



Equality

Introduction

As per the syllabus, equality includes **social, political and economic dimensions**, along with the **relations between equality and freedom**, and the role of **affirmative action**.

Equality – The Core Idea

At its heart, **equality is a relationship**. Not in the sense of everyone being *identical*, but in the sense of how **two or more persons or groups relate to each other** in society.

It's always about **comparison** — “How do I stand in relation to you?”

Aspects of Life where Equality Matters

1. Political Equality

- Every citizen has **equal political rights** – one person, one vote, one value.
- Example: No matter if you're rich or poor, when you enter the polling booth, your vote carries the same weight.

2. Social Equality

- No one should face discrimination because of caste, race, gender, or religion.
- It means **equal dignity and status** in social life.
- Example: Abolition of untouchability in India → recognition of everyone's equal worth.

3. Economic Equality

- Not absolute sameness of wealth (that would be impossible), but **fair opportunity and minimum standards** so no one is left to starve while others hoard.
- Example: Progressive taxation, welfare schemes, MGNREGA in India.

The Essence

Equality is not about **making everyone the same**, but about ensuring **no one is pushed below**, and **everyone stands with dignity in relation to others**.

Think of it this way:

- **Political equality** gives you a **voice**,
- **Social equality** gives you **respect**,
- **Economic equality** gives you **basic security**.

Without all three, equality remains incomplete.

Evolution of the Idea of Equality

1. Aristotle

- For Aristotle, equality was linked with his **theory of citizenship**.
- He emphasized **formal equality** → “treat equals equally, and unequals unequally.”
- But here's the catch: he also defended **natural inequality**.
 - Example: He justified slavery and limited citizenship to a small elite, saying it was “natural” to recognize and maintain such inequality.

Lesson: Aristotle planted the seed of equality, but it was exclusionary.

2. Hobbes

- Hobbes shocked his time by saying: in the **state of nature**, there is **natural equality** between all humans.
- Why? Because while some may be stronger in body, others can use **secret plot** or cunning → which equalizes things.
- Everyone is also equally bound by **pleasure and pain**.

Lesson: Hobbes made equality universal, but in a



fearful, competitive sense.

3. Rousseau

- Rousseau drew a sharp line between:
 - Natural equality** → unalterable, given by nature.
 - Unnatural/conventional equality** → alterable, created by society (privileges, property, class).
- He warned that property and privilege corrupt natural equality.

Lesson: Rousseau pointed towards the birth of modern democratic equality.

4. Marx

- Marx went further → no half measures. He demanded **absolute equality**.
- His principle:
 - “**From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.**”
- This was not just equality of opportunity, but **equality of outcomes**.

Lesson: Marx radicalized equality — not just removing privilege, but abolishing class exploitation.

5. Alex de Tocqueville

- Observing America, Tocqueville saw **equality as the tendency of modern society**.
- He noted: the world was moving irreversibly towards more democratic equality.

Lesson: Equality is not just a theory; it's the spirit of modern times.

The Essence

See the journey?

- Aristotle** → equality for some.
- Hobbes** → equality in fear.
- Rousseau** → equality corrupted by privilege.

- Marx** → equality perfected in communism.
- Tocqueville** → equality as destiny of modernity.

The **idea of equality evolved from a limited privilege to a universal aspiration** — becoming the heartbeat of democracy.

Why Equalise?

1. Fair distribution of benefits and burdens

- Society creates both **benefits** (like education, healthcare, jobs) and **burdens** (like taxes, duties, responsibilities).
- If these are distributed unfairly, resentment grows, and society fractures.
- Equalisation** ensures that no group enjoys all benefits while others carry all burdens.
Example: Progressive taxation ensures the rich pay more, so the poor aren't crushed under burdens.

2. Fulfilling basic needs

- Equality isn't just an abstract idea; it's about **basic needs**.
- Food, shelter, healthcare, and education are the foundations of human dignity.
- Equalisation ensures **no one is left behind**, so everyone has at least the minimum to live a decent life.
Example: Schemes like **Right to Education** or **Public Distribution System** in India aim at this.

