

GENDER, RELIGION AND CASTE

CHAPTER COVERAGE

- Indian Democratic System
 1. Political Expression of social differences
 2. Social differences in the form of social inequality
 3. Three kinds of social differences
 - (A) Gender
 - (B) Religion
 - (C) Caste
- Nature of Social Division with Indian Politics
- Impact of Social Division on Indian socio-democratic Politics, like-Impact of communalism, casteism etc.



Gender & Politics

(a) Sexual Division of labour :

It is a form of hierarchical social division. It can be seen at two levels :

1. **Public Division**
2. **Private Division**

Boys and girls are brought up to believe that the main responsibility of women is housework and bringing up children. This is reflected in **sexual division of labour** in most families.

- ◆ Women do all work inside the home such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, tailoring, looking after children etc.
- ◆ Men do all the work out side the home. It is not that men cannot do house work, they simply think that it is for women to attend to these things. And when these jobs are paid men are ready to take up these works.
- ◆ Similarly it is not that women do not work outside their home. In villages, women fetch water, collect fuel and work in fields. In urban areas, poor women work as domestic helpers in middle class homes and in offices.
- ◆ In fact majority of women do some sort of paid work in addition to domestic labour. But their work is not valued and does not get recognition.

(b) Feminist Movements :

Role of women, especially in politics, is minimal in most societies. Earlier, only men were allowed to vote and contest for public offices. Women in different parts of the world organised and agitated for equal rights. These agitations demanded enhancing the political and legal status of women and improving their educational and career opportunities. More radical women's movement aimed at equality in personal and family life as well. These movements are called **FEMINIST** movements. Political mobilisation has helped to improve women's role in public life. In our country, women still lay much behind men. Ours is still a male dominated, **PATRIARCHAL** society.

◆ Women face disadvantage, in various ways :

1. The literacy rate among women is only 54 % compared with 76 % among men.
2. Smaller proportion of girl students go for higher studies.
3. Parents prefer to spend their resources for their boys education. rather than spending equally on their sons and daughter.
4. On an average an Indian woman works one hour more than an average man every day, yet much of her work is not paid and therefore often not valued.
5. In spite of the Equal Wages Act in almost all area of work, women are paid less than men.
6. In many parts of India parents prefer to have sons and find ways to have the girl child aborted before she is born.

◆ **Domestic violence :** There are reports of various kinds of harassment, exploitation and violence against women. Both urban as well as rural areas have become unsafe for women. They are not safe even within their own home from beating and other forms of domestic violence.

➤ Women Political Representation

In India, the proportion of women in legislature has been very low. In the government cabinets are largely all-male even when a woman becomes the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister. One way to solve this problem is to make it legally binding to have a fair proportion of women in the elected bodies. One-third of seats in Panchayats and municipalities - are now reserved for women. Women's organisations and activities have been demanding a reservation of at least one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. Gender division is an example that some form of social division needs to be expressed in politics.

➤ Religion Communalism & Politics

Many countries including India have in their population, followers of different religions. Unlike gender differences, the religious differences are often expressed in the field of politics.

(a) Different considerations about religion and politics :

1. Gandhiji used to say that religion can never be separated from politics. He believed politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion.

2. Human rights groups in our country have argued that most of the victims of communal riots in our country are people from religious minorities. They have demanded that the government take special steps to protect religious minorities.
3. **FAMILY LAW** of all religions discriminate against women, so government should change these laws to make them more equitable.

Ideas, ideals and values drawn from different religions can and perhaps should play a role in politics. People should be able to express in politics their needs, interests and demands as a member of a religious community. These political acts are not wrong as long as they treat every religion equally.

(b) Communalism :

Communalism is a situation when a particular community tries to promote its own interest at the cost of other communities.

The communalism problem becomes acute when :

- (i) Religion is seen as the basis of the nation.
- (ii) When one religion and its followers are discriminated against by another.
- (iii) When people start believing that beliefs of one religion are superior to those of other religion.
- (iv) When the demands of one religious group are formed in opposition to another.
- (v) When state power is used to establish domination of one religious group over the rest.

