

# EQUALITY-SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

MEENAKSHI J. APTE

The paper gives various definitions to the term 'equality' and quotes the concept of equality held by authors like Lohia, Gore, Kristol and others. To judge whether a given society is egalitarian or not, certain aspects like impartiality, equal shares and proportional equality should be taken into consideration. A brief history is traced of equality as a thought, beginning with Aristotle. Various programmes are needed to make a society egalitarian. These include important aspects like education, environment, medical help, wages and others. The article ends by questioning the possibility of real equality in a society.

Prof. (Mrs.) Meenakshi J. Apte is Head, Department of Family and Child Welfare, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay.

## Introduction

The word 'equality' is familiar to most of us, but when pressed to explain its meaning, our definitions are full of contradictions. We say that we believe that all men are equal, but when asked to explain the inequalities around us, we fumble, then say "at least men ought to be equal"?.?The answer is then converted into wishful thinking and not a reality of life. While taking note of the inequalities, we say, "Men should be equal before God". While saying that 'all are equal' we also believe that some people are more competent than others, and that, this will be always so. If some people are more competent, then the corollary is, competence, should be rewarded. Differential rewards are contradictory to the principle of equality. One realises that it is easier to talk about the existing inequalities, but difficult to conceptualise 'equality'. Under various names the problem of 'inequality' has occupied a central position in the social sciences. While comparatively, literature on 'equality' is scanty. Ram Manohar Lohia aptly writes,

The case of equality has not before been stated comprehensively. In other words, complete meaning of equality has not been adequately investigated. Equality is perhaps as high an aim of life as truth and beauty. But its aim has not been invested in serenity. Its direct and immediate repercussions on day-to-day life, on property and income and general order of the society are deep and many. The din of battle does not quieten nor its dust settle down for a total and serene examination of equality (Lohia, 1978:222).

The history of society, is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, guild master and journeyman, in a word the oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, observed Karl Marx.

Men *are* known to work comparatively better under the temptation of profit, if they are independent of fear of dismissal, or under a system which combines fear and temptation. Such a system which depends on temptation and fear for their dynamism and growth must inevitably breed inequality. Inequality has thus come to be regarded as part of the human nature... Under such circumstances no substitute for fear and greed are found. Moral exhortation or pious hopes of an

altruistic revolution in human nature have disfigured the examination of equality as much as irrational, shortsighted and narrowly selfish abuse heaped upon it. Whether equality corresponds to human nature or not is a secondary question (Ibid).

### **Equality as a Goal, a Value, High Aim of Life**

Under the difficulties explained above, equality is regarded as value or aim of life.

We say that all human beings are equal, we are making the statement in a normative sense, we are suggesting that in some respects-understood, if not specified-all human beings must be treated as equal. This normative or prescriptive statement cannot, of course, change the condition of inequality in the biophysical or biopsychic equipment of different individuals, but in so far as the inequalities between the individuals are due to differences in social treatment, they are potentially subject to modification by the adoption of egalitarian values. In this sense social equality is a value, a goal, an ideal, and not necessarily a description of the human condition at a given point of time (Gore, 1977).

Dr. Lohia calls equality as the high aim of life.

In one way or the other, high aims of life have tended to link up with an imagined existence after death. Hindu philosophy believes in life after death and Moksha. The attainments of the short span of individual life are so evanescent that a state after death gives comfort, hope and also purpose. The concept of salvation after death has given birth to the complementary notion of salvation in life. Salvation of life would mean absence of regrets on the lowest planes and undimmed presence of bliss and happiness on the highest planes. Can life as such be lived without the supreme principle of equality? (Lohia: 1978 : 223).

Stressing that equality is the high aim of life, Lohia describes how man has discovered the principle of equality. "When the bards sang of the indestructible unity of the Universe, they were thrilled with two discoveries, first that the Universe is all of one piece and, therefore, every part is the equal of another, and second that every part of the Universe can sense the joy of being co-extensive with all of it".