3. Enhancing self-respect

- Inequality often humiliates. Being treated as “less than human” crushes self-worth.
- Equality restores **self-respect** by recognising every individual as worthy.
- Historical example: the **abolition of untouchability** in India → it wasn't just



legal reform, it was restoring human dignity to millions.

4. Fostering fraternity

- Equality is not only about individuals, but also about relationships.
- When citizens see each other as **equals**, it nurtures **fraternity** → the sense of brotherhood and solidarity.
- Without equality, fraternity is impossible, because hierarchies breed suspicion, not trust.

Example: The **Constitution of India** placed equality, liberty, and fraternity together for this reason.

The Essence

So, why equalise?

Because equality is not just about numbers or policies. It is about:

- **Fairness in burdens and benefits**
- **Meeting basic needs**
- **Restoring self-respect**
- **Building fraternity**

In short, **equalisation is what makes democracy humane and society united**. Without it, liberty becomes privilege, and justice becomes hollow.

Equality of What

Welfare Equality

1. Utilitarian perspective

- Utilitarianism asks: *What maximises overall welfare?*
- Here, **welfare equality** is judged not by how much **resources** someone gets, but whether their **happiness** or **desires** are satisfied.

2. Two dimensions of welfare equality

Happiness = Pleasure – Pain

- Think of life like an account book:
 - **Pleasures** are credits
 - **Pains** are debits
- What matters is the **net balance**.
- If two people both end up equally happy (same net balance), then welfare equality is achieved—even if their resources differ.

Example: A rich person with stress may have the same happiness balance as a farmer with contentment.

Desire / Preference satisfaction

- Here, the focus shifts: it's not about wealth, but about **meeting desires**.
 - If your **desires** are satisfied, you are as well-off as someone else, even if the things desired are very different.
- Example: A taste for **expensive jewellery** vs. the simple joy of **riding a bicycle** → both are treated **at par** if they equally satisfy the individuals' preferences.

3. Key Insight

- **Welfare equality** is not resource-focused.
- It says: "Don't count what people *have*, count whether they're *happy* or *satisfied*."

The Essence

This view is powerful, but also **problematic**:

- If someone has very **expensive desires** (like luxury cars), welfare equality says it's the same as someone satisfied with a bicycle.
- But doesn't this let inequality in **resources** hide under equality of **desires**?

That's why later thinkers like **Amartya Sen** asked: *Equality of what? Resources? Welfare? Capabilities?*



So, in **Welfare Equality**, remember the **two dimensions**:

- **Happiness (pleasure–pain balance)**
- **Desire / preference satisfaction**

It's a subtle but deep idea: **not how much you own, but whether you are satisfied.**

Equality of Resources

1. Rawls and beyond

- **John Rawls** argued for a *fair distribution of resources* through the **difference principle**.
- But **Ronald Dworkin** said: let's go deeper! He wanted a **resource egalitarian conception**—a framework where people get **equal resources**, but outcomes may differ depending on their **ambitions** and **choices**.

2. The Clamshell Market

- Imagine: everyone gets **100 clamshells**—the currency in a **perfectly competitive market**.
- With these clamshells, people can buy whatever bundle of resources they want—land, tools, food, books.

Why clamshells? Because they are **equal starting tokens** of opportunity.

3. Two-stage process

(i) **Ambition-sensitive auction**

- People bid their clamshells in an **auction**.
- The result: bundles of resources differ according to individual **ambitions**.
Example: One person spends clamshells on art supplies, another on farming tools.
- This passes the **envy test** → No one should envy another's bundle, because differences reflect *their own ambitions and choices*.

(ii) **Endowment-sensitive auction**

- But what about people born with **disabilities** or **natural disadvantages**?
- Dworkin adds a layer of **insurance**: society compensates for **natural endowments** like illness or disability.
Example: If someone is blind, the market gives them *extra clamshells* (insurance payout), so they can still compete fairly.

