

2. Diversity, Prejudice and Discrimination

Human diversity, as you learnt in the last chapter, refers to the differences in physical, social and economic conditions of human beings. Some people are short, while some are tall; some people are educated, while some are not; some speak Bengali, while some speak Tamil; some are men, while some are women.

You also saw why the world needs diversity. A world full of identical human beings would be disastrous. Unfortunately, diversity also seems to give rise to **prejudice** and **discrimination**.

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

What is prejudice? When we make a judgment about someone or have an idea about them before we actually know anything about them, it is called **prejudice**. It is an unfair judgment about or attitude towards something or someone, a kind of behaviour that is not based on reason. Most of



us tend to look at people who are different from us with a certain amount of prejudice. When we express this feeling of prejudice in action, it is called **discrimination**. For example, many people view cleaners and waste collectors with prejudice. These occupations, and the people engaged in them, are assumed to be 'dirty' and 'polluting'. They are often treated badly. In some places, they are not allowed to enter places of worship or draw water from village wells. These are acts of discrimination born out of prejudice.

Today, many people are discriminated against on the basis of colour, caste, race, religion, gender and ability. Some are mocked (or made fun of) for having a different skin colour, some for being mentally or physically disabled, some for being overweight, some for being poor, and some for belonging to an oppressed section of society.



Describe the scene in this picture. Why are the children laughing at the girl? How do you think she is feeling?

Discrimination on the basis of caste

The caste system is a social hierarchy that has been in existence for centuries. It is based on the idea of purity and pollution. The caste system is a social hierarchy that has been in existence for centuries. It is based on the idea of purity and pollution. The caste system is a social hierarchy that has been in existence for centuries. It is based on the idea of purity and pollution.

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Women drawing water from a well is a common sight in rural areas. Often, the women are from the lower caste, and they are discriminated against.

Discrimination on the basis of caste

Discrimination on the basis of caste can affect people in many ways. It can affect their social status, their economic opportunities, and their access to education and healthcare. Discrimination on the basis of caste can also affect people's mental and physical health. It can lead to feelings of inferiority and self-hatred. Discrimination on the basis of caste can also lead to physical violence and harassment. It is important to recognize and address discrimination on the basis of caste in order to create a more just and equitable society.

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also face caste-based discrimination in many areas like education, employment opportunities, political representation, social relationships and so on.

Our Constitution has abolished untouchability and its practice is a criminal offence. Positive steps have been taken by the government to provide relief to the oppressed castes, who now call themselves **dalits**, in the form of scholarships, reservations in colleges, universities, public sector undertakings and government services.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, an eminent lawyer and social activist, was the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He belonged to the Mahar

caste, and in the end of his life, he fought against the prejudices of the caste system and the ill-treatment of women. He was the first law minister of independent India. In 1951, he introduced the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament, which tried to give women equal rights with regard to the laws of inheritance, marriage and the economy. He resigned from his post when the bill was not passed.



Read the passage below. It is an extract from the writings of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, where he tells the story of a young man, a dalit, who gets a job as a clerk in a government office but is abused and threatened until he gives up the job.

...On 19th February 1936, I was appointed a Talati in the office of the Mamlatdar of the Borsad Taluka in the Kheda District. ...I was surprised to find the attitude of the clerk of the Mamlatdar's office when I presented myself to take charge of the post of the Talati.

The Karkun contemptuously asked, "Who are you?" I replied, "Sir, I am a Harijan *." He said, "Go away, stand at a distance. How dare you stand so near me! You are in office; if you were outside, I would have given you six kicks. What audacity to come here for service!" Thereafter, he asked me to drop on the ground my certificate and the order of appointment as a Talati. He then picked them up. While I was working in the Mamlatdar's office at Borsad, I experienced great difficulty in the matter of getting water for drinking. In the verandah of the office there were

kept cans containing drinking water. There was a waterman in charge of these water cans. His duty was to pour out water to clerks in office whenever they needed it. In the absence of the waterman, they could themselves take water out of the cans and drink it.