All men of joy have variously wanted to be the tree whose sap rises with the wind, or the kid that gambols after his mother, or the star whose twinkle reveals as much as it deepens its mystery not to talk of fellow creatures. Reason is a potent instrument of understanding but so is the direct and intuitive feeling of equality. To be able to sense the indestructible unit of the Universe is perhaps the greatest joy that can be known to man and equality appears to be a necessary state of mind. To feel the joy of being one with the Universe, of being equal with everything in it. Such a spiritual and emotional kinship appears to be a main quality of equality as aim of life (Ibid).

Wollheim and Berlin have pointed out two assumptions for accepting the naturalness of the idea of equality : (a) men are members of one species of a single class of objects (*i.e.* human beings); and (b) all members should be treated uniformly, unless there is a good and sufficient reason not to do so. This assumption Berlin

emphasises is so pervasive, that it has almost a status of a category of human rationality.

## Definition of Equality

Lohia defines equality, "As an abstract concept and generalisation, equality can mean an atmosphere, an emotion and perhaps also a wish that all arrangements political, social or economic shall be equal as between one individual and another". *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides three aspects of the definition of equality : (i) Conditions of having equal dignity, rank or privileges with other; (ii) Condition of being equal in power, ability, achievement or excellence; and (iii) Fairness, impartiality, equity due to proportion. Irving Kristol comments, "A moment's contemplation will reveal that these three definitions of equality although all of them are consistent with common usage are not entirely or necessarily consistent with one another". If, for example, men are unequal in power, ability, achievement or excellence, then an adherence to definition (i) will violate the definition in (iii) It is only if men are equal in power, ability and excellence, they will be equal in rank. The natural inference of the situation would be that, since real equality is not possible, inequality is inevitable. But that is not so. Equality implies the deliberate acceptance of social restraints upon individual expansion. It involves the prevention of sensational extremes of wealth and power by public action for the public good. It is applicable in social, political, civil lives of people. It implies that exploitation of any group be stopped and these groups be given the opportunity to develop their strength to the fullest possible extent. Commenting on inequality, Mathew Arnold remarked, "On the one side, in fact inequality harms by pampering; on the other by vulgarising and depressing. A system founded on it is against nature, and in the long run breaks down". It is a distinguishing characteristic of the modern age, that equality should not be merely an abstract ideal, but also a politically aggressive ideal.

## Equality of Characteristics and Equality of Treatment

When one thinks of equality of characteristics, equality must be construed in the sense of similarity that is of agreement in certain properties. Men are equal implies that men share some of the common properties. Men are evidently unequal in many characteristics. There are natural differences (sex, colour, personal endowments, among others) and institutional variations (citizenship, religion). Other properties are common to all but in varying amounts (age, strength, possession, power, intelligence). To claim then that all men are equal in such respects can only mean that resemblances in some ways are more significant than differences (Kristol, 1969). Hobbes says that,

Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of the body and mind that the weakest can kill the strongest and no one can outwit the other. Men are held equal in a sense that all have a common human nature, they have the same basic motives, good and bad, are having basic common needs, similar capacities to feel pleasure or pain or some ability to act deliberately or to choose rationally (Felix E. Oppenheim-. 102).

So equality of treatment is also very important. Moralists have claimed that men, in spite of differences of character or intelligence, are of equal dignity or worth. These

statements are to be interpreted in a normative sense, to the effect that all men are to be treated equally. Locke interprets his own statement that "men by nature are all equal", as referring not to all sorts of equality, since men differ as to age or virtue, but to the equal right that every man has to his natural freedom. It means that men should be given corresponding equal rights (Locke). Whether individuals or groups are, in fact, treated equally or unequally by others, depends on the way in which benefits or burdens are allotted to them. Benefits and burdens are concretised in terms of rights and duties. In an egalitarian society, balance between the distribution of rights and duties has to be attained. How does one judge whether the society is egalitarian or not? Oppenheim has tried to point out certain traditional criteria which suggest whether a given society is egalitarian or inegalitarian. They are :

*Impartiality:* Equal treatment means first of all, the impartial allocation of some benefits or burdens by one actor to another. Equality before the law means the impartial application of the law. Allocations are partial or impartial only by reference to a rule of allocation. To whom these rules are to be applied, is a matter of least importance. Adultery or infidelity is bad. Whether the husband is adulterous or the wife, is immaterial. Payment of income-tax is a requirement. Whether one is a common man or a minister, would not be given any consideration where impartiality prevails.

