UNIT 17 EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

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17.1 INTRODUCTION

Democratic Socialism is the Constitutional philosophy of India. Democracy implies the total freedom of all individuals in a society and that can be possible in a state of equality. Democracy without socialism is impossible and socialism without democracy is meaningless. There is a historically evolved inequality in Indian society.
that is associated with caste, land-holding, property possessions, school-facilities, school-participation, access to higher education, health status and occupational status. Education is not only an indicator of the status of inequality in society but is also perceived as a chief instrument of social mobility and of an egalitarian society.

17.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- appreciate the role of education as an instrument for the creation of an egalitarian society;
- differentiate between the strategies adopted at lower and higher levels of education in promoting equity and excellence in education;
- be familiar with the current controversies and debates in employing education as a strategic instrument for promotion of equality; and
- identify and distinguish between the various indicators of excellence and equity in education.

17.3 EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Society and the State employ education to achieve several national goals. Promotion of equality among the people and excellence in economic, social, civic and cultural spheres of life are two significant goals for which education is employed. As of now, a process of globalisation of life has begun everywhere. Indian society is also in the thick of globalisation. To make a mark in this globalising world, there is a need to maintain quality and standards and be in the forefront of competition. Pursuit of excellence is a value in this direction. Just as India marches ahead, there is also a need to carry all cross-sections of society in this globalising universe. Otherwise inequalities in society may increase leading to social tensions and disintegration. A peaceful march towards progress and prosperity is possible with the pursuit of excellence and should be directed along with the pursuit of equity. A student of Sociology of Education should know as to what it means to achieve these ends and how it is done through education.

17.3.1 Equity as a Constitutional Value

The Constitution of India is a blueprint for the creation of a new society that has been nomenclatured as ‘Democratic Socialism’. This implies a movement wherein individual interests are treated as of supreme value. Articles of the Constitution guarantee fundamental rights to all individuals. The envisioned society is founded on four fundamental values viz; Justice, Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.

Several policies and strategies have been adopted by the Indian State for promotion of equality. Distribution of land to landless persons, provision of special incentives in agriculture, irrigation, power supply and housing to disadvantaged population, a nation-wide scheme of public distribution of cereals, pulses, oil and kerosene at subsidised rates, fertiliser subsidies, progressive taxation, concession to industrial entrepreneurs in backward regions are illustrative of these policies/strategies. Even educational policies and strategies in India are geared towards the promotion of equality. In fact, education is one of the chief instruments for heralding a new society as visualised by the Constitution. It is a non-violent, peaceful and enlightened strategy for creation of a society based on and leading towards the four fundamental Constitutional values.
Emerging Concerns in Indian Education

Freedom or liberation is the goal of an individual and fraternity is the goal of a society. There is an age-old definition of education in Sanskrit which is stated as ‘Sa Vidyā, Ya Vamukththaya’ which means that education is that which liberates a person, makes him free from all types of bondage, ignorance, superstitions, prejudices, unscientific and irrational beliefs and takes him towards knowledge, truth and wisdom. For example, all human beings have the same divine, self-propelling spirit in them and hence all are equal as sparks of the divine is a fundamental truth of life which realisation dawns on an individual through the right type of education. Such a knowledge and understanding sets a human being free from ignorance and bondage. Fraternity can be a reality in a society where all individuals are equal and free. Creation of a society of equals and free individuals who live in harmony and peace is the Constitutional goal of Indian society. Education is the chief tool in realisation of these goals.

17.3.2 Nature of Inequality in India

Promotion of equality presumes an understanding of the nature of inequality. Indian society has been characterised by inequality for centuries. This inequality is both nature created and society contrived. Regional disparities in developmental levels are largely due to asymmetrical distribution of natural resources as well as apathy of organised society towards the same. However, there are several inequalities created and perpetuated by human society. They are related to caste and class. The belief that human beings and groups are hierarchically endowed in regard to their abilities, that those who have superior abilities should enjoy status and wield power over the rest has led to inequalities. Discrimination in regard to sanction/deprivation of privileges, special facilities, access to natural and other resources is borne out of such a belief. Sanctions/deprivations in regard to ownership of property, control of administration, acquisition of learning, marriage relationships, participation in civic/public life have led to unfair and unjust treatment of several groups of human beings in preference to others. It has, in sum, led to injustice in societal organisation and treatment of individuals/groups. This is the society that we inherited at the time of independence and adoption of the Constitution. There is a conscious, deliberate, planned effort on the part of the Indian State to regulate, rechannelise and reform this inegalitarian social structure and lead it towards ‘Democratic Socialism’.