4. Key Insight

- Dworkin's model balances **freedom** and **fairness**.
- Equality doesn't mean same outcome, but same **starting resources**.
- **Ambition-sensitive** → rewards choices.
- **Endowment-sensitive** → corrects brute luck.

The Essence

Think of it this way: Dworkin is saying—

"Let everyone start the race with the same shoes and track. If someone has a broken leg, give them support. After that, how far they run is up to their ambition."

That's **equality of resources**: fair start, fair compensation for brute luck, but responsibility for your own choices.

Equality of Capabilities

1. Sen's Core Argument

- Sen said: Don't stop at **income** or **resources**.
- Real equality lies in **real freedom**—what people are actually *able to do* and *to be*.
Can they **read**?
Are they **healthy**?
Do they have **self-respect**?
That's the measure of well-being.

2. Function vs. Capability

- **Function** = an activity or achievement.
Example: *Reading a book*.



- **Capability** = the *freedom to achieve that function*.

Example: *Being literate so that you can read if you choose to.*

So, Sen says: Don't just see if people are reading
→ ask whether they *have the capability* to read.

3. State's Role

- The state should focus not just on providing **functions** (like schools, hospitals), but on ensuring **capabilities**—real opportunities to use them.
Example: Giving a girl textbooks (resource) is not enough if she is not **literate** or not **allowed** by society to study.

4. Resource Equality vs. Capability Equality

- **Resource equality** = equal distribution of **books, income, education services**.
- **Equality of capability** = depends on both **external conditions** and **internal ability**.
Example: Two students get the same books.
- One, due to good health, family support, and literacy, can use them.
- Another, due to illness or discrimination, cannot.

So, equality is meaningless unless we check whether people have the **real freedom** to convert resources into achievements.

The Essence

Sen is telling us:

"Don't just count what people have. Count what they can do with what they have."

It's like giving everyone a bicycle. If one person knows how to ride and another doesn't, resource equality exists—but **capability equality does not**.

That's why **Sen's Capability Approach** shifted the debate from **things** (income, resources) to **real**

freedoms—the power to live with dignity, choice, and self-respect.

Complex Equality – Michael Walzer

1. Communitarian Roots

Walzer was a **communitarian**. He believed that **justice and equality are not universal**; they **vary**:

- From **society to society** (depending on culture, traditions, values).
- Within a **single society**.
- Even between different **spheres** (political, social, economic).

So, equality isn't one-size-fits-all. It's *plural* and *contextual*.

2. Spheres of Justice

Walzer said society is divided into **spheres**:

- **Political sphere** → power, leadership, voting.
- **Economic sphere** → money, business, trade.
- **Social sphere** → family roles (father, mother, children), friendships, community.

Each sphere has its own **rules of justice**.

In family life, love matters, not money.

In politics, votes matter, not wealth.

In economy, hard work and market value matter, not social status.

3. No Single Equality

- There is no **single notion of equality** across all spheres.
- Inequalities **within a sphere** may be acceptable (a mother is not the same as a child, a boss is not the same as a worker).
But! That inequality should **not spill over** into other spheres.

4. The Key Rule



Inequality in one sphere should not dominate another.

Example:

- If someone earns huge **money** in the **business sphere**, they should not buy **political power**.
- If someone has **political office**, they should not use it to gain **economic wealth**.
- If someone is respected as a **religious leader**, they should not impose authority in the **political sphere**.

This keeps society balanced and prevents **tyranny of one sphere over others**.

The Essence

Walzer is basically saying:

"Justice is not simple. It is complex. Each part of society has its own rules. Don't let power in one area take over another."

Think of it like **different games**:

- Cricket has rules.
 - Chess has rules.
 - Football has rules.
- A good player in cricket cannot demand the same privileges in chess!

That's **Complex Equality** → respecting the **plurality of justice** across spheres, ensuring fairness without letting one kind of power dominate all.

Dimensions of Equality

1. Legal Equality – Liberal Theory

- At the foundation of **liberal theory** lies **legal equality**.
- It means **equality before law** and **equal protection of law** – *no one is above or below the law*.
- But it's not just formal; it also **justifies corrective policies** like:

- **Reservation** (to uplift disadvantaged groups).
- **Progressive taxation** (the rich contribute more for fairness).
Law isn't only about sameness, it's also about **justice in real terms**.