*Equal share to all:* According to utilitarians, everybody is to count for one, nobody for more than one in the allocation of benefits and burdens. Rules which allocate a benefit or burden equally, should be undoubtedly called egalitarian. But it does not happen. Let us take the example of scarcity of food and rationing of food materials. Everyone, rich or poor, gets the same food quota. But the rich have got the additional capacity to buy food by paying higher rates, which creates inequality. Or say sales tax, which is levied on the basis of the price of goods. Both rich and poor have to pay it equally. But a millionaire paying the same amount of sales tax as the poor man, is inegalitarian.

*Equal share to equals:* Most rules of allocation grant equal share of some kind, not to all generally, but to all who are equal with respect to some property. For example, people within the same income bracket will have a common scale of income tax. According to the previous criterion and our personal view, this would be non-egalitarian. Thus, the American Constitution, which proclaimed that all men are equal, was also interpreted as all white men are equal (refusing equality rights to the blacks or women). This kind of rule should be considered as inegalitarian, but this rule also tries to reduce the burden on the weaker sections, like by exempting certain poor groups from the payment of income tax and so on. This rule treats equals equally and simultaneously, unequals unequally.

*Proportional equality:* To narrow down the criterion, unequal allotments have been held to be egalitarian if, and only if, they satisfy the requirements of "proportional equality". A rule is generally considered to satisfy this requirement, if it provides that the amount of benefit or burden is a monotonically increasing function of the specified character. Thus, this rule allots rewards in proportion to the virtues each one has. To each according to his need and to each according to his right is the rule.

*Unequal shares corresponding to relevant differences:* Inequality in allotment has been held to be egalitarian, provided it is based upon relevant differences in personal characteristics. Thus, age and citizenship are important for voting rights but not sex,

race or wealth. Wealth is relevant to taxation, hence, graduated income tax is viewed as egalitarian, but not sales tax. Here, equality becomes tantamount to distributive justice. "The unjust is unequal, the just is equal, that is, it is unjust to make equal awards to those to share unequal virtues' (Aristotle).

*Preferential equality:* To these criteria, Lohia has tried to add one more. He uses the term preferential equality, which is used to notify the disadvantaged groups (either socially, economically or geographically), to whom more support is given so that they can be on par with others. This principle of preferential equality is used by the Indian Constitution, in giving special protection to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Oppenheim also gives a working definition of egalitarianism. In a given society, equality of opportunity, legal equality, equal satisfaction of basic needs, economic equality, common ownership of means of production, and so on, will depend to what extent a society is committed to the egalitarian idea, its commitment to political philosophy, and many other aspects.

### **Development of Equality as a Thought**

In the Greek democracies, the citizens were equal in the possession of liberty and largely equal in social aspects, but they formed only one category from which women, aliens and slaves were excluded. To Aristotle, it was evident that freemen and slaves differed by nature. For Aristotle, equality required that each should receive his just due, a doctrine of *Sum Cuigne* or equality for equals. Signs of equality in a wider sense are found among the Greeks, even before Plato and Aristotle, in religious connections. Nature gave men the law of equal rights. As time passed, the Stoics reached a conception of Cosmic Law, a law of nature, to which all men were subject alike, a law which embodies a universal reason, of which all men, slave and free, possessed some spark. By this spark of reason, all men resembled each other and differed from animals. Seneca observed that no man was more noble than another, except in being more right-minded or more capable of good actions. The Hebrews saw men created in the image of God. Jesus Christ further implied the same idea. He saw men as children of one father, declared that offence to the "least of these was an offence to himself". By the end of the 12th century, with the spread of Christianity all over Europe, came the belief in human equality. In the Middle Ages, the Church itself created many inequalities, against which later generations were to rebel. Luther considered all men equally capable of spiritual life. The Protestant reformers asserted the equality of Christian believers. To overthrow the traditional priesthood and establish a spiritual equality of believers, Luther welcomed the increase of power in the hands of the ruling princes.

