

**STRUGGLES FOR EQUALITY****CONTENTS****F Introduction****F The Indian Constitution as a Living Document****➤ INTRODUCTION**

1. Persons are discriminated against primarily because of their social and cultural background as well as because they are women. Discrimination on the basis of a person's religion, caste and sex is another significant factor for why people are treated unequally in India.
2. Often, poverty and lack of dignity and respect for certain communities and groups come together in such powerful ways that it is difficult to identify where one aspect of inequality ends and the other begins. Dalit, adivasi and Muslim girls drop out of school in large numbers. This is a combined outcome of poverty, social discrimination and the lack of good quality school facilities for these communities.
3. Throughout the world – in every community, village, city and town—you will find that there are some people who are known and respected because of their fight for equality. These people may have stood up against an act of discrimination that they faced or which they witnessed. Or they may be well-respected because they treat all persons with dignity and are, therefore, trusted and called upon to resolve issues in the community.
4. Often, some of these persons become more widely recognised because they have the support or represent large numbers of people who have united to address a particular issue of inequality.
5. In India, there are several struggles in which people have come together to fight for issues that they believe are important.
6. The Tawa Matsya Sangh in Madhya Pradesh is another example of people coming together to fight for an issue.
7. When dams are built or forest areas declared sanctuaries for animals, thousands of people are displaced. Whole villages are uprooted and people are forced to go and build new homes, start new lives elsewhere. Most of these people are poor. In urban areas too, bastis in which poor people live are often uprooted. Some of them are relocated to areas outside the city. Their work as well as their children's schooling is severely disrupted because of the distance from the outskirts of the city to these locations.

8. This displacement of people and communities is a problem that has become quite widespread in our country. People usually come together to fight against this. There are several organisations across the country fighting for the rights of the displaced. The Tawa Matsya Sangh – a federation of Fisherworker’s cooperatives – an organisation fighting for the rights of the displaced forest dwellers of the Satpura forest in Madhya Pradesh.
9. Originating in the Mahadeo hills of Chindwara district, the Tawa flows through Betul, before joining the Narmada in Hoshangabad. The Tawa dam began to be built in 1958 and was completed in 1978. It submerged large areas of forest and agricultural land. The forest dwellers were left with nothing. Some of the displaced people settled around the reservoir and apart from their meagre farms found a livelihood in fishing. They earned very little.
10. In 1994, the government gave the rights for fishing in the Tawa reservoir to private contractors. These contractors drove the local people away and got cheap labour from outside. The contractors began to threaten the villagers, who did not want to leave, by bringing in hoodlums. The villagers stood united and decided that it was time to set up an organization and do something to protect their rights.
11. The newly formed Tawa Matsya Sangh (TMS) organised rallies and a chakka jam (road blockade), demanding their right to continue fishing for their livelihood.
12. In response to their protests, the government created a committee to assess the issue. The committee recommended that fishing rights be granted to the villagers for their livelihood. In 1996, the Madhya Pradesh government decided to give to the people displaced by the Tawa dam the fishing rights for the reservoir. A five-year lease agreement was signed two months later. On January 2, 1997, people from 33 villages of Tawa started the new year with the first catch.
13. With the TMS taking over the fishworkers were able to increase their earnings substantially. This was because they set up the cooperative which would buy the catch from them at a fair price. The cooperative would then arrange to transport and sell this in markets where they would get a good price. They have now begun to earn three times more than they earned earlier. The TMS has also begun giving the fishworkers loans for repair and the buying of new nets. By managing to earn a higher wage as well as preserving the fish in the reservoir, the TMS has shown that when people’s organisations get their rights to livelihood, they can be good managers.

## ➤ THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION AS A LIVING DOCUMENT

1. The foundation of all movements for justice and the inspiration for all the poetry and songs on equality is the recognition that all people are equal. The Indian Constitution recognises the equality of all persons. Movements and struggles for equality in India continuously refer to the Indian Constitution to make their point about equality and justice for all.

2. By constantly referring to the Constitution they use. It as a 'living document', i.e., something that has real meaning in our lives. In a democracy, there are always communities and individuals trying to expand the idea of democracy and push for a greater recognition of equality on existing as well as new issues.
3. Issues of equality are central to a democracy. A challenge to this idea of equality in a democracy include the privatisation of health services in the country, the increasing control that business houses exert on the media, the low value given to women and their work, and the low earnings made by small farmers who grow cotton. These issues substantially affect poor and marginalised communities, and therefore, concern economic and social equality in the country.
4. This is the core of the struggle for equality in a democracy. The dignity and self-respect of each person and their community can only be realised if they have adequate resources to support and nurture their families and if they are not discriminated against.