17.3.3 Inequality in School Education

One sad feature of the inegalitarian Indian society is the asymmetric distribution of learning levels, exposure to schooling, mean educational levels, access to opportunities and attainments in general as well as technical and vocational skills in the general population. This asymmetry is distinctly observed across caste and sub-caste groups, rural and urban populations, slum and non-slum population in cities and across various regions in the country. The inequalities arising out of this asymmetry is further accentuated in case of girls across all groups and regions. The case of education of girls is one of inequality within inequality. Provision of schooling and other educational facilities for the whole of the Indian population, ‘Education for All’, is expected to drastically reduce inequalities at least in regard to one basic need of life. Universalisation of elementary education of a given standard and quality all over the country by 2010 AD is a commitment of the State in India under a nation-wide programme called the SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAAN. Universal elementary education is a human right and an obligation of a civil society that can be achieved in near future. This achievement may offset the imbalances in social status among the Indian people and facilitate a more refined day-to-day life. It is noteworthy that universalisation of secondary education is also on the agenda of the State in India.
17.3.4 Equality as a Value in Higher Education

Higher education is not a Fundamental or a Human Right in the sense in which Elementary Education is considered. Article 26 of the Charter of Universal Declaration of Human Rights proposes that "Technical and Professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." Access to higher education and economic ability to profit from professional education in India is highly inequitable. Hardly 8 per cent of the age-group population are in college in India while the average for advanced countries is nearly 30 per cent. Further, the access deprived castes and girls to higher education is quite low.

The significant distinction that needs to be noted herein is that elementary education as an equality-value assumes the status of a fundamental or essential or human right while the equality-value in regard to higher education is a desirable right as per the universal character of Human Rights. Notwithstanding the charter, the Indian State adopted strategies such as the Reservation Policy in professional and other forms of higher education. If school education facilities are not there for the concerned age-group population, it is mandatory for the government to provide it. Alternatively, if higher education facility is not there, it is not mandatory for the government to provide the same. But, if such a facility is available, either in government or government regulated private institutions, it is obligatory for the government to provide reservation to earmarked sections of society.

17.3.5 Role of Education in Promotion of an Egalitarian Society

Education is both an indicator as well as an instrument for the promotion of equality in a society. Literacy level in a society is a crude indicator which is universally employed as an indicator of the spread of education in a society as well as for the comparison of national and sub-national systems of education. Other indicators which are popular are mean level of education, enrolment rates at various levels, retention rates, attainment levels, manpower stocks, teacher-pupil ratios and the like. Differentials between the sexes on all these indicators are used to examine Gender Empowerment Measure.

Literacy and school education, even the elementary ability to register one's signature, elevate the human spirit and endows the ability and feeling to experience the value of equality in daily life. Education liberates a person from bondage. Ignorance, superstitions, poverty, disease, squalor, slavish mentality are all bondages. Freedom from bondage leads to an experience of equality. Inequality is characterised by fear, subjugation, submission, unquestioning loyalty, blind respect for hierarchy and authority, passive acceptance of discrimination and in sum, a loss of freedom. Freedom on the other hand means self-regard, frankness, fearlessness, questioning frame of mind, responsibility and self-discipline. As such freedom presupposes equality. Equality can be there only where there is Justice in society. It is in such a society where there is established Justice, Equality and Freedom that there can be harmony, peace and brotherhood. In this way, education ploughs its path for the promotion of an egalitarian society and creation of democratic socialism through its movement from Justice and Equality towards Freedom and Fraternity.

Social change implies changes in group culture and individual mind-sets which value equality. Achievements in regard to physical quality of life can flow from such reformed mind-set or enlightenment. Education mediates this change. It is the chief instrument for a society in transition from traditional to egalitarian values. National policy statement in education, the National Policy on Education, 1986, reflect the egalitarian concerns of the State.
Check Your Progress 1

Notes:  

a) Write your answers in the space given below  

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Name the Constitutional philosophy of India. What is the chief problem of education in the realisation of this philosophy?
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2) Identify the articles in the Constitution under which Equality of Educational opportunity is guaranteed in India.
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3) State the Constitutional goals of Indian society.
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4) Identify the nature of inequality in school education.
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17.4 STRATEGIES FOR EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Equality is a value of democracy. It is based on the assumption that the planet earth and its resources belong to all its inhabitants and they are entitled to a proportionate share of these resources. The consumption, utilisation and absorption of these resources may depend upon various factors including individual abilities which are distributed in a skewed measure across individuals. But there should be no discrimination in regard to the opportunities to access and enjoy these resources.
17.4.1 Distinction between Equality and Equity

While equality is a value, equity refers to the strategies adopted to realise the value of equality. It is through concrete, transparent, physically observable strategic interventions of equity that the value of equality can be realised.

For example, if all children in a school should be treated in a fair, just and humane way is a statement of equality and a value therein, the attention given to individual differences in attainment levels by the classroom teacher/school is a school strategy for equity and the organisation of Remedial Instruction for slow learners is a programme under this strategy.

17.4.2 Strategies in School Education

Even by 2000 AD, as per an estimate of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), 25 per cent of Indians, 250 million are below the poverty line of income. There is an observed strong association between poverty, illiteracy, non-enrolment in schools and drop-out behaviour. Demand for schooling is very low among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities and girls among all groups. The Government of India/Governments of the States of the Union have been offering special educational facilities and incentives to disadvantaged sections of society to realise the objectives/dream of universalisation of primary education. Attendance scholarship to children in the form of free uniforms, free textbooks and work-books, mid-day lunch for children, school bags, raincoats in coastal areas, hostel facilities, etc; are given to children to attend schools. Special scholarships are given even to the physically challenged persons.

17.4.3 Strategies in Higher Education

Reservation of seats in colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education (eg: IITs) and award of scholarships to needy and deserving students are the twin strategies for equity in higher education.

Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is a national, Constitutional commitment. Reservation for Backward Castes and Communities is provided by the State Governments as per certain norms set by the Backward Class Commissions constituted by the Government of India. Two Commissions had been set up by the Government of India since independence viz; the Kaka Kalelkar Commission in 1952 and the B P Mandal Commission in 1978. The recommendations of the Mandal Commission provided guidelines for reservation which were not uniformly implemented in the States of the Union. The States constituted their own commissions from time to time. Implementations of recommendations of these commissions by State Governments have often led to civil conflicts, public interest petitions and judicial interventions. The judiciary has addressed itself to problems such as the quantum of seats for reserved groups and the differential fee-structures for professional colleges across social groups keeping in view the highly differentiated paying abilities in the general population. Of all the Supreme Court judgements, the 1993 judgement delivered on a petition by Unni Krishnan, the 2002 October judgement delivered on a petition by Manipal Academy of Higher Education and the 2003 August Verdict on a petition by the Islamic Academy of Education against the government of Karnataka are quite significant.

The Committee reports, judicial pronouncements and cabinet decisions leading to lightning government orders, indicate the difficulties in evolving a universally acceptable and rational policy for reservation of seats in education for the disadvantaged sections of society.
17.4.4 Issues and Concerns in the Reservation Policy in Higher Education

A national programme of higher education through the Distance Education Mode is also a highly useful strategy for promotion of equity. IGNOU is in the forefront of this strategy.

The Reservation Policy in Higher Education in India has attracted a variety of social tensions, civil conflicts, public interest litigations, street demonstrations, strikes and even self-immolations. Colleges and universities have been closed in the past to maintain law and order. The following issues and concerns have been the subject of tensions over time.

- **Time-Frame:** Initially reservation had been proposed for a period of ten years beginning with 1950. This has been extended again and again for a further period of ten years since then. The last extention was given in 2000 AD. Critics have been wondering as to how long reservations will continue in education and employment. When will the State be able to realise the values of Justice and Equality? Is there no need to set a time-frame for realisation of these values?

- **Identification of sub-groups:** Lists of social groups who have suffered discrimination and social exclusion for centuries has been prepared, maintained, revised and used by the Government of India since the adoption of the Constitution. The groups/tribes included in these Lists/Schedules are known as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They are entitled for Reservation of spaces in education. Likewise, the States also maintain lists of backward castes and communities for their use as well as for the use of the Central government. It has been observed that these lists are revised periodically, though marginally, wherein certain groups are either inducted, dropped or reinducted into the list. It is also observed that while some social groups engaged in certain occupations are considered as SC or OBC in one State, they are not considered so in another State. Demands for inclusion of their own sub-groups within the reservation umbrella are frequently made. Sometimes, false certification by competent authorities of scheduled caste/tribe/BC status has also led to tensions. In this way identification of sub-castes, sub-groups and specific tribes has been a bone of contention over the years.

- **State vs Union Lists:** State lists are revised from time to time. Inclusions and exclusions of sub-groups takes place during such revisions. The groups so included/excluded are also eligible/ineligible for reservation in central quota/pool of seats in professional colleges. However, there is always a gestation time between the revision of State and Union lists. Further, groups with same sub-caste/tribe name/identity have differential status across States. For instance, Nayaka in one State may be identified as a Scheduled Tribe in one State while this group may not be considered so in another State. The Central Government will get confused about the inclusion of this group in their list. Hence, it is observed that divergences and inconsistencies between Union and State lists pose practical problems in implementation of the reservation policy.

- **Quantum of Reservation:** Another very significant issue in the reservation policy concerns the quantum/quota of reservation. In the past, the specification
of the quantum varied across regions of India. There is no confusion in regard to the space for SCs and STs as it is a Constitutional Commitment. When it comes to BCs and OBCs, the quantum had been so fixed in some States like Bihar, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu that the total reservation went up to 68 per cent of the total pool of seats. In contrast, West Bengal gave reservation only for SCs and STs for a certain period of time in the past. Ultimately, after several petitions to the judiciary, civil conflicts, violence in streets, self-immolation and the like, the Supreme Court pegged all reservations to a limit of 50 per cent of the total pool. It is in force now. Still, there are tensions in the redistribution of the 50 per cent seats across sub-groups within SCs, STs and OBCs.

- **The CREAMY LAYER:** There is observed a demand for exclusion of certain sub-groups among SCs, STs, BCs and OBCs as they were not only eligible for reservation in 1950s and 1960s but also enjoyed the benefits and have moved up very high in the ladder of social mobility. Though their identity is with the sub-groups eligible for reservation, individually they have moved up very high in their educational, occupational, income and assets status (social sectors). Their children do not deserve any special treatment. They are referred to as the CREAMY LAYER among the sub-groups. Hence, they should be excluded from reservation opportunities even though the groups/tribes with which they are identified are eligible for the same.

**CASTE or CLASS:** This piquant situation has led to a controversy wherein the question raised has been: Should caste or class be the basis of reservation? While there are strong advocates for either caste or class, there is also a third group which has no objection to retain caste as the basis but would very much want class as a brake, a rider within the caste groups. Proponents would recommend reservation only for the deserving while first generation and second generation beneficiaries to be kept out. The controversy is yet to be resolved. In the mean time, some States have also given a marginal reservation for some groups who are economically poor, known as Backward Special Groups.