By the end of the 18th century, the principle new thought which the enlightenment had to contribute with respect to equality was the idea of environmentalism. The ancient idea that men were equal at birth, or in the eyes of God, was thus enriched by the further idea that they were potentially equal in earthly life. The basis of traditional, customary and hereditary inequalities was undermined. A strong current of humanitarianism began to flow. For reasons that are hard to explain, men were more shocked by cruelty, sensitive to injustice, insistent on the dignity of human beings, each to alleviate misery and raise the level to which all could aspire (Palmer, 1973).

The works of John Locke are of utmost importance. In his essay concerning human understanding, he tries to explain and undermine the basis of traditional customary and hereditary inequalities. Rousseau was the main philosopher of equality. He did not regard it as a fact of nature. He believed that human beings were greedy and grabbing. "It is precisely because the force of thinking always tends to destroy equality that the force of legislation should always tend to maintain it". Rousseau argued in *The Social Contract* (1774):

men were indeed equal in a state of nature, though somewhat brutish but as their minds developed they also developed qualities of pride, arrogance, domination, the love of show and of material goods with a desire to outdo their neighbours and to be admired for their own superiority.

Rousseau provided thought to the French Revolution. "The essence of the French movement was the determination to destroy the legal foundations of an obsolete system of class relations and thus to clear a space for one which should be better adapted to the needs of a rapidly expanding society" (Tawney, 1929:97). The new doctrine was set forth in the Declaration of Rights of 1789, significantly called the rights not only of men but of citizens.

Men are born free and equal in rights. These rights are liberty, security and property. There is also equality of rights which means equality before law, equality of punishment for the same offence, equality of taxation of persons of same income, equality of access to public office depending only on virtues and talents, equality of civil rights for Catholics, Protestants, Jews and non-believers. Equalities of opportunity for employment or investment, abolition of guilds, equalities as between the geographical areas within the state, equality of representation based on numbers, equality of educational opportunity and equality between men and women.

These are the equalities visualised by the Charter of Citizens Rights (1789).

Racial equality was first attained in the French Colonies in 1791 and was advanced in America by Abraham Lincoln at the cost of a civil war. "The main emphasis of the glorious revolution was a plan of universal education and effort to emancipate man from legal fetters which paralysed his energies. In such a society inequalities of wealth between individuals would remain but they would have lost their sting (Tawney: 106).

The revolutionary socialism of the 19th century aimed at an equality beyond that attained by the French Revolution. The most serious socialists of the time were moved by the gross inequalities from which the poor suffered. They were seriously concerned with the inequalities generated by the economic system. Marx thought that capitalism was the private ownership of means of production and purchase of labour for wages. This created two social classes : the exploiters and the exploited. Workers had a right to revolt against class exploitation. Engels observed, "Equality must not be merely apparent, must not merely apply to the sphere of the state, but must also be real, must be extended to the social and economic sphere" (Engels, 1962:199-200). The Marxist theory emphasised that, based on the ownership of tools of production, every society had two classes. The theory also believed in political action. Marx specified the steps

that would be involved in the process of political action. This process would go step by step. (1) Conflicts over the distribution of economic rewards between the classes. (2) Easy communication between the individuals in the same class position, so that ideas and action programmes are readily disseminated. (3) Growth of class consciousness in the sense that the members of the class have a feeling of solidarity and understanding of their historic role. (4) Profound dissatisfaction of the lower class over its inability to control the economic structure of which it feels itself to be the exploited victim. (5) Establishment of a political organisation resulting from the economic structure, the historical situation and maturation of class consciousness.