(c) Communal Politics :

Religion is used in politics in exclusive and partisan terms. This manner of using religion in politics is communal politics.

Communal politics is based on the idea that religion is the principal basis of social community. communalism involves thinking along the following lines :

- (i) The followers of a particular religion must belong to one community.
- (ii) Their fundamental interests should be the same. Any difference that they may have is irrelevant or trivial for community life.
- (iii) Communalism also follows that people who follow different religions can not belong to the same social Community. If the followers of different religions have some commonalities, these are superficial and immaterial. Their interests are bound to be different and involve a conflict.
- (iv) Sometime communalism leads to the belief that people belonging to different religions cannot live as equal citizens within one nation. Either one of them has to dominate the rest or they have to form different nations.

(d) Communalism can take various forms in politics :

1. Communalism involve religious prejudices, stereotypes of religious communities and belief in the superiority of one's religion over other religions.
2. A communal mind often leads to quest for political dominance of one's own religious community. For those belonging to the minority community, it can take the form of desire to form a separate political unit.

3. Political mobilisation on religious lines is another form of communalism. This involves the use of sacred symbols, religious leaders, emotional appeals and plain fear in order to bring the followers of one religion together in the political arena.
4. Sometimes communalism leads to communal violence, riots and massacre.

(e) Secular State :

Communalism is a major challenge to democracy. The makers of our constitution chose the model of a secular state.

1. There is no official religion, for our constitution does not give a special status to any religion.
2. The constitution provides to all individual and communities freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion or not to follow any.
3. The constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.
4. Constitution allows the state to intervene in the matters of religion in order to ensure equality.

Secularism is not just an ideology. This idea constitutes one of the foundations of our country. Communalism is seen as a threat. That is why communalism needs to be combated.



Caste and Politics

Caste and politics, have both positive and the negative aspects.

Caste division is special to India. In most societies. Occupations are passed on from one generation to another. Caste system is an extreme form of this.

The hereditary occupational division was sanctioned by rituals. Members of the same caste group practiced the same occupation, married within the caste group and did not eat with members from other caste groups.

Caste system was based on discrimination against the 'outcaste' groups. They were subjected to the inhuman practice of untouchability political leaders and social reformers like Jotiba Phule, Gandhiji, B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker advocated and worked to establish a society in which caste inequalities are absent.

Caste system in modern India have undergone great changes due to -

1. Economic development and large scale URBANISATION.
2. Growth of literacy and education.
3. **OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY**
4. The weakening of the position of landlords in the villages. Due to the old notions of **CASTE HIERARCHY** are breaking down factors.

The Constitution of India prohibited any caste-based discrimination and laid the foundation of policies to reverse the injustices of the caste system.

◆ Caste system has not disappeared from India :

1. Some of the older aspects of caste have persisted.
2. Even now most people marry within their own caste or tribe.

3. Untouchability has not ended completely.

4. Effects of centuries of advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt today.

◆ **Caste in Politics :** Casteism is rooted in the belief that caste is the sole basis of social community. According to this way of thinking, people belonging to the same caste belong to a natural social community and have the same interests which they do not share with any one from another caste.

◆ **Caste can take various forms in politics :**

1. When parties choose candidates in election, they keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate and nominate candidates from different castes so as to get necessary support to win elections.

2. Political parties make appeals to caste sentiment to muster supports. Some political parties favour some castes.

3. Universal adult franchise brought new consciousness among the people of caste that were earlier treated as inferior and low.

4. No parliamentary constituency in the country has a clear majority of one single caste. So, every candidate and party needs to win the confidence of more than one caste and community to win elections.

5. No party wins the votes of all the voters of caste or community. When people say that a caste is 'vote bank' of one part, it usually means that a large proportion of the voters from that caste vote for that party.

6. Many political parties put up candidates from the same caste. (if that caste is believed to dominate, the electorate in a particular constituency). Some voters have more than one candidate from their caste.

7. The ruling party and the sitting MP or MLA frequently lose elections in our country. That could not have happened if all castes and communities were frozen in their political preferences.

8. Voters have strong attachment to political parties which is often stronger than their attachment to their castes or community.

