Every person is different from another. But they have some similarity which is influenced both by geography and history of the place where we live.

India is if you look even briefly at the following statement: There are eight major religions in the world. Every single one of them is practised in India. We have more than 1600 languages that are people’s mother tongues, and there are more than a hundred dance forms.

Yet this diversity is not always celebrated. This is because we feel safe and secure with people who look, talk, dress and think like us.

We may find people who are different from us strange and unfamiliar.

People also form certain attitudes and opinions about
others who are not like them.

- **Prejudice** means to judge other people negatively or see them as inferior.

- When we think that only one particular way is the best and right way to do things we often end up not respecting others, who may prefer to do things differently.

- We can be prejudiced about many things: people’s religious beliefs, the colour of their skin, the region they come from, the accent they speak in, the clothes they wear etc.

### Creating Stereotypes

- When we fix people into one image we create a **stereotype**.

- When people say that those who belong to a particular country, religion, sex, race or economic background are “stingy,” “lazy,” “criminal” or “dumb,” they are using stereotypes.

- There are stingy and generous people everywhere, in every country, in every religion, in every group whether rich or poor, male or female.

- And just because some people are like that it is not fair to think that everyone will be the same. Stereotypes stop us from looking at each person as a unique individual with his or her own special qualities and skills that are different from others.

- They fit large numbers of people into only one pattern or type. Stereotypes affect all of us as they prevent us from doing certain things, that we might otherwise be good at.
Inequality and Discrimination

- Discrimination happens when people act on their prejudices or stereotypes.
- If you do something to put other people down, if you stop them from taking part in certain activities and taking up jobs, or stop them from living in certain neighbourhoods, prevent them from taking water from the same well or hand pump, or not allow them to drink tea in the same cups or glasses as others, you are discriminating against them.
- Discrimination can take place because of several reasons.
- Diversity can also be a source of discrimination. Groups of people who may speak a certain language, follow a particular religion, live in specific regions etc., may be discriminated against as their customs or practices may be seen as inferior to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.
- They experience discrimination in offices, in hospitals, schools etc., where they are treated badly because they are poor. Some people may experience both kinds of discrimination.
- Tribals, some religious groups and even particular regions, are discriminated against for one or more of these reasons.

On being discriminated against

- People are engaged in different kinds of work like teaching, carpentry, pottery, weaving, fishing, farming etc. to earn a livelihood.
- However, certain kinds of work are valued more than
others. Activities like cleaning, washing, cutting hair, picking garbage are seen as tasks that are of less value and people who do this work are seen as dirty or impure.

- This belief is an important aspect of the caste system. In the caste system, communities/groups of people were placed in a sort of ladder where each caste was either above or below the other.

- Those who placed themselves at the top of this ladder called themselves upper caste and saw themselves as superior.

- The groups who were placed at the bottom of the ladder were seen as unworthy and called “untouchables”. Caste rules were set which did not allow the so-called “untouchables” to take on work, other than what they were meant to do.

- For example, some groups were forced to pick garbage and remove dead animals from the village. But they were not allowed to enter the homes of the upper castes or take water from the village well, or even enter temples.

- Their children could not sit next to children of other castes in school. Thus upper castes acted in ways, which did not give the so-called “untouchables” the same rights as they enjoyed.

- Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, one of the greatest leaders of India, shares his first experience of caste-based discrimination, which took place in 1901 when he was just nine years old.

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956) is considered the father of the Indian Constitution and is also the best known leader of the Dalits.

Dr Ambedkar fought for the rights of the Dalit community. He was born into the Mahar caste, which was
considered untouchable. The Mahars were poor, owned no land and children born to them also had to do the work their parents did. They lived in spaces outside the main village and were not allowed into the village.

- Dr Ambedkar was the first person from his caste who completed his college education and went to England to become a lawyer. He encouraged Dalits to send their children to school and college.
- He also urged Dalits to take on different kinds of government jobs in order to move out of the caste system. He led many efforts of Dalits to enter temples. Later in life he converted to Buddhism in his search for a religion that treated all members equally.
- Dr Ambedkar believed that Dalits must fight the caste system and work towards a society based on respect not just for a few but for all persons.

**Dalit** is a term that people belonging to so-called lower castes use to address themselves. They prefer this word to ‘untouchable’. Dalit means those who have been ‘broken’. This word according to Dalits shows how social prejudices and discrimination have ‘broken’ the Dalit people. The government refers to this group of people as Scheduled Castes (SC). Being made to sit separately in the classroom because of one’s background is a form of discrimination.

**Striving for Equality**

- The freedom of struggle also included within the
struggle for equality.
- Dalits, women, tribal and peasants fought against the inequalities they experienced in their lives.
- As pointed out earlier, many Dalits organised themselves to gain entry into temples.
- Women demanded that they should have as much a right to education as men did.
- Peasants and tribal fought to release themselves from the grasp of the moneylender and the high interest they were charged.
- When India became a nation in 1947 the different kinds of inequalities that existed was major concern.
- Those who wrote the Constitution of India, a document that laid out the rules by which the nation would function, were aware of the ways in which discrimination had been practised in our society and how people had struggled against this.
- These leaders set out a vision and goals in the Constitution to ensure that all the people of India were considered equal. This equality of all persons is seen as a key value that unites us all as Indians.
- Everyone has equal rights and opportunities.

- Untouchability is seen as a crime and has been legally abolished by law.
- People are free to choose the kind of work they wish to do. Government jobs are open to all people.
- In addition, the Constitution also placed responsibility on the government to take specific steps to realise this right to equality for poor and other such marginal communities.
- The writers of the Constitution also said that respect for diversity was a significant element in ensuring
equality.

- They felt that people must have the freedom to follow their religion, speak their language, celebrate their festivals and express themselves freely. They said that no one language, religion or festival should become compulsory for all to follow.

- They said that the government must treat all religions equally. Therefore, India became a secular country where people of different religions and faiths have the freedom to practise and follow their religion without any fear of discrimination.
- This is seen as an important element of our unity – that we all live together and respect one other.
- Though these ideals are enshrined in our Constitution, this chapter points out that inequalities exist even today.
- Equality is a value that we have to keep striving for and not something which will happen automatically.
- People’s struggles and positive actions by the government are necessary to make this a reality for all Indians.