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**Equity and Excellence in Education**

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Emerging Concerns in Indian Education

6) Identify the issues and concerns in Reservation Policy in Higher Education.

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17.5 EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY – CONCERNS

In recent times, research has demonstrated that the education of women and disadvantaged has personal, family, community and social benefits that make it an important investment for poverty reduction, national development and gender equality. Recognizing the benefits of women’s education and as signatories to the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also of 2000, virtually all governments have committed themselves to working towards ensuring gender equity and equality at all levels of education by 2015. Despite these commitments, the education of women and disadvantaged especially at the higher education level continues to pose major challenges to education systems.

17.5.1 Equality is not Identity

Equal opportunities do not mean identical opportunities. It is not that everyone will be given seats for medical/engineering education. Opportunities are equally distributed and not benefits. Each according to his ability and merit is given opportunities. A quota of opportunities is specially earmarked for the disadvantaged. The best among these sections up to the lower ceiling will get the opportunities. Equal access is guaranteed and not identical results. Rather, some weight is also given to social handicaps in the form of lowering of a marginal percentage of marks at qualifying examinations for eligibility, an increase in age limit for applications etc.; These are considered as compensations for handicaps that could not be addressed through systemic interventions. Once equal opportunities are given through reserved seats, scholarships, hostel facilities, fee concessions, library resources etc.; then the beneficiaries have to compete with the rest and excel themselves.

17.5.2 Discrimination Essential for Equalisation

The term discrimination has negative overtones. The common thinking is that discrimination is undesirable. The disadvantaged sections of society had been discriminated against in access to learning, knowledge and education for centuries. It needs to be noted that discrimination is neither good nor bad. The value of discrimination depends upon its purpose. If discrimination is done to protect persons from the risks of social exclusion, then it is valuable. In a society where there is injustice and inequality in the structure of social organisation, discrimination is essential for equalisation. It is essential for compensating persons from social handicaps. There is a well known slogan that “where injustice is the order of the day, disorder is the beginning of justice.” Discrimination in favour of disadvantaged sections allows them to compete with others on a level-playing field and renders the competition fair and just. Such a discrimination has positive values and is expected to yield positive results for social harmony and integration.
Administration of justice and promotion of equality is there both in India and in advanced countries like the United States. In India it is called as protective/positive discrimination while in the US it is called as Affirmative Action. There is a difference between the two. Protective discrimination is a strategy in India to protect the disadvantaged from economic and social handicaps arising out of a discriminatory, hierarchical social structure and regional disparities in provision of facilities. Access to good quality schooling, guidance from parents for learning in school, language development at home, learning atmosphere at home, quality of peer group influence and competitive environment, physical facilities at home and school are distributed in skewed and asymmetric forms in the general population. Quality of schools is quite poor in rural areas, tribal pockets and urban slums as compared to urban self-financing (private unaided) schools. Results of school final examinations reflect unequal social structures. Children of poorer strata of society, low caste groups, rural areas and urban slums find it hard to compete with the rest. Hence, the government discriminates in their favour so as to protect them from unfair competition.

In the U.S., quality of education is not highly differentiated for Blacks, Hispanics and coloured persons as against those for the white. School facilities are of comparable standards. Everybody completes a minimum of 12 years of education. Hence, there is no need for protection of persons from any type of handicaps. However, at higher levels, if there is a tie between a Black and a White person in a competition for a seat in a professional college or a university, then the university/college would award the seat to the Black. This measure is treated as Affirmative Action. By doing so, the university/college/government affirms its faith in justice and equality. In this way, the US Society pursues the values of equality of educational opportunity and equality.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes:  
a) Write your answers in the space given below  
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

7) Define the term Equality of Educational opportunity.

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8) What is Protective Discrimination Policy?

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9) Distinguish between Protective Discrimination and Affirmative Action.

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17.6 LOGIC OF EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Several theories/justifications have been advanced for granting equality of educational opportunity to the disadvantaged sections of society.

- One of them is the Theory of Redistributive Justice (RAWLS). According to this theory, there is inequality in the distribution of natural resources and social sanctions, social privileges that are integral to natural and social evolution. There is a need to redistribute these resources for achieving an economic and social equilibrium, for harmony and peace in society. Such a thinking is also borne out of a principle called the Hicks-Kaldor Compensatory principle which is intended to realise an economic equilibrium wherein there is optimum social welfare. It is more from the point of view of optimisation of social welfare function that equalisation is desired than from the perspective of individual interests.

- There is a debate regarding the relative values of power and resources as instruments of Equality. Power includes control over resources. When people are empowered, they can control resources and use them for advantage. They are given reservation of seats in parliamentary/legislative/panchayath elections so that they can participate in power politics and regulate the flow of resources to their advantage. They can oversee that poverty among disadvantaged is alleviated in a planned way and educational facilities are provided to them. The disadvantaged will use all these benefits and become competitive in life. This in brief is the approach/Theory of Empowerment of the people. However, this is a long drawn, time-consuming process. Rather, it would be to their benefit that resources are directly granted to them. In the context of education, seats in institutions of higher education constitute the resources. Across generations, they will elevate their educational/occupational status and pull up their dependents and kinship members. In this way, the whole social group comes up in life. This is the assumption underlying the Theory of Entitlement (A.K. Sen).