Marx not only preached equality of classes, but also tried to formulate his ideas into a concrete political programme. The antagonism of the workers to the capitalist class, and to the prevailing economic system, was not simply a consequence of the struggle for economic advantage. Marx also thought of the social relations which capitalist industry imposed on the workers. Lack of psychological satisfaction with which workers drag on their lives, Marx called the alienation of human labour. He believed that alienation of labour was complete deprivation, and that would lead to revolution, revolution.

Equality is thus, preached by the 19th century liberals, as well as socialists. Both believe that maximum equality needs to be attained. Liberal views on equality can be analysed in two ways. One assumes an existing amount of human capacity widely different among individuals. The problem is to allow maximum fulfilment of his capacity, either as an act of justice, or prevention of frustration and social dissatisfaction, or to make maximum use of his capacities for the common good. Equality of rights is upheld, inequality of facts is accepted. The socialist view holds to everyone according to his need and demands equitable distribution. In this connection, equality of opportunity and equitable distribution need to be discussed.

Any given society is called egalitarian when opportunity is open to all. Equality of opportunity is not simply a matter of legal equality. Its existence depends not merely on the absence of disabilities, but on the presence of abilities. Tawney observes, "the term has been presented in negative rather than positive terms. It has been interpreted rather as freedom from restraints than the possession of powers." Everybody does not have the same opportunities. Poor people have to pass through many social and economic evils to come up in life (Tawney : 114). The existence of opportunities to move from point to point on an economic scale, and to mount from humble origins to success and affluence, is a condition both of social well-being and individual happiness, and impediments which deny them to some, while lavishing them on others, are injurious to both. But the opportunities to rise are not a substitute for a large measure of practical equality, nor do they make immaterial the existence of sharp disparities of income and social conditions. On the contrary, it is only the presence of a high degree of practical equality which can diffuse and generalise opportunities to rise. The existence of such opportunities in fact, and not merely in form, depends not only on an open road but also upon an equal start (Tawney : 116).

Merely the provision of equal opportunities is not enough. Even to make use of the opportunities is not enough. To make use of the opportunities offered, individuals

require some initial strength or start. Even if education is free, a child from a poor home cannot make use of it. Many factors are responsible for facilitating a child's education. If he does not have a conducive atmosphere at home, no food to eat, or if there are demands to start earning early in life, mere provision of equal opportunities will not be enough.

If a high degree of practical equality is necessary to social well-being, because without it ability cannot find its way to its true vocation, it is necessary also for another and more fundamental reason. It is necessary because a community requires unity as well as diversity and because as it is important to discriminate between powers, it is even more important to provide for common needs (Tawney:118).

Individual happiness does not only require that men should be free to rise to new positions of comfort and distinction, it also requires that they should be able to lead a life of dignity and culture. This fundamental principle of human dignity demands equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity implies the establishment of conditions which favour the expansion of individual abilities.

Rightly interpreted, it means not only that what are commonly regarded as the prizes of life should be open to all, but that none should be subjected to arbitrary penalties, not only that exceptional men should be free to use their exceptional powers, but that common men should be free to make the most of their common humanity. For this the ownership of means of production need to be decentralised and diffused. The institution of property confers a measure of security and independence on poor as well as on rich and softens the harshness of economic contrasts by a common similarity of social status. So, for social equality, economic opportunity becomes necessary (Ibid).

Sydney Webb has stated that, if a classless society is to become not merely a phrase but a practical reality, it can only be established by abolishing the disabilities, which in capitalist societies are attached to poverty, and by providing equally for all the advantages, which in such societies are the privileges of wealth. As a method of correcting the grave results of economic inequality, the combination of progressive taxation and provision of social services is necessary. The concept of equal opportunities and equal distribution gives rise to a specific social policy manifest in the form of various programmes.