2. Political, Social, and Economic Equality

- Equality is **multi-dimensional**. It spans:
 - **Political equality** → equal right to vote, contest, and participate.
 - **Social equality** → no caste, race, gender, or religion-based discrimination.
 - **Economic equality** → no extreme concentration of wealth, fair opportunities.
 Together, these ensure a **balanced structure of justice**. If one dimension fails, equality as a whole collapses.

3. Formal Equality

- This is the **surface layer**: laws and rules treat everyone **uniformly**.
- It covers **legal equality + political equality**.
Example: Every citizen gets **one vote**, every person is **subject to the same criminal law**.
But formal equality is not enough if deep social and economic inequalities persist.

4. Substantial Equality

- Goes deeper than the legal surface.
- It's about **real equality in society and economy**.
- **Social equality** → no **discrimination** based on caste, race, religion.
- **Economic equality** → addresses the debate:
 - **Equality of opportunity** (everyone gets the same starting line).
 - **Equality of outcome** (compensates for structural disadvantages so everyone can



finish fairly).

Substantial equality is where the **heart of justice** beats – making equality **real, not just on paper**.

The Essence

Think of it like building a house of justice:

- **Legal equality** is the foundation (everyone equal before law).
- **Political, social, and economic equality** are the **walls** (structure of fairness).
- **Formal equality** is the **paint** (uniform treatment).
- **Substantial equality** is the **furniture inside** – making the house truly livable for everyone.

Without **substantial equality**, the house looks good from outside but is empty inside.

Equality and Freedom

Two Principles as Complementary Principles

- Normally, people think **freedom** means "leave me alone" and **equality** means "everyone the same."
- But **social liberals** argue → these two are not enemies, they are **complementary principles**.
Freedom without equality becomes empty (only the privileged enjoy it).
Equality without freedom becomes mechanical (no scope for choice or creativity).

Amartya Sen – Capability Approach

- Sen says, true **freedom** is not just about removing chains, but about being **equally equipped with capabilities**.
- Example: If both rich and poor are legally "free" to go to school, but the poor child cannot afford books or tuition, is that **real freedom**?
- Sen: **Capabilities** (health, education, income

security) make **equality of freedom** real.

MacPherson – Creative Freedom

- MacPherson takes it further → freedom is not just "absence of interference," it's about **creative freedom**.
- He says **equality enhances opportunities for individual development**.
- Example: In a society where resources are shared fairly, individuals can explore art, science, entrepreneurship — not just struggle for survival.
 Equality **expands the canvas** on which freedom can be painted.

The Essence

Think of it this way:

- **Sen** gives us the **toolkit** (capabilities).
- **MacPherson** gives us the **canvas** (creative freedom).
- **Equality and freedom** together create a **just society** where people are not just free *in theory*, but free *in practice*, free to **become their best selves**.

If freedom is the **engine**, equality is the **fuel** — one without the other cannot take us far.

Impediment to Freedom

Alex de Tocqueville – Tyranny of Majority

- Tocqueville warned that when **equality** becomes the central value, people start caring more about being *the same* than being *free*.
- Result? Individuals become **subservient to public opinion**.
- If everyone wants equality of opinion, dissent disappears → leading to a **tyranny of majority**.
 Example: In a democracy, if majority opinion crushes minority voices, society loses **freedom**



of thought.

J.S. Mill – Weighted Vote

- Mill valued **liberty** above all.
- He feared that **formal equality** (one person = one vote) could allow the majority to dominate minorities and the less-educated to silence reasoned voices.
- Solution? He suggested a **weighted vote** — giving more weight to educated citizens, to **protect minorities** and maintain genuine liberty.
Equality of votes might look fair, but it can **reduce freedom of intellect**.

