

**Department of Education
Semester – 2, Unit – 2(i)
Equity and Equality in Education**

Dr Ajit Mondal

Introduction

India is a democratic and socialistic country. Our Constitution is also committed to the principle of equality. We have also accepted democracy as an integral part of our social and political life. Equality of opportunity is the trump card of an egalitarian, democratic and socialistic pattern of society. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, democracy only provides that all men should have equal opportunities for the development of their unequal talents. How to realize the ideal of egalitarianism or how to build egalitarian society has been a subject of much interest to the democratic India since the achievement of independence. It is unfortunate that the phenomenal growth in educational facilities after independence is not accompanied by equalisation of opportunities for all. In India where social and economic inequality is still a cause of deep concern, equalisation of educational facilities must be linked to equity. Education is one the effective means through which any society can strive for social equality or at least make an effort to reduce social inequalities among their members. It is simply because education promotes social mobility among its members. This will only be made possible, if there is a provision for equalisation of educational opportunities to all its members irrespective of caste, religion, gender, location, creed, language, socio-economic status etc. Moreover, human resource development of any nation essentially calls for optimal utilisation of all sections of population. Education plays an important input in such a development of human resource in the country. The report of the Indian Education Commission, 1964-66 also stated regarding the equalisation of educational opportunities, “One of the important social objectives of education is to equalize opportunity, enabling the backward or underprivileged classes and individuals to use education as a lever for the improvement of their condition. Every society that values social Justice and is anxious to improve the lot of the common man and cultivate all available talent must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee for the building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimized”. Equality of educational opportunities should be provided to the traditionally underprivileged, disadvantaged and weaker sections of society in India.

Concept of Equality and Equity

There is a common misconception among us about the differences between Equity and Equality in the areas of education, health, sports, opportunities etc. The two terms are used interchangeably as we assume that equity is same as equality, but the truth is that they are different. Scholars have differentiated the two terms in the following ways:

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Martin Bronfenbrenner (1973): Despite their phonetic similarity and philological connections, they are quite distinct. The equality of a distribution of income or wealth is basically a matter of fact and is, therefore, basically objective. The equity of the same distribution is basically a matter of ethical judgment and is, therefore, basically subjective.

D. Corson (2001): The term ‘equality’ basically means the absence of special privileges to any section of the society, and the provision of adequate opportunities for all individuals without any discrimination. The ‘equity’ concept is associated with fairness or justice in the provision of education or other benefits and it takes individual circumstances into consideration.

W. J. Jacob & D. B. Holsinger (2009): Equality as the state of being equal in terms of quantity, rank, status, value, or degree. Equity refers to a strategic approach to ensure distribution of resources or opportunities, in order to compensate for uneven distribution of opportunities and resources amongst differently situated groups and individuals in a given context.

A careful analysis of the above cited definitions makes it clear that the term equity refers to the system of justice and fairness and under which the individual needs, interests and requirements are taken into account and treated accordingly. Therefore people are treated fairly but differently as their circumstances are given due importance. Equality is a system where everyone is treated in the identical way, without giving any attention to their needs and requirements. Equity is thus a situation in which each and every individual is granted same rights and facilities, irrespective of their individual differences. Therefore, equality works, only if the starting point of every individual is same.

While equality is a value, equity refers to the strategies adopted to realize the value of equality. The value of equality can only be realised through concrete, transparent, physically observable strategic interventions of equity. For example, if all children in a school be treated in a fair, just and humane way is an effort towards value of equality, the attention given to individual differences in attainment levels by the classroom teacher or school is a school strategy for equity and the organisation of Remedial Instruction for slow learners is a also programme under this strategy.

Equity is primarily a means of establishing equality or minimising the degree of inequalities in the society. The question of equity doesn’t arise if all the individuals belong to same level in terms of education, intelligence, economy, social status etc. The ‘equity’ refers to the just and fair provision of resources to all the individuals, whereas ‘equality’ denotes provision of same resources to all people. The differences between equity and equality can be summarised in the following ways:

- Equity denotes subjective and ethical judgement whereas equality is more objective.
- Equity is a means whereas equality is an end.