- There is also a theory known as the Doctrine of Natural Rights (Rousseau). According to this theory, ‘man is continuous with nature’. Nature is a common property of all the organisms of the natural/biological universe. Every inhabitant on the planet earth has an equal claim on the resources of the planet. A variant of this thinking in modern times is the Theory of Human Rights. Right to get equal treatment by society/State is a human right, a basic/essential/fundamental right. Hence, equality of educational opportunity gets attention as a human right.
Check Your Progress 4

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below
     b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

10) Identify the theories/justification for provision of equality of educational opportunities.

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17.7 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Social inequality is an aspect of virtually all social processes. A person's position in the stratification system is the most consistent predictor of a person's behavior, attitudes, and life chances. Social stratification, however, links almost all aspects of society together. A study of social stratification should help us understand a wide range of other changes in society. Stratification on the other hand is a social division of individuals into various hierarchies of wealth, status and power. There is no unanimity on how to describe stratification systems with some sociologists favoring the concept of class while others discuss status differentiations.

17.7.1 Sponsored vs Contest Mobility

It is common knowledge that the provision and utilisation of educational opportunities would enable the beneficiaries to move up the ladder of social status. Such a movement is facilitated through two approaches. In the first approach, the State regulates the movement of individuals by controlling and distributing the facilities/opportunities. This is also popular in India wherein reservation facility, scholarships, hostel facilities and fee waivers are given on priority basis and within a quota system. Mobility that takes place under this approach is known as sponsored mobility. Alternatively, the State leaves everything to the market and the private sector without any regulation. Aspirants for professional/higher education compete with each other and the best among them will get opportunities according to availability. This is known as contest mobility. There have been debates in educational literature/larger society regarding the relative merits of Sponsored vs Contest mobility (J.B.Sprott). The debate is centred around the relative efficiency and quality of graduates who move up the social ladder under the two approaches.

17.7.2 Achieved vs Ascribed Status

Persons who move up a social ladder through education and related occupation will also get a commensurate income. Depending upon their education, occupation and income levels, they get respect, authority, power, prestige, social acceptance and privileges which in sum constitutes their social status. If the status of a person is the result of facilities/opportunities accorded/conferred because of special provisions, reservations by the government then it is known as 'ascribed status'. It is ascribed by a society because of the deprivations and discrimination that they had been
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subjected to for centuries. Likewise, if the status is achieved by a person through open competition in market contexts, then it is known as 'achieved status'. There is observed a hidden conflict and tensions between colleagues with ascribed and achieved status in functional contexts, working environments and social situations. In some societies, even departmental promotions in government and career opportunities are also distributed on the basis of ascriptions. This is true of Indian society. It is believed that over a period of time, the tensions get resolved and there will be social harmony and integration as status differentiations diminish in society.

Check Your Progress 5

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below
   b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

11) How does equalisation of educational opportunities bring about social harmony and integration?

17.8 EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

17.8.1 Concept of Excellence

The pursuit of excellence, standards and quality in a society is very essential to be on top of the world in a competitive global environment. This is possible when the mind-set of the people is tuned to healthy competition. Their hardwork, discipline, sincerity of purpose, integrity, honesty and concern for efficiency in work should characterise this mindset. Resource use should be guided and directed to achieve excellence in product quality, that is the mindset of the students. Such a mindset is possible through habit-formation at formative stages of life, as well as fostered and nurtured at higher levels of learning. That is, one of the objectives of education should be the pursuit of excellence.

There are several constraints in a developing country like India for pursuit of excellence. There is considered to be operating a Law of Averages operates here which brings down everybody's ability and performance towards the mean, unless, special efforts are adopted to facilitate those who have the ability and motivation to excel in whatever they do. Special efforts are needed to bring out the latent talents and abilities of individuals. Excellence in the context of individuals means that everybody in society is provided with opportunities to achieve the best that they are capable of. Their inborn potential should only be the limiting factor and not constraints in the environment. Rather, the environment should be able to overcome the constraints, if any, and bring out the best in everybody. Education has the responsibility and duty to promote excellence among all individuals and thereby in a society.

17.8.2 Meritocracy, Democracy and Excellence

There is a debate regarding the relative significance of merit, ability, competence among individuals vis-à-vis the government policies and strategies to provide equality of educational opportunities. There is a section of population, mostly those who do not get the reservation benefits, who are critical of the policy as they think that it
brings down overall efficiency in the system of life and economy. Persons with low abilities and efficiency in work are preferred over persons of merit. They will become our engineers, doctors, scientists and managers. Since their ability and inborn competence is low, they would not be able to pursue excellence in their work. Society would ultimately suffer. 'You cannot entrust the construction of your house to an engineer or get treatment from a doctor for your chronic illness because of your respect for the value of equity ignoring the competence of the engineer/doctor. Pursuit of excellence cannot be reconciled with democratic values'.