F.A. Hayek – Mirage of Social Justice

- Hayek argued: humans are **different in skills and talents** → so **socioeconomic inequality is natural**.
- For him, any attempt to forcibly impose equality through redistribution destroys freedom.
- He called it a **mirage of social justice** — an illusion that looks attractive but is impossible without heavy state control.
Example: Excessive welfare policies may reduce incentives, innovation, and ultimately shrink everyone's liberty.

The Essence

So, from this perspective:

- **Tocqueville** feared equality of opinion → leads to **conformism**.
- **Mill** feared equality of vote → leads to **majoritarian tyranny**.
- **Hayek** feared equality of outcome → leads to **loss of liberty** and a **mirage of justice**.

In short: **Too much equality can suffocate freedom.**

It's like giving everyone the same pair of shoes — it may look fair, but it won't let people run freely, because not every foot is the same size!

Social Contract & Equality

Freedom for Society

The **social contract tradition** teaches us that people are not born into ready-made societies. Instead, they **willingly give up some freedom** to create an organized society.

Why? Because only by limiting *absolute freedom* can we ensure **security, order, and justice** for all.

It's like saying: "I'll give up my right to hit you, if you give up your right to hit me" → and together, we get **peaceful coexistence**.

Harold J. Laski – Equality ≠ Identical Treatment

Now, here comes an important clarification from **Harold J. Laski**:

- **Equality is not identical treatment.**
- Why? Because **men are different** — in **want, capacity, and need**.

Example: A student who is visually impaired does not need the same exam sheet as others; he needs a **braille paper**. Giving him the same sheet as everyone else would be "identical treatment," but it would actually be **unjust**.

So, equality in the social contract means **fairness tailored to human diversity**, not mechanical sameness.

The Essence

The **social contract** shows us that society itself is born from a compromise — freedom is exchanged for justice. But as **Laski** reminds us, **equality doesn't mean cloning people's conditions**.

Instead, it means **meeting unequal needs fairly**.

Think of it like this: society is a symphony — not every instrument plays the same note, but



equality ensures each gets its chance to be heard.

Different Schools of Thought on Equality & Freedom

Classical Liberals & Neoliberals – Negative Liberty

For **classical liberals** (like John Locke) and **neoliberals** (like Hayek), the greatest threat to freedom is the **state itself**.

- They emphasize **negative liberty** → freedom *from interference*.
- According to them, equality means ensuring **non-intervention of the state**, especially in personal choices.
- So, what matters most? **Freedom of speech, freedom of expression, equality before law**.
Example: A citizen can openly criticize the government without fear of punishment.

Marxists – Freedom from Necessities

Marxists flip the argument. They say: *What use is freedom of speech if you are starving?*

- For them, **true freedom** means **freedom from necessities**.
- They capture this in the famous maxim: **"To each according to his needs."**
- So, equality here means **economic redistribution** → only then can a worker or poor farmer experience real liberty.
Example: A hungry child given food in a mid-day meal scheme experiences **freedom to learn** — because his basic need is secured.

Social Liberals – Positive Liberty

Social liberals (like T.H. Green, Amartya Sen) argue that freedom is not just absence of interference but the **presence of enabling conditions**.

- This is **positive liberty** → the ability to

actually use one's freedom.

- They say: the state must take **active intervention** → education, healthcare, welfare, reservations.
Example: A Dalit child being given reservation in education and jobs → this is state ensuring **substantive equality** to guarantee freedom.

The Essence

So, three schools, three visions:

- **Classical liberals & neoliberals:** Freedom = *don't touch me, state!*
- **Marxists:** Freedom = *feed me first, then talk about liberty.*
- **Social liberals:** Freedom = *equip me, empower me, and then I can be free.*

In short → **freedom without equality is hollow, and equality without freedom is oppressive**.
The balance is the art of political thought.

Contemporary Relevance of Equality & Freedom

Affirmative Action

In our times, **affirmative action** is one of the strongest tools to address **historical inequalities**.

- Reservation for **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs** in India → is not about denying freedom to others, but about giving **real freedom of opportunity** to those historically excluded.
- It embodies the spirit that **equality must empower freedom**.