### **Various Aspects of Equality as a Programme**

The demand for equality and recognition of human worth, drew its strength from the material deprivation and lack of rights experienced by the working class, during the 19th century. The demand for social justice and the inner urge for economic equality, have compelled the political systems of various types to undertake various programmes. The following is a review of bringing about equality through the state policy.')

*Education for equality:* Education is one of the most important instruments for changing a society. The prospects of a person's life are determined, to a large extent by education, in broadening or narrowing the choice of occupation. It influences the individual's social and economic standards, working environment, freedom and

independence in the job, and the amount of influence at the place of his work. It also greatly affects an individual's relationships with other individuals and groups. Education is considered important for deepening the roots of democracy. Education broadens the individual's understanding about society, but it can also stimulate the individual to question the existing wrongs in a given society. It provides the citizen with sharpened tools for influencing both his own life and the society. Increased education can create preconditions for a greater quality in many ways. Opening educational opportunities and giving scholarships to disadvantaged groups becomes essential. The differences which children from poor economic groups show in their educational achievement are not due to the differences in talent, but are the result of the differences in the pupil's environment at home. Social differences at home are discernible at school. The educational opportunities offered by society are thus, not utilised to the same degree, by different groups. Instead of the underprivileged making rapid use of increased educational resources, experience shows that it is the comparatively prosperous who first take advantage of new and increased educational opportunities. This applies at all levels of primary, secondary and university education. An education policy for equality requires increased allocations of resources and efforts principally in the following areas : (i) equality of early environment to the children in the form of day care and pre-school centres, (ii) development in school, (iii) adult education. Various studies abroad have established the fact that a child's adjustment in school and progress are assured if the child gets an opportunity of attending pre-school education. Children, who have grown up in a stimulating milieu, start school with a much better foundation than children whose milieu has not stimulated the development of their capabilities. It is basic to a programme for equality that children be provided with equal opportunities for development. Greatly expanded pre-school activities should do much to reduce the differences in children's capabilities.

An even start is not enough. The striving for equality must continue to be a force throughout the individual's school life. The school must, to a greater degree, be made meaningful to all the pupils. The methods used must be designed to give even the weaker and disadvantaged children a chance of profiting by the instruction given. Individual performance must be reduced in importance, and greater weight placed on developing children's abilities to collaborate with one another. Skills in working together is an important basis for the development of equality in society. Weaker sections such as scheduled castes, low income groups, girls, economically disadvantaged groups, need to be drawn into the mainstream through education.

Society's educational efforts have so far been focused on the young. Modern working life has a need for skilled educated workers. Middle-aged persons have to compete with the educated younger generation. A continued imbalance in education will lead to a new type of class difference. An education policy, aiming at equality, must be designed with a strong emphasis on adult education. Even those who have received good education in their youth, need to be provided with opportunities for retraining, maybe in the form of continued education. Systematic reduction of educational inequalities among adults, should also have a place in an egalitarian education system. Disadvantaged groups (unskilled labourers, uneducated women) should get priority in adult education. The education system also needs reorganisation. Educational experience and student life at the university is a strong attraction to many young people. In a rapidly changing society with a rapidly increasing fund of knowledge, various types of supplementary education would also be necessary. The younger

generation's need for contact with society as a whole, and the working world's need for better contact with young people and education, also requires to be visualised in the new educational opportunities. Education today leads to personal profits for individuals in an egalitarian society, education would be a privilege for access to service.

*Equality in residential environment and health services.:* Housing represents one of the basic necessities of life. Good housing, at a reasonable price, common to all members of the society, is yet a dream. The situation of the homeless is disturbingly bad. The sight of a modern slum, anywhere, disturbs the egalitarian-minded person. They are social volcanoes. Segregation of low income people in typical localities increases the social gap. In future, residential environments with more collective amenities such as child care, health and recreation facilities, would be necessary.