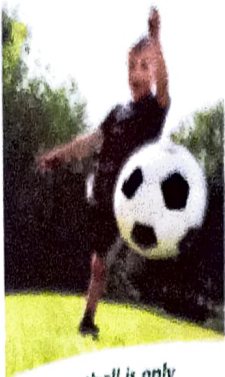
That was impossible in my case. I could not touch the cans, for my touch would pollute the water. I had therefore to depend upon the mercy of the waterman. For my use there was kept a small rusty pot. No one would touch it or wash it except myself. It was in this pot that the waterman would dole out water to me. But I could get water only if the waterman was present. This waterman did not like the idea of supplying me with water. Seeing that I was coming for water, he would manage to slip away, with the result that I had to go without water; and the days on which I had no water to drink were by no means few.

Source: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 12, edited by Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1993)

* Harijan is a word that was used for people of the oppressed castes, but today, it is generally not accepted by them.

Furthering stereotypes

A stereotype is a generalisation, or an assumption, that people make about a person or groups of people on the basis of their identity. For example, 'women are too weak to join in the army' or 'boys don't cry'. These are generalisations that do not hold true for many who belong to the group. There are women who join the army and do very well. Similarly, there are boys who join the army and do very well. Similarly, there are boys who cry, and there is nothing wrong with it either.



'Football is only for boys.'

Examples of stereotypes

...paper article given below. This article appeared in *The Hindu* dated 6 May 200...

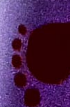
Knocking down wall of shame

Discrimination is often subtle and attitudinal, but in Uthapuram village of Madurai in Tamil Nadu it was embodied for two decades in a 600-metre wall separating caste Hindus. A report in *The Hindu* on the electrification of the fence atop a public outcry, and prompted the first disconnect power supply and then the portion of the wall that denied Dalits common use. The Dalit community of families is numerically dominant in the village, they are denied space in village squares and common entry points to the village, effectively cutting Dalits off from the village mainstream.

...an editorial in *The Hindu*, condemning the treatment of the oppressed castes in present-day India since Ambedkar's time? ... report, how are oppressed castes treated even in other parts of Tamil Nadu? Such ill treatment of the oppressed continues to happen in every part of the

trenched traditions of social exclusion. Uthapuram is not the only village where Dalits encounter discrimination on the basis of caste. Despite strong governmental action, in many tea shops across the State Dalits continue to be served in a different set of tumblers; in community halls they are not allowed to mingle with those belonging to other castes. The main pathways directly leading to areas of common use are usually out of bounds for Dalits, and funeral processions of Dalits have to take circuitous routes to separate burial grounds and churches. Temple festivals remain a source of potential trouble in several villages as Dalits are kept out of chariot-pulling rituals. Economic advancement of the few Dalits who are able to find jobs outside the village becomes a problematic issue for caste Hindus who see themselves as superior in the social hierarchy. In rural areas, life is thus a constant struggle for Dalits as they come face to face with social discrimination. The portion of the Uthapuram

country. Have you come across any such story? Share it with your class. Each of us should take a solemn vow never to let such ill treatment of the less-privileged go unchecked. **Raise your voice against it wherever and whenever you see it happen.**





This is a page from the book *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the story of a 13-year-old Jewish girl and her family, who were forced into hiding by the Nazis during World War II. The diary, which was written by Anne Frank while in hiding, was found after her death at the hands of the Nazis. Try and get a copy of this book and read it.

There are more dangerous types of stereotyping, which have resulted in the large-scale killing of people of a particular group or race. For example, during World War II, the Jewish people were stereotyped as being racially impure, by Hitler and the Nazis (Hitler's followers). Millions of Jewish people were killed by the Nazis as a result of this stereotyping.