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- Equity is a process while equality is the outcome of that process. That's why equity is the necessary condition to be fulfilled to achieve equality.
- In equity, the differences are recognized and so efforts are made to treat everyone differently. On the contrary, equality recognizes sameness and so it aims at treating everyone equally.
- Justness and fairness in the manner of treating individuals are called equity. Equality is a state or situation where everyone is at the same level.

Meaning of Equality of Educational Opportunity

While the concept of 'equality' in general and 'equality of opportunity' in education in particular owes its origin in the hoary past, the notion of equity in education is a more recent one. The notion of 'equality' is usually dated from the French Revolution of 1789 and popularised under the slogan liberty, equality and fraternity. In the nineteenth century, the ideals of democracy and socialism have added a new thrust to the idea of equality. The socialism advocates supply and distribution of adequate opportunity to all for growth and development according to their abilities, aptitudes and desires. The very idea continued to flourish till recent times and has been highlighted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, when the principles of 'non – discrimination' and 'right to education' have been strongly advocated. These two principles have given birth to the concept of "equality of educational opportunity in education".

Although universally accepted as a social ideal, there is no general agreement on the meaning of equality of educational opportunity. University Education Commission (1948-49) stated that 'equal opportunity does not mean identical opportunity for all. It means the equal availability of education for every qualified person. Our system must provide for every young person education to the extent that he can profit from it and of a character best designed to assure the maximum development of his nature. It must of course recognise differences of gifts and interests'. However, in India inequality of educational opportunities is a reality that has been continuing for generations. Let us quote few definitions on equality of educational opportunity given by eminent educationists in order to gain an insight into its meaning:

C. Seshadri (1976): Equality of educational opportunity implies provision of differential treatment (in the form of incentives) in favour of the handicapped and underprivileged classes.

J. P. Naik (1979): Equality of educational opportunity has several aspects. The most important of these is the recognition of the right to education as a human right or as the birth-right of every individual irrespective of religion, caste, race, language, colour, class or socio-economic status.

S. K. Kochhar (1982): By the concept of equality of opportunity is meant giving equal chance to every citizen for the development of his or her capacity or ability; and nothing should be allowed to obstruct one's path of development ... in education, it will mean that special attention is to be given to the underprivileged, the disadvantaged, the scheduled castes, tribal areas, women and the students from backward classes.

V. R. Taneja (2003): The absence of discrimination and the absence of inequality constitute "equality of educational opportunity". The concept of equality however, does not assume that all individuals are basically equal. It therefore, desires that each individual should get

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opportunities according to his innate capabilities. No one should be stopped from “going up the ladder” except if he himself lacks the ability to go up.

Considering the above definitions, we may now say that equality of educational opportunities means the provision of education to every citizen on the basis of their own abilities, skill, interest, aptitudes. Equalization of educational opportunities does not mean provision of one and the same educational programme to all but to provide different educational programmes on the basis of their own aptitudes, interests and needs. It doesn't denote identical opportunity but a means best suited to the abilities and aptitude of every student. Therefore, University Education Commission, 1948-49 reiterated that ‘each person should have educational opportunity of the kind and to the extent that is suited to his capacity and interest and which represents his fair share of the total educational resources’. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 also emphasized that equality of education means “to provide for equal opportunity to all not only in access but also in the conditions for success”. In Indian context, equality of educational opportunity means that everyone must be given his or her own chance to develop, depending upon his or her individual capacity. Equality of educational opportunities implies to give equal chance to every citizen for the development of his or her capacity or ability, and nothing should be allowed to obstruct one's path of development. Particularly special attention is to be given to the underprivileged, the disadvantaged, the disabled, women and other child from backward communities.