LGBTQ+ Rights

Movements for **LGBTQ+ equal rights** are another classic arena where **equality and liberty** clash and converge.

- On one side: **Freedom** of individuals to love and live as they choose.



- On the other: **Equality** before law → demanding recognition in marriage, adoption, employment.

The recent debates in India over **same-sex marriage** show this tension beautifully: law as a tool of equality, society as a space of liberty.

Universal Healthcare vs Progressive Taxation

Modern policy dilemmas highlight the balancing act between equality and liberty.

- **Universal healthcare** → ensures **equality of access** to life-saving facilities, regardless of wealth.
- But to fund it, states impose **progressive taxation** → which some argue restricts the **liberty** of the rich to spend as they wish.
This is the modern echo of the age-old debate: how much state intervention is too much?

The Essence

So, when we look around today:

- **Affirmative action** → freedom through equality.
- **LGBTQ+ rights** → equality through freedom.
- **Healthcare & taxation debates** → the eternal balancing act of both.

And this shows us one timeless truth: **equality and freedom are not abstract theories; they are living, breathing struggles shaping our daily politics and justice.**

Affirmative Actions

Concept

Think of **affirmative action** as a conscious attempt by society to correct the wrongs of history.

It is a **policy to address past discrimination** — to give **differential treatment to disadvantaged**

groups who were denied equal opportunities for generations.

In simple terms: if history pushed some communities 100 meters behind in the race of life, affirmative action is not favoritism — it's society saying, *"Let's move them to the starting line so the race is fair."*

Rational Grounds

The policy stands on **rational grounds**:

1. **Inadequate opportunities in the past** → must be **compensated now**. Justice delayed cannot be justice denied forever.
2. In **times of scarce opportunities**, allocation should be based on **needs rather than just merit**. After all, what does merit mean if people never had equal resources to develop it?
3. **Positive intervention** is necessary to create a **level playing field** — otherwise, equality remains a mere illusion.

Example: Reservations in Indian education and jobs ensure that a child from a marginalized background has a chance to compete with someone from a privileged one.

Opponents

But the story doesn't end here. **Opponents**, particularly **neo-conservatives**, raise sharp criticisms:

- They argue affirmative action **goes against merit**, rewarding people not for achievement but for belonging to a group.
- They fear it will **erode social progress and stability**, by creating resentment among those excluded.
- More deeply, they claim it hurts **personal dignity and self-respect** → because individuals feel rewarded through



preferential treatment, not through their **own hard work**.

This is why debates on affirmative action are so emotionally charged: it touches both **justice for the disadvantaged** and **dignity for the individual**.

The Essence

So, is affirmative action a **boon** or a **burden**?

- To its defenders, it is **justice in action**.
- To its critics, it is a **threat to meritocracy**.

But one thing is clear: **affirmative action is not just a policy** — it's a mirror reflecting how a society balances equality, freedom, justice, and dignity.

Affirmative Action in India

India's Acceptance

In **India**, society has been relatively **sympathetic to affirmative action**.

Unlike in the **U.S.**, where debates on **reverse discrimination** are loud and bitter, here the idea of compensating for **historical caste-based injustice** has found broad legitimacy.

Why? Because most Indians recognize that **caste** was not just history — it shaped, and still shapes, access to education, land, jobs, and dignity.

Contrast with the U.S.

Now, compare this with the **U.S. Supreme Court verdict** that **restricted affirmative action in higher education**.

In America, the worry is that preferential policies **violate individual merit** and **equal protection under law**.

But in India, the conversation is different — affirmative action is seen as a tool of **social justice**, not a violation of equality.

India's Own Issues

Yet, India's story is not without challenges. Three

big issues stand out:

1. Problem of Identification

- Who really counts as "backward"?
- Different states demand inclusion, and every caste wants recognition.
- Example: The demand for a **caste census** reflects this anxiety of correct identification.

2. Creamy Layer within Backward Classes

- Within OBCs, the **creamy layer** (the relatively wealthy and powerful sections) often corner the benefits.
- This dilutes the very purpose of reservations, leaving the most marginalized still behind.