Alternatively, votaries of democracy and equality question the concepts of merit, ability and competence. Giving importance to marginal differences in achievements between the well-to-do/higher strata of society and the disadvantaged sections would be erroneous and sinful. Achievements of disadvantaged students in trying, challenging and depressive environments with almost nil or poor facilities at home and in schools/colleges carry a premium which is quite high and get traded for superior hidden abilities and merit. Efficiency/in-born competence of the well-to-do are myths and irrational beliefs of persons prejudiced against equality and democracy. Excellence depends so much upon sincerity, hardwork, discipline, work-culture and goal orientation as on intellect and ability. Hence, equity strategies are quite valuable and worthy of pursuit.

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**Check Your Progress 6**

**Notes:**

a) Write your answers in the space given below

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

12) State your understanding of Excellence in Education.

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17.9 STRATEGIES AND INDICATORS OF EXCELLENCE

17.9.1 Strategies at School Level

There is a clear difference between urban/rural and private/government (Corporation) schools in identification and fostering of excellence. Normally, better-off sections of society prefer to go to self-financing schools mostly located in urban areas which are perceived to be quality schools. The highest strata in Indian society attend residential Public schools that are located in metropolitan centres as well as hill stations. A student of sociology of education must be concerned with the Government/Corporation schools which serve the masses of Indian population. Strategies for excellence in these institutions are of significance.

There is a strategy for identifying talent in the country and fostering the same called the National Talent Search scheme. Students at the high school stage appear in competitive tests/examination. Those who qualify at the State level are given scholarships for higher studies at the State level. There will be a follow-up inter-State competition at the national level. Those who qualify at the national level shall be eligible for scholarships of a higher value for higher studies throughout their study-period. The NTS examination is organised, conducted and managed by the NCERT.
Emerging Concerns in Indian Education

Good schools do ability-grouping of children. Children considered to be of superior abilities are given special coaching to facilitate them to excel in school final examinations. Even the school system, in informal ways, identifies persons who have special competencies in music, drama/play-acting, painting/drawing, debating, elocution, athletics, field-games, aquatics and other sports, organises competitions as part of co-curricular activities and creates space for the nurturing and flourishing of talent among children. It is to be noted that excellence should not be confined only to scholastic subjects. Excellence should comprehend life in its entirety and variety.

The Government education department or the consortium of schools organise science exhibitions, humanities-fairs, literary mahaflls and quiz competitions to identify, foster and nurture talents among students. Prizes are awarded to the best students. Competitions are organised from Block level through District and State levels to national levels. National level programmes are quite rare.

Good schools organise clubs to nurture talents among students. Science clubs, clubs for language development, numismatics, mathematics, nature-study, geography, philately, are illustrative in this regard. Some of the schools also set up natural history museum, art galleries, geology museums and the like. Such measures contribute to the flowering of talent in children.

Teachers are periodically given in-service training in school subjects and other educational concerns to keep them updated in knowledge and pedagogy. Pursuit of excellence requires competent, excellence-friendly teachers and heads of institutions.

17.9.2 Strategies in Higher Education

Centres of excellence have been created as well as fostered by the government for promotion of excellence in higher education. A chain of Indian Institutes of Technology had been set up at Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kanpur and Khargapur in the late 1950s. Of late two more IITs have been set up. University Departments in different subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, Mathematics, Economics, Education, etc; have been identified across the country for special grants as Centres of Advanced Studies. For instance, the Department of Education at Baroda University is considered as Centre of Advanced Studies in Education. There are also advanced centres for research and knowledge-dissemination for different subjects. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, the Central Food & Technological Research Institute, Mysore, the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, the Tata Institute for Social Science Research, Mumbai, the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, the National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad are all illustrative of national institutions. Excellence is promoted by the government of India through umbrella organisations as CSIR, ICSSR, ICAR, ICHR, ICPR and the like.

Teachers in colleges/universities are trained/refreshed periodically through a chain of Academic Staff Colleges all over the country as well as through advanced centres of learning. Best teacher awards are given both at State and National levels right from primary school stage onwards which is limited upto higher secondary stage.

17.9.3 Indicators of Excellence

An indicator is a summative measure which gives information between two or more than two variables. This information would be useful to assess progress, compare groups, monitor standards and evaluate programmes. Indicators reflect the pulse of an organisation or a process.

There are varieties of stakeholders in education. The students/parents, teachers/headteachers, community members/leaders, employers, educational administrators are some significant stakeholders in education. Their expectations from the system is
also varied. In so far as excellence is concerned, parents would like their children to be in the top brackets in Board/competitive examinations. While admitting their children to schools for the first standard, parents look to the school final results of the schools including ranks obtained and proportion of students with distinction. Some parents may also look to the school’s performance in sports, games and other co-curricular activities in comparison with other schools/colleges.

Managers of educational institutions and head teachers look to the overall performance of the school as well as the proportion who get distinction and ranks in Board Examinations. The teachers would monitor results in this way in their own subjects. The community members/leaders not only look to the results but also to the quality of discipline in schools, personality make-up of students and teachers and the variety of activities/functions/celebrations organised by the school. The District/State level administrators look to the overall percentage in Board examinations, proportion of first classes, distinctions and ranks and proportion qualifying under NTS. The employers look to the on-the-job competence of their employees. The level of competence reflects the quality of their schooling.

Check Your Progress 7

Notes:  
a) Write your answers in the space given below  
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

13) Mention the strategies employed by the schools to promote excellence.