As everyone's right to education is important, the right to have a good and healthy life is also important. To enjoy social and economic equality, the person should have a healthy body. In a society, where there is exploitation of one class by another, the class of the poor suffers most. Inadequate food and malnutrition leads to poor health. People must have enough food according to their needs. Availability of food depends on the families' economic condition, but it also depends on other factors such as the availability of food in the market itself, and the distribution system in a given society. If people get enough and good food, many of the problems of ill-health could be avoided. People belonging to the poorest sections cannot make use of available health services.

*Wage policy:* Wage policy is very vital to the achievement of the goal of equality. A person's right to work and to proper wages, is considered one of the fundamental human rights. Gandhiji said "A sweeper and a barrister should get equal wage". Although in every society certain functions are more important than others, there should not be a vast difference between the minimum and the maximum wage. Some societies have tried to attain this, but in the society where there is large-scale unemployment, it is very difficult to reduce the gap. In a developing society, there is a need to have persons with leadership and managerial skills, and naturally they will demand differential rewards. The primary goal of equality oriented labour market, is to give each individual the possibility of a free and carefully considered choice of occupation. In any society, this right of the individual must be fulfilled. The future development of the labour market depends on the emergence of an educated society, conscious of its rights. Full employment has always been a demand for the establishment of equality.

*Tax policy:* Tax policy is used many a time, to bring equality. Tax policy is used to reduce income disparities. It is also used to redistribute income and prosperity between groups and individuals. It also helps to transfer economic resources from individuals to society, for an expansion of services for the welfare of all. Certain incomes need to be taxed heavily for the social good. In an underdeveloped country like India, though the rich pay a considerably higher proportion of their income as tax, there has been no resultant reducing inequalities in the distribution of disposable incomes. Considerable improvement in the taxation system itself is necessary. Conspicuous consumption to avoid taxes on the part of the rich class, evasion of tax, accumulation of tax evaded incomes and wealth, are serious threats to economic equality.

*Equality in working life:* Most of today's employees have no appreciable influence on the daily pattern of their work situation, be it office, factory or domestic service. The trade union movement in the last fifty years, has acquired the right to consultations between employee/employers. Because of trade unions, employees have also acquired influence over working conditions, in their own places of work. Legislation to limit the management's power increases state control over the private managements, but does not, necessarily, give the individual worker more influence over working conditions in his work place. People experience lack of equality in working life (which is quite a major part of their day to day life), in addition to the inequalities that they experience elsewhere. Working life influences the individual himself. For some, work means an opportunity to do something which engages their interest, skill and enthusiasm to have a free hand, to experience the stimulation of being trusted and of assuming responsibility, to be constantly learning new things and developing. For others, work is boring, meaningless. If we want to introduce democracy in our political life, some kind of democracy need to be brought in working life, through the participation of the subordinate cadres in policy decisions. As democracy develops, the role of the trade unions as the most important tool of workers' influence also increases. In fact, trade unions play a very important role in bringing equality in working life, within the plant and outside the factory.

*Equality in family-between men and women:* Equality between men and women sought by egalitarians means, rights, obligations and work are no longer allocated according to sex. Today, women experience lack of equality at home, at the place of work, in economic benefits, in opportunity, in rewards. Increased equality in the home, work and community, would result in significant benefits from all points of view. Men would enter more fully into family life, have better contact with their children. Women would be more independent economically. The advantage would be that neither man nor woman will be forced into a pre-determined role because of sex. Children's development would also be influenced with contact with both men and women. Women's difficulties in finding work and their low status are obstacles to their economic equality. Though equality of women has been accepted, women are at a disadvantageous position in many occupations. Equality before law for men and women is upheld, but still there are many social barriers which women cannot cross.

*Equality before law and equality of rights:* Civil rights are considered very important for the achievement of equality. All are equal before the law, at least within the geographical boundaries of a nation. But equality before the law is not always upheld. Those who are well adjusted in society, those who have means, can approach the court where justice is meted. But for most of the economically poor people, law and rights are a dream. It has not been politically or economically possible for any nation to reshape and build a society which will attain full equality before the law. A society's legal machinery usually works slowly and justice is delayed. It is said justice delayed is justice denied. The protection of consumers who are in an exploited situation, in the large commodity markets of modern days is also important. In the quest for equality, the consumer's rights will also have to be visualised. The administrative apparatus in modern society has been changing rapidly. This has meant that the individual has to surrender to the administrative machinery. The citizen needs to establish his rights in the context of the administrative and political machinery. The individual's rights need to be protected, when there is a clash with the state.