3. EWS Reservations Debate

- The introduction of **10% EWS reservations** for economically weaker sections of forward castes opened new debates.
- Critics argue: Does this dilute the original principle of reservations, which was about **historical social discrimination**, not just poverty?

The Essence

So, in **India**, affirmative action is widely accepted, but the **real battle** lies in its **implementation**:

- **Identification** of beneficiaries,
- **Exclusion of creamy layer**,
- **Balancing caste and class** in policies.

In the end, affirmative action in India is not just a policy, it is the **soul of our democratic promise** — to make freedom and equality meaningful for all, not just for those born into privilege.

Arguments Against Affirmative Action

1. Compromise against Merit



Critics argue that **affirmative action** dilutes **merit**.

Imagine a competitive exam where someone with lower marks is selected simply because of caste or category. Opponents say this undermines **efficiency** and **quality** in institutions and public services.

For them, progress should be based on **achievement**, not **preferential treatment**.

2. Difficult to Roll Back

Once introduced, such policies become **difficult to roll back**.

Why? Because every social group starts demanding its share, and **political leaders** hesitate to withdraw benefits for fear of backlash. In this sense, what was meant as a **temporary measure** often becomes a **permanent entitlement**.

3. Politicisation

Reservations and **affirmative action** often get trapped in **politicisation**.

Parties use it as a **vote-bank tool**, expanding quotas to win elections, rather than focusing on genuine **social justice**.

This reduces affirmative action from being a **moral corrective** to a **political instrument**.

4. Failure to Achieve Objects

Finally, critics argue that affirmative action often ends in the **failure to achieve objects**.

Why? Because benefits are cornered by the **creamy layer** within disadvantaged groups, while the **truly marginalized** remain excluded. Thus, instead of ensuring a **level playing field**, the policy risks **deepening inequality** within groups.

The Essence

So, the critics' case is clear:

- It **compromises merit**,

- It is **hard to roll back**,
- It invites **politicisation**, and
- Often **fails to achieve its intended objects**.

But remember — while these are serious criticisms, the **moral force** of affirmative action lies in correcting **centuries of injustice**. And that is why the debate remains so alive, in India, the U.S., and across the world.

Preferential Policies

Preferential policies are meant to uplift the disadvantaged — to provide **fairness, justice**, and a **level playing field**. But history warns us: sometimes, these very policies can **end up favouring the dominant class**, instead of the truly marginalized.

The Case of Sri Lanka

Take the example of **Sri Lanka**.

- In the mid-20th century, the government introduced preferential policies in **education** and **employment** to favour the **Sinhalese majority**.
- The intention? To reduce inequality.
- But what actually happened? Instead of creating **harmony**, these measures **marginalized the Tamil minority**.

The result was **social divisions**, resentment, and eventually, decades of **ethnic conflict**.

The Lesson

So the key lesson is this:

- **Preferential policies** must be carefully designed.
- They should uplift the **truly disadvantaged**, not reinforce the power of the **dominant class**.
- Otherwise, what is meant to be a tool of **social justice** can turn into a source of



social division.

The Essence

Remember, my friends — **justice is delicate**. If preferential policies are not **fairly targeted**, they risk becoming weapons of **exclusion** rather than instruments of **inclusion**. Sri Lanka stands as a cautionary tale for all societies, including India.

PYQ

1. Comment on: Affirmative Action 2021, 10
2. "Equality of estates caused equality of power, and equality of power is liberty." Comment. 2022, 15
3. Affirmative Action Policies draw as much strong criticism as strong support. Analyze this statement in the context of equality. 2023, 15
4. The nature of relationship between equality of democratic citizenship and liberty of citizens is influenced by economic equality. Comment. 2024, 15
5. Equality means fair treatment rather than equal treatment. Comment. 2018, 15
6. Comment on: Affirmative Action. 2016, 10
7. How is liberty a precondition for equality? Explicate the relationship between equality and liberty 2014, 15
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