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17.10 EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION – INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

17.10.1 Excellence of Institutions—Measures

When excellence in an educational institution school/college has to be measured, then several variables need to be considered. Quality of physical infrastructure is the first among them. Number of classrooms as against standards/sections, sitting space for children/size of rooms, availability of playground, laboratory and library facilities, seating arrangements, facilities for staff, sports and games equipments, furniture and their quality constitute the physical infrastructure. Efficiency in utilisation of resources is also a useful indicator of the quality of a school. Use of charts, maps, specimens, laboratory equipments, library books need to be examined. It is no use in having stocks without using them. Quality of the curriculum, organisation of programmes and activities, the internal monitoring of progress of students within a school, supervision of the quality of work of teachers and head teachers, the periodicity of evaluation of students’ performance and the feedback given to stake-holders, maintenance of variety of records in the school, the upkeep of the school including hygienic standards maintained, health check-up organised for students, the organisation and functioning of alumni association are several indicators to judge the quality of a school.
At the primary level, standards of achievement have been set by the Government of India. They are known as Minimum Levels of Learning. A minimum quality of learning is to be ensured by a school for all children. Minimum is not maximum. It is the threshold level of competence to be reached by all children in a school.

The Department of Education, at school and collegiate level, practice a system of recognition of schools. There are guidelines for recognition which refer to maintenance of standards and quality on several variables including physical infrastructure facilities. At university level, colleges are granted/denied affiliation on the basis of adequacy and quality of infrastructure facilities.

17.10.2 Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education

There are several institutions that maintain and monitor standards in higher education. The Medical Council of India/MCI, the Dental Council of India/DCI, the All India Council of Technical Education/AICTE, the National Accreditation and Assessment Council/NAAC for colleges and universities, the National Council of Teacher Education/NCTE and the Distance Education Council/DEC are institutions for setting standards and monitoring quality in their respective institutions. The NAAC is only a quality grading institution while the University Grants Commission gives recognition and support to the universities.

Check Your Progress 8

Notes:  a) Write your answers in the space given below
     b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

14) Identify the institutions for higher education in India for maintenance of standards.

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17.11 EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE – A DISCOURSE

17.11.1 Structural Adjustment Policies in India (Post 1991) and Relative Significance for Equality and Excellence in Education

The Government of India adopted a new economic policy in June 1991. The policy envisaged structural adjustments in economy, society and polity. It is popularly referred to as a transition to a process of liberalisation of controls, privatisation of enterprise and globalisation of trade, investments and services.

Since the adoption of this new economic policy huge investments came to India in the form of grants and loans from global financial institutions like the World Bank. Facing criticisms in the initial years that this structural adjustment policy does not have a human face, the government earmarked funds for social sectors known as the National Renewal Fund, in 1993. A Social Safety Net (SSN) was created for additional expenditures on sectors like education and health. A nation-wide strategy for quality improvement of primary education keeping also in view the interests of disadvantaged children was initiated.
sections and backward regions (literacy rates) was launched in 1995. This programme, popularly known as District Primary Education Project, DPEP addressed in an equal measure the concerns of equity and quality. The DPEP came to a close in 2003 and got merged with a national programme in school education for promotion of equity, quality and other concerns. This is known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan/SSA. This programme is expected to have a smooth sailing as universalisation of primary education and expansion of secondary education is on the top of the agenda of educational reform in India.

Several new challenges to higher education are on the anvil from the perspective of equity and excellence in education. The emphasis today is to reduce government participation in financing and management of education. Private sector will not be as much concerned with equity as is the government sector. Already, the Supreme Court, considering the demands of the private sector, has earmarked a higher proportion of seats in professional education to be retained by the private colleges (vide judgement of August 2003). As such, privatisation may favour excellence and standards at the cost of equity if it is in the hands of purely intellectual type entrepreneurs. Alternatively, private enterprise may sacrifice both excellence and equity and favour commercialisation, if it is in the hands of purely materialistic entrepreneurs. There is also a Private Universities Bill pending for a few years in Parliament for adoption. If this bill becomes an Act, there may be an explosion of private enterprise whose effects/implications for equity and excellence are not clear, as of now.

Globalisation is another process being experienced by India in higher education today. As of now, it is observed, that universities from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.K. are advertising for admissions to higher education institutions open for Indians in their respective countries. This process may reduce the demand for higher education at Indian Institutions especially from well-to-do strata of society. This will reduce capital formation within Indian society, in the university sector. A few more dangers are on the anvil as perceived by a section of critics. The Indian government has signed the WTO (World Trade Organisation) agreements. One provision relating to trade in services has included higher education as a service that should face global exchanges. After 2005 AD, higher education is open for global competition. Any country can set up higher education institutions within India. The Government will have to provide license and permits and facilitate this process. How will it affect demand for higher education in India will be a matter of speculation. It may also have positive effects in the sense, that Indian colleges/universities have to gear up their quality to stand out in competition. Alternatively, given the poor infrastructure facilities, they may also get lost in the competition.