## Is Equality Possible?

It seems that equality in all walks of life would be perhaps not possible, but efforts need to be made in that direction.

Psychologists tell us that the way to overcome a complex is not to suppress it, but to treat it frankly and uncover its foundations. What a community requires, as the word suggests, is a common culture, because, without it, it is not a community at all. And evidently it requires it in a special degree at the moment like the present. When circumstances confront it with the necessity of giving a new orientation to the economic life, it must rest upon practical foundations of social organisation. It is incompatible with the existence of sharp contrasts (Tawney:17).

A political doctrine of equality is to be judged according to its strength and not its weakness. Even Engels has warned that only a limited equality would be possible in a socialist society.

The worker must neither imagine that any real equality was possible in a class system, nor expect that under socialism all persons will be treated alike. The real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the abolition of classes. Any demand for equality which goes beyond that, of necessity passes into absurdity (Engels, 1962:95).

Alex de Tocqueville (1875) has stated that if the idea of equality is stretched too much, the end product would be a society of equally small, helpless and unrecognised individuals, on whom despotism could be easily exercised. In the modern world, the key words to acquire equality are fair competition, equality of opportunity, reward for merit, and career open to talent. The purpose is giving encouragement to the able. A vast apparatus of testing, and examination of sifting, sorting, elimination and discrimination has arisen to serve those purposes and values. The difficulty in such a system is that there are more losers than winners. Those disadvantaged at the start remain disadvantaged throughout the contest

## REFERENCES

- Appadorai, A. 1973 : *Documents on Political Thoughts in India*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, Vol. I and II
- Benn, Stanley, I. 1967 : 'Equality Moral and Social' Paul Edward's (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. III, New York : MacMillan Co. and the Fress Press
- Brinton, Crane 1957 : 'Equal Protection of the Law' *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, (Eds) Seligmen and Johnson, Vol. V, New York : The MacMillan Co. (12th Edn.)
- Durant, Will 1953 : *The Pleasures of Philosophy-A Survey of Human Life and Destiny*, New York : Simon and Schuster
- Engels, F. 1962 : *Anti Durhing*, Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House" (3rd Edn.)

- Oppenheim, Felix E. : 'The Concept of Equality' in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, (Ed.) David L. Sills, Vol.V, New York : The MacMillan Co. & the Free Press
- Gore, M.S. : 'Quest for Equality', Hukerikar Memorial Lecture (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) (May) 1977
- Konwits, Milton R. : 'Article on Equality', *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, (Ed.) by Philip P. Wiener, New York : Charles Scribner and Sons 1973
- Kristol, Irving : 'Equality as an Ideal', *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, (Ed.) David L. Sills, Vol. V 1969
- Lohia, R.M. : *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism, The Meaning of Equality*, Hyderabad : Navhind 1978
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. : *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House 1953
- Myrdal, Alva : *Towards Equality*, Prisma Swedish Social Democratic Party 1971
- Palmer, R.R. : 'Article on Equality'. *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, (Ed.) Philip P. Wiener 1973
- Tawney, R.H. : *Equality*, London : George Allen & Unwin Ltd 1931
- Wilson, Bryan (Ed.) : *Education, Equality and Society*, London : George, Allen & Unwin, Ltd 1975
- Wollhelm, Richard : 'Equality and Equal Rights', Frederick A. Olapton (Ed.) *Justice and Social Policy, A Collection of Essays*, 111-127 Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1961
- Wollhelm Richard and Berlin : *Equality*, Parts 1 -2 281 -326, London : Proceedings, the Aristotelian Society for the Systematic Study of Philosophy 1955