

CHAPTER-2: DIVERSITY AND DISCRIMINATION

MODULE -2/2

This module covers the following topics and concepts:

- Inequality and Discrimination
- On being discriminated against – Caste based discrimination
- Striving for Equality

Inequality and Discrimination

Inequality is the situation in which people are not equal on the basis of economic conditions and opportunities available to them.

Discrimination is the process of distinguishing one person from another on the basis of caste, religion, language, creed, color, economic condition is called discrimination.

Discrimination happens when people act on their prejudices or stereotypes. If you do something to put other people down, if you stop them for taking part in certain activities and taking absorbs or stop them from living in certain arears, prevent them from taking water from the same well, or not allow them tea in the same cups or glasses as others, you are discriminating against them.

Discrimination can take place because of many reasons.

In the previous chapter, we read that Samir Ek and Samir Do were different from each other in many ways. For example they belonged to different religions.

Though this is an aspect of diversity, it can also be a source of discrimination.

Groups of people who may speak certain language, follow a particular religion, live in specific regions etc. maybe discriminated against as their customs and practices maybe seen as inferior.

Another difference between the two Samirs was in their economic backgrounds. Samir Do was poor and this difference is not a form of diversity but of **inequality**. Poor people do not have money to meet their basic needs. They experienced discrimination in offices, in hospitals, in schools etc. where they are treated badly.

On being discriminated against – Caste based discrimination

People are engaged in different kinds of work to earn their livelihood. However certain kinds of work are valued more than others. People who do work like cleaning, washing, cutting hair, picking garbage are seen as dirty or impure.

In the caste system, people are divided into upper caste and lower caste called “untouchables” and now they are called Dalits. The government calls them as Scheduled Caste (SC).

Dalit means “broken”. They are not allowed to enter the homes of the upper caste, take water from the village well or enter the temples. Their children could not sit next to children of other castes in school.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, father of the Indian Constitution and is also best known leader of the Dalits, shares his first experience of caste based discrimination when he was just 9 years old. He had gone with his brothers and cousins to meet his father in Koregaon in Maharashtra.

When they were waiting at the railway station for his father to pick them up, meanwhile the station master asked them for the tickets and enquired who they were. Ambedkar told him that they were Mahars (untouchable community). The station master was stunned and went away to his room. After half an hour the station master returned and asked them what they were going to do. Ambedkar replied that they could hire a bullock-cart and go to Koregaon but the cart men refused to carry them because they belonged to untouchable class, though they were prepared to pay double the fair. The cart-men acted in discriminatory manner.

So this story clearly shows us caste based discrimination is not only limited to preventing Dalits from undertaking certain economic activities but also denies them the respect and dignity given to others.

Striving for Equality

Dalits, women, tribals and peasants fought against the inequalities they experienced in their lives. Dalits led by Ambedkar organize themselves to get entry into temples. Women demanded right to education on par with men and tribals and peasants fought to release themselves from the grasp of the money lenders.

When India became independent in 1947, our leaders were aware of the inequalities that existed. Those who wrote the Constitution of India, were also aware of the ways in which discrimination have been practiced in our society and Ambedkar fought for the rights of the Dalits. The Constitution ensures that all the people of India are considered equal. This equality of all persons is seen as a key value that unites us all as Indians. Everyone has equal rights and opportunities. Untouchability is considered as a crime and has been abolished by law. Government jobs are open to all people.

The writers of the Constitution felt that people must have the freedom to follow their religion, speak their language, celebrate their festivals and express themselves freely. They said that the government must treat all religions equally. Therefore India became a secular country where people of different religions can practice their religion without any fear any discrimination. This is seen as UNITY IN DIVERSITY.

But in reality, inequalities exist even today. So we have to keep striving for equality.