As of now, there is enormous demand from several Asian countries for higher education in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There is a very rich market for higher education in Asia. India is in an advantageous position to capture this market especially in areas like Information Technology, Biotechnology, Space-science, Electronics, Pharmaceuticals, Gemmology, Oceanic studies, Management and similar subjects. If Indian higher education institutions can pursue and maintain standards, quality and excellence, then all the Westward demand can get diverted to India as education in Indian universities of comparable standards will definitely be cost-efficient and cost-effective. Some of the existing constraints have to be overcome if this is to happen. For example, regionalism should be properly managed. A trend is growing towards demand for transmission and production of knowledge in regional languages as against English. This will detract foreign students on Indian soil. Reconciliation of regionalism with globalisation in higher education will be a challenge of the times. Excellence will be watchword in a globalising world village. India needs to meet this challenge if it has to stay in competition. If it succeeds in maintaining institutions of excellence and attract capital from Asian countries and English speaking African countries, then it will have adequate resources to carry all sections of society and satisfy the demands of equity.
Emerging Concerns in Indian Education

Check Your Progress 9

Notes:  
a) Write your answers in the space given below  
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

15) Identify the challenges for equity and excellence in education in India in the 21st Century.

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17.12 LET'S SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the need for promotion of equity through education that is a constitutional value and the need for promotion of excellence that is essential to survive and succeed in a globalising world. We familiarized ourselves with the nature of inequality in India and its reflections in the system of education. Elementary education in India for all is a fundamental right that is justifiable. Several strategies are followed both in the field of school and higher education for promotion of equity and excellence. Of all the strategies the Reservation Policy has experienced certain controversies. The Indian State follows reservation policy as an instrument of protective discrimination. It facilitates social mobility of the disadvantaged and catalyses a transition from an unequal society to a society of equal and free citizens.

Several strategies are also being adopted to promote excellence in school and higher education. Excellence shall be the watchword under the Structural Adjustment Policy adopted by the Indian State since June 1991. Higher education can take advantage of this policy which opens the curtains for globalisation and competitive environment. If higher education in India can attract foreign investment through pursuit of excellence, then it will have adequate resources to meet the demands of equity. The need of the hour is to meet the challenges of globalisation by pursuing excellence and still protect the Constitutional value of equality.

17.13 UNIT END EXERCISES

1) Exercise your memories of your school/college life and list out all those activities that in your opinion contributed to the promotion of (a) equity and (b) excellence.

2) Visit a nearby government/municipal school and check on the facilities/incentives given to school children.

17.14 POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1) Collect literature on the Reservation Policy in higher education and critically examine this policy using this literature, in the form of an essay.

2) Examine the dangers and opportunities for education in a globalising world.
17.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1) Democratic Socialism is the Constitutional philosophy of India. The chief problem of education herein is to realise the relative demands of equity and quality.

2) Articles 14, 15(1), and 29(2) of the Constitution of India guarantee equality of educational opportunity.

3) Creation of a society of equals and free individuals who live in harmony and peace is the Constitutional goal of Indian society.

4) Caste and class based inequalities and regional disparities in development are two types of inequalities. Discrimination in regard to sanction/deprivation of privileges, special facilities, access to natural and other resources are characteristic of this inequality.

5) Equality is a value of democracy. Equity refers to the strategies adopted by a government to realise the value of equality.

6) Need for the specification of a time-frame; proper identification of sub-castes, sub-groups and specific tribes; divergence between State and Union lists of disadvantaged who are eligible for reservation; fixing the total quantum/quota of reservation as well as redistribution of this quantum across eligible sections; removal of creamy layer from the reservation net and indecision regarding the relative merits of caste or class as basis for reservation are the issues and concerns in the Reservation Policy in Higher Education.

7) Equality of educational opportunity means the provision of incentives to school children and special facilities and provisions in professional/university/higher education so as to compensate for the social and economic handicaps faced by disadvantaged sections of society.

8) It is a policy of the Government of India to give protection to the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society from the risks of competition with the advanced strata of society. It is intended to create a level playing field and overcome unfair and unjust competition.

9) Protective discrimination is a policy in India to promote justice and equality among the disadvantaged and protect them from risks of unfair competition while Affirmative Action is the policy in the US to prefer Blacks and other disadvantaged sections over the Whites when both of them are of equal merit and attainments.

10) There are three theories justifying equality of educational opportunity. They are: the theory of Redistributive Justice; the theory of Entitlement; and the theory of Human Rights.

11) It is difficult for disadvantaged sections of society in an unequal society to move up the ladder of social status through market competitions and contests. If their movement is sponsored through regulation of educational opportunities by the government, then they will acquire education, get commensurate occupation and income and eventually a better social status. Equalisation of social status will lead to social harmony and integration.
12) Excellence means the facilitation for every student to realise his/her full potential and bringing out the best. It is also the development of a mind-set which is characterised by concern for efficiency and quality in work.

13) Ability-grouping of children for special attention, organisation of co-curricular activities, organisations of science/humanities exhibitions, formation of school clubs are illustrative strategies adopted by schools to promote excellence.

Ranks, distinctions and proportion of first classes in Board examinations, awards/cups/medals in sports, games and other competitions, personality and behaviour of students, competence in work-situations are indicators of excellence in education.

14) The MCI, DCI, AICTE, NAAC, NCTE, DEC, the UGC are institutions monitoring standards in higher education in India.

15) Privatisation and Globalisation are the challenges for higher education. While privatisation may specifically affect the value of equity, globalization will throw up challenges for excellence in higher education in India in the 21st Century.