

instance, providing scholarships for economically weaker sections or ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities reflects substantive equality.

However, substantive equality also faces criticism. Some argue that special treatment may conflict with the principle of equal treatment. Others claim that it may create resentment among groups who do not benefit from such measures. There is also debate about how long such policies should continue and how to measure their effectiveness.

Egalitarianism: Background Inequalities and Differential Treatment:

Egalitarianism is a political and moral philosophy that emphasizes equality as the central value of social justice. It holds that all human beings are equal in moral worth and therefore deserve equal respect, concern, and opportunities. However, egalitarianism does not always mean strict equality in outcomes or identical treatment in all circumstances. Rather, it is concerned with eliminating unjust inequalities and ensuring fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights.

Meaning and Foundations of Egalitarianism:

The term egalitarianism comes from the French word *égal*, meaning equal. The roots of egalitarian thought can be traced to the Enlightenment period. Thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that social inequalities are not natural but are created by social institutions such as private property and political power. Rousseau believed that while natural inequalities (like differences in strength or intelligence) may exist, moral and political inequalities are the result of unjust social arrangements.

In modern political theory, egalitarianism has taken various forms. Liberal egalitarianism emphasizes equality of opportunity. Socialist egalitarianism stresses economic equality and redistribution of wealth. Contemporary philosophers such as John Rawls and Amartya Sen have developed sophisticated theories to explain how equality should be understood in a complex society.

Rawls, in his theory of justice, argues that social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society (Difference Principle). Sen, through his capability approach, argues that equality should focus on expanding people's real freedoms and capabilities rather than simply distributing income equally.

Background Inequalities:

Background inequalities refer to the deep-rooted social, economic, historical, and cultural disadvantages that shape individuals' life chances. These inequalities exist prior to any formal interaction with laws or policies. They influence people's access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation.

Background inequalities can arise from:

- Economic Factors – Unequal distribution of wealth and resources.
- Social Hierarchies – Caste systems, racial discrimination, or patriarchal norms.
- Historical Injustice – Colonialism, slavery, or systemic discrimination.
- Geographical Conditions – Rural-urban divide and regional imbalances.

Egalitarians argue that ignoring background inequalities leads to unfair outcomes. If society only ensures formal equality (equal laws and procedures), it may fail to address these structural disadvantages. Therefore, background inequalities must be considered when designing policies.

Rawls emphasizes that natural talents and social circumstances are morally arbitrary. Since individuals do not choose their birth conditions, society has a responsibility to reduce the disadvantages arising from them. Similarly, Sen highlights that individuals differ in their ability to convert resources into real freedoms. For example, a person with a disability may require additional support to achieve the same level of functioning as others.

Differential Treatment:

Differential treatment refers to the practice of treating individuals or groups differently in order to correct existing inequalities and achieve fairness. At first glance, this may appear to contradict the principle of equality. However,

egalitarianism distinguishes between unjust discrimination and justified differential treatment.

Unjust discrimination occurs when individuals are treated differently based on arbitrary characteristics such as race, religion, or gender without valid reason. Differential treatment, on the other hand, is justified when it aims to reduce disadvantages and promote substantive equality.

Differential treatment can also be seen in:

- Scholarships for economically weaker sections.
- Special provisions for persons with disabilities.
- Maternity benefits for women.
- Progressive taxation, where the wealthy pay higher tax rates.

These measures recognize that equal treatment in unequal circumstances may perpetuate injustice. Therefore, treating unequals equally can be as unfair as treating equals unequally.