Equality does not indicate that all men are equal in any sense. The native capacities of men are by no means equal. So, we should treat all men equally. Individual differences must have to be kept in mind. Since the native abilities of individuals are bound to differ in accordance with their heritage and environment, the concept of equality should be harmonized with quality among the citizens of a country. People differ from one another in almost all aspects of human personality – cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Equality in education means equalization of individual differences among the learners. Every individual should get equal and suitable opportunity to cultivate his talent and receive education according to his needs, abilities and aptitudes. Equality of educational opportunities can be stated as the right of each child to receive an education suited to its character and abilities.

Need and Importance of Equality and Equity in Education

The following aspects underline the need of equality and equity in education:

Human Right: Education is considered as a universal and fundamental human right since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. It has also been found that right to education is not only a human right in itself, but also essential for the exercise of other rights. The idea of equality of opportunity has also been affirmed in Article I of the UDHR, 1948, stating “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. As a sequel to this, the principles of "non-discrimination" and "right to education" have been strongly advocated. These two principles gave birth to the concept of "equality of opportunity in education." Therefore, education is considered as the birth right of every individual. It must be provided to all children irrespective of caste, creed, religion, language, sex and other social stratifications. Depriving any person of education on the ground of religion, race or class will be denial of Human Right.

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Essential for Socialism: The concept of equality has been the real force of socialist idealism through the centuries. Under the ambit of socialism every individual should have equal opportunities for social, economic, cultural and educational advancement in line with his or her innate capacities or potentialities. Even the Preamble to the Constitution of India guarantees “equality of status and of opportunity” to all the citizens.

Success of Democracy: Equality is the backbone to the democratic society and it aims to prevent discrimination and provides an equal opportunity to all. The central idea of equality is that all the individuals are entitled to get equal treatment in the society and are not discriminated on the basis of race, sex, caste, creed, nationality, disability, age, religion and so forth. India is a democratic country. True democracy can only be achieved through the practice of some universal values like liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. Hence equality and equity in education are essential for the success of democratic institutions.

Egalitarian Society: The Constitution of democratic India enshrines the concept of egalitarian society in which equality and social justice are the cardinal norms. Modern society views education as an important societal resource and means of achieving the goal of egalitarianism. Equal and equitable opportunities for education can ensure the citizens to have equal status in the society. That’s why, the Education Commission (1964-66) stated that equalisation of educational opportunity is ‘the only guarantee for the building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimised’.

Economic and Social Development: Another view point is that the progress of society and the development of the individual are complementary and they go hand in hand. Hence, the aim of education in all respects would be developing the individual up to his/her potential as a member of a society and, therefore, leading to development of society. Equal and equitable education is considered as a means of raising the societal and economic status of an individual. Education is the potent tool for empowering people socially and economically. This means education should go down to every citizen of India, every SC, every ST, every girl, and every rural child and to every economically poor child.

Advancement of Nation: Equality and equity in education are essential for a rapid development of a nation. Today the advancement of a nation is primarily measured in terms of its human resource development. That’s why education is now considered an investment. If the people have equal opportunities to get education they will have a chance to develop their native talent and thus contribute to the progress of nation.

Search of Talent: The principles of equality and equity confirm the entitlement of access to educational opportunities for all. Such principles provide a wider scope for manifestation of inner potentials of human beings in tune with aptitude and capacity. Equality and equity in education will thus facilitate the search of talent among all the people of nation. There will thus be available people with specialized talents for specialized jobs in a large number and the society will be benefitted.

Closer Link: Equality and equity in education will widen a closer link between the requirements of a society and the availability of the skilled personnel. Expectations of the society and its members can be fulfilled only when equality and equity in education are treasured.

Modernization: Education is closely associated with the process of modernization. Equal and equitable education minimise the exploitation of the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of the society. Equality in education also removes poverty, illiteracy, superstitions

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and ignorance. Equality and equity in education thus bring the people into the process of modernization in social, economic, political and education fields. Equalisation of opportunities in education is essentially sought for acting as a catalyst in the process of modernization.

