had to come back to home from their work to feed their children, now no longer need to do so.
- (iii) This programme has also helped reduce caste prejudices because both lower and upper caste children in the school eat this meal together.

I don't think that this programme would be more effective. Inequalities still exist in every nook and corner. Big differences can be seen between schools that the rich attend and those that the poor attend. However, this programme may prove to be a steps in the direction of establishing equality in the country.

■ TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

- Q. 1.** *In a democracy why is Universal Adult Franchise important?*

Ans. In a democracy every citizen is equal. The concept of Universal Adult Franchise is based on equality. Therefore, it is important in a democracy. Under Universal Adult Franchise every adult irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex etc. is allowed to vote.

- Q. 2.** *Re-read the box on Article 15 and state two ways in which this Article addresses inequality?*

Ans. This Article addresses inequality in terms of (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment, or (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathings ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

- Q. 3.** *In what ways was Omprakash Valmiki's experience similar to that of the Ansaris?*

Ans. Both Omprakash Valmiki and Ansaris were subjected to discrimination. Omprakash was not allowed to sit with other students in the classroom and was made to sweep the school and the playground only because he was a dalit. Similarly, the Ansaris were not given a flat in a locality where lived the people belonging to religion other than theirs. The moment the landlady came to know about their names, she declined to rent the house. In both the cases the dignity of a person is violated.

- Q. 4.** *What do you understand by the term "all persons are equal before the law"? Why do you think it is important in a democracy?*

Ans. It means that every person, from the President of the country to a domestic help like Kanta has to obey the same laws. No person can be discriminated against on the basis of their religion, race, caste etc. Every person has access to all public places including playgrounds, hotels, shops and markets. All persons can use publicly available wells, roads and bathing ghats.

Equality is the soul of democracy. We know that democracy is a form of government which gives equal importance and recognition to all. If inequalities on the basis of race, religion, caste, etc. continue to exist, democracy would never flourish. Instead, it would perish very soon.

- Q. 5.** *The Government of India passed the Disabilities Act in 1995. This law states that persons with disabilities have equal rights, and that the government should make possible their full participation in society. The government has to provide free education and integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools. This law also states that all public places including buildings, school, etc., should be accessible and provided with ramps.*

Look at the photograph and think about the boy who is being carried down the stairs. Do you think the above law is being implemented in his case? What needs to be done to make the building and accessible for him? How would his being carried down the stairs affect his dignity as well as his safety?



Ans. The boy in the photograph is disabled. As per the law this building should have been accessible for him. But we see the law is not being implemented in his case. He is being carried down by security personnels through stairs. This building does not provide ramps. The boy's dignity is overlooked here. He may morally feel inferior. The way he is carried down the stars may prove dangerous. Law should take this case to the court.