Stereotypes are promoted when we are unable or unwilling to search for all the information we would need to make a fair judgement about people. Such generalisations often lead to discrimination, especially when the stereotyping is unfavourable. There are stereotypes about people from particular regions or states, about people belonging to various castes or religions, about boys and girls. Thus, you can hear people freely using terms like lazy, stupid, rude, greedy

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Write down the first word that comes to your mind when you hear each of these words—villager, city-dweller, vegetarian, non-vegetarian, Indian, American, Chinese, working mother, shopkeeper, brother, sister.

Read out your words to the rest of the class. Compare and discuss. How many of your words reflect stereotyping?

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Have you seen any movie recently where any of the characters have been stereotyped? For example, the typical South Indian, the typical Gujarati, the typical mother-in-law/daughter-in-law, etc. Describe it in class. How do these people feel when they are stereotyped?

and stingy, when they talk about particular communities.

We all tend to learn or develop prejudices about people who are different from us. We should stop and think whether we are being fair to those people. History can show us many examples of how prejudice and discrimination can lead to violence and death. If we need to put an end to prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping, each of us has to take a brave stand. The next time jokes are made or prejudices are expressed about a particular community or group, you could choose to explain to the person why it is wrong to say what they did, and voice your protest.

INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Inequality is another basis for discrimination. Inequality takes on various forms like the unequal distribution of wealth, or the unequal status of

Discrimination on the basis of
... from that based on diversity.

Quality
... of property and wealth in
... economic inequality. People who
... access to good food, clothing,
... The poor suffer if they are ill,
... for expensive medical treatment.
... education, they are unable to get
... Thus, the poor get discriminated
... different ways.

... of poverty and the issue of
... the oppressed castes have become
... centuries of exploitation, in
... belonging to socially backward
... economically backward.

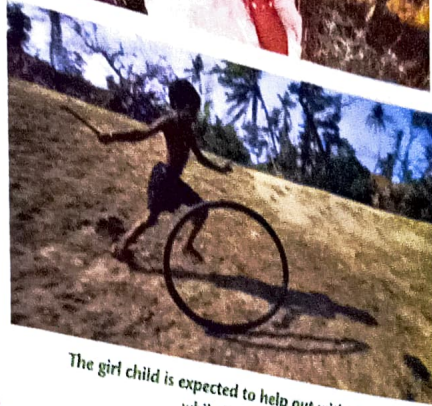
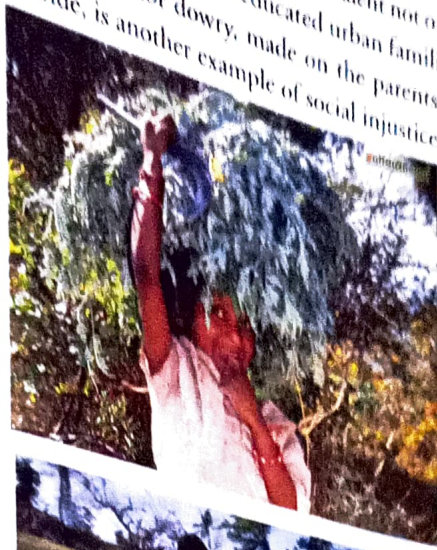
... welfare schemes and employment
... have been started by the government
... employment but the problem
... one of the greatest challenges Indian
... today.



... inequality exists all around us. While
... some can afford to travel long distances
... means, many others still have to walk.

Quality
... is a form of discrimination that
... against women for hundreds

of years now. The girl child is usually given less
importance and attention in terms of healthcare,
food and education. **Female foeticide** and
infanticide (the killing of female foetuses and
babies) are two harmful practices prevalent not only
in our villages but also in educated urban families.
The demands for dowry, made on the parents of
the bride, is another example of social injustice.



The girl child is expected to help out with chores
while boys play.

Some of the laws—especially inheritance laws—
are biased. For the most part, society in India is
patriarchal i.e., a man is the head of the family and
the family name is traced through the male line.
In India, though the law has given women equal
rights to inherit property, it will be a long time
before most women are actually given a share of
their ancestral property.

A number of steps have been taken for the
emancipation and empowerment of women.

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