Causes of Inequalities in Respect of Educational Opportunities

The Indian society is highly stratified and hierarchical, based on caste, class, religion, language and other social stratifications. Naturally, there are many barriers in equalizing educational opportunities in India. The Report of the Education Commission 1964 – 66 highlighted that inequalities of educational opportunities arise in various ways, like uneven existence of primary, secondary, or collegiate institutions, and glaring imbalances of educational development in different parts of the country. However, following are the main causes for inequalities in education:

Absence of a National System of Education: The absence of a national system of education poses an obstacle in the way of equality of educational opportunities in India. In the education sector both public and private agencies are at work. To ensure equality of educational opportunity, State is essentially required to perform as only one agency in the field of education. Unfortunately, our education system has not yet been nationalised. Education under State control is yet to be achieved. Although the 42th Amendment to the Constitution of India placed education on the Concurrent List, yet education remains dominated by individual policies of the States.

Differences in the Home Environment: Differences in the home environment of children create inequality. A child belonging to a rural household or an urban slum having non-literate parents does not have the same opportunity in respect of education which a child from an upper class home with highly educated parents has. Children whose parents are illiterate are first generation learners. These children are deprived of the academic support and supervision, encouragement, and help from their parents. On the contrary, children belonging to educated family enjoy all the support and guidance from their parents for their education. Thus, such type of inequality among children arises from the disparities in the home environment to which children belong.

Gender Disparity: In Indian context, educational inequity arises due to gender inequality or discrimination with reference to the education of boys and girls at all stages. In our society, due importance is not given to girl child as compared to boy due to social taboos, which prevent girls from receiving proper education. They are made passive members in the family. Even they hold inferior position in their family. Parental expectation is generally reflected in children's performance. In many cases, degree of their expectation also varies with gender. Parental dreams almost son-centric. Usually parents value more and take care of education of their sons. Curriculum is also not suited to the needs and problems of the girls. Consequently, education of girl child is neglected due to gender biasness among the parents, guardians, elders and the curriculum framers.

Poverty of Parents: Another cause of inequality of educational opportunity is the poverty of a large section of the population and the relative affluence of a small minority. Even in the neighbourhood of an educational institution, children from poor families do not have the same chance as those who come from richer ones. Children from poor families are generally

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to pursue all levels of education due to the poverty of the families. In recent years, the cost of education mainly at higher secondary and tertiary levels has increased substantially. If poor parents are unable to meet such heavy expenditure for education purpose, education of their children will be discontinued. On the other hand, children belonging to affluent families do not face the problem of meeting the cost of education. Economic status of parents is thus a crucial matter for equalising educational opportunities among children.

Differential Standard of Educational Institutions: Differences in the standards of schools, colleges and universities also create educational inequality. At present there are glaring imbalances of educational development in terms of number of institutions at all levels and educational facilities in different parts of our country. The schools and even colleges in rural and backward areas are grossly ill-equipped in terms of number of teachers, scope of multi-subjects, well – equipped library, teaching aids and apparatus, application of ICT. Comparatively urban schools and colleges are of better standard than rural schools and colleges. Consequently there happens larger incidence of failure than in urban schools and colleges. Students from ill-equipped schools or colleges can't get scope for admission to an institution such as college or university due to poor performances in terms of marks. The poor exposure of rural children may lead to poor performance. Differences in the standards of educational institutions ultimately cause inequality in the standard of students.

Disparity between the Advantaged and the Disadvantaged: The equally wide or sometimes wider disparity of educational development between the advantaged section and the disadvantaged sections of people (the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, rural people and womenfolk) causes inequality of educational opportunities. Differences can be found in educational and cognitive development of children belonging to upper class, most backward classes and scheduled tribes. The disadvantaged groups are deprived of all developmental programmes due to a good number of reasons such as illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness about their rights. Naturally the children belonging to the disadvantaged groups do not have the educational opportunities available within their reach.

Regional Imbalance: There are regional imbalances in educational opportunities in different states, different districts and blocks within the territory of India. Even the availability of educational opportunities is different from place to place within the state and within the district. There are areas where facilities for higher education are not available. Due to the uneven development of educational institutes across India, children are being deprived of equal opportunity for education. Inequality of educational opportunities thus arises from the glaring imbalances of educational development in different parts of the country.

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