

Concept of Equality

QUALITY, LIKE LIBERTY, is a prominent political ideal of the present-day world. The French Revolution (1789) was fought for 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. Liberty and equality, taken together, describe the conditions of human emancipation. They constitute the voice of the oppressed, the voice against injustice, and the voice for changing unfair social conditions.

Liberty

and equality, in this sense, may be interpreted as complementary principles. In

some other contexts, they may appear to be mutually contradictory. It is, therefore, essential to understand the nature and essence of equality in order to

determine its proper relationship with the principle of liberty and justice.

The problem of equality and inequality has figured in political thought since earliest

times. Aristotle, for instance, discovered that 'inequality' was a cause of rebellion

in many a state. He defined justice as treating equals equally and unequals unequally.

This was a typical statement in that it insisted on recognition and maintenance of

existing inequalities in society—between master and slave, between rich and

poor, between morally superior and morally inferior, and so on. The modern idea

of equality, on the contrary, seeks the reduction in inequalities insofar as they can

be proved to be unjust according to the prevailing social consciousness.

EQUALITY AS A STATEMENT OF RIGHT, NOT OF FACT

At the outset, it is essential to note that the modern idea of equality is derived

from the theory of rights. Equality is a prescriptive term, not a descriptive one.

We argue that men must be treated as equal, not that they are in fact equal. We, of course, advance some logic in support of our claim to human equality. For instance, we postulate that man as such is a rational being; he is endowed with the faculty of 'reason'; all men are created equal by God. Or we argue that the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of all men are similar; hence all are entitled to equal rights. We do not say that all men are equal in their physical or mental capacities, beauty and talents, etc. Sometimes we dwell on physical attributes to press our claim, such as, when we argue that men may differ in the colour of their skin, but they are all similar in the colour of their blood, hence they should be treated equally. Nature has not made different persons with different elements. A drug does not discriminate between the Jew and the Gentile while showing its effect. Blood group of the black may match with that of the white whereas it may not match in the case of two whites or blacks. The black may donate his eye or kidney to the white to restore his lost vision or to give him a new lease of life. In short, the distinction between different races is not ordained by nature. Thus we tend to establish some fundamental equality among men—equality as a fact—to press their claim of equality as a right.