9. Rich and poor or men and women from the same caste often vote very differently.

10. People's assessment of the performance of the government and the popularity rating of the leaders also matter.

➤ **Politics in Caste**

Politics too influences the caste system and caste identities by bringing them into the political arena.

Thus, it is not politics that gets caste-ridden, it is the caste that gets politicised. This takes several forms :

1. Each caste group tries to become bigger by incorporating within it neighbouring castes or subcastes which were earlier excluded from it.

2. Various caste groups are required to enter into a coalition with other castes or communities and thus enter into a dialogue and negotiation.

3. New kinds of caste groups have come up in the political arena like 'backward' and 'forward' caste groups.

4. In some situations, expression of caste differences in politics gives many disadvantaged communities the space to demand their share of power.

e.g. Dalits and OBC have gained better access to decision making.

5. Several political and non-political organisations have been demanding for an end to discrimination against particular caste, for more dignity and more access to land resources and opportunities.

Religion, politics based on caste identity are not very healthy in a democracy. It can divert attention from other pressing issues like poverty, development and corruption.

(a) Caste system a great threat to Indian democracy :

Most of the politicians and scholars accepts that the caste system has become very complicated Presently it has become a great threat to Indian democracy. Caste system implies denial of equality and freedom, and hence is contrary to the principles of equality. As such it is posing a big threat to our democratic policy.

- (i) the politics of caste at its worst is being practiced now-a-days.
- (ii) This type of politics is responsible for creating social tension, violence and fear psychosis.
- (iii) It has given rise to instability in the political system of our country.

(b) Step taken by the government to do away with casteism :

- (i) Untouchability has been abolished by Indian Constitution and it has been made a criminal offence.
- (ii) The fundamental rights guaranteed in our constitution provide equality and freedom to all citizens.
- (iii) Reservation has been provided to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and people of the other backward castes in educational institutions, jobs and legislatures.
- (iv) As per Directive principles, state is duty bound to promote and protect the interest of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
- (v) Education is provided to more and more people. Inter-caste marriages are being welcomed by most of the state governments, progressive parties and leaders.

GLOSSARY

1. **Gender Division** : It is a form of hierarchical social division based on biology, social expectations and stereotypes.
2. **Sexual Division of Labour** : A system in which all work inside the home is either done by women of the family, or organised by them through the domestic helpers.
3. **Feminist** : A woman or a man who believes in equal rights and opportunities for men & women.
4. **Patriarchy** : It is a concept which is used to refer to a system that values men more and gives them power over women. The society based on this ideology is known as the patriarchal society.
5. **Child Sex Ratio** : It is referred to as the number of girl children per thousand boys in a given period.
6. **Family Laws** : Those laws that deal with family related matters such as marriages, divorce, adoption, inheritance, etc. In our country every community has its own family law.
7. **Urbanisation** : The process of shifting of population from rural areas to urban areas for better facility and job opportunities.
8. **Majoritarian Dominance** : The community belonging to a majority category takes the status of majoritarian dominance.
9. **Occupational Mobility** : Process of shift from one occupation to another. Usually when a new generation takes up occupations other than those practised by their ancestors.
10. **Caste Hierarchy** : It is a ladder like formation in which all the caste groups are placed from the highest to the lowest castes.
11. **Secular state** : A state which has no official religion of its own is known as the secular state. It provides religious equality and equal status to all religions.
12. **Secularism** : It is an ideology which deals with the equal status to all religions and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion. It implies religious freedom, people enjoy the right to preach, practise or profess a religion of their choice.
13. **Untouchability** : A state of affairs in which some backward and lower caste people are treated as outcaste people, treated as untouchables and are not allowed to mingle with so called upper caste.
14. **Universal adult Franchise** : It refers to in which Right to vote is given to every adult citizen of the country. It is one of the political rights of the people. In this -
Universal - signifies - to all
Adult - signifies - above 18 yrs and
Franchise - signifies - right to vote
15. **Minorities** : The word signifies those groups of people or communities who are lesser in number in a given area.
16. **Communal Representation** : A system of separate electorate for the adequate representation of the people belonging to different communities.
17. **Social change** : It signifies the modification which takes place in the life style of people, i.e., mode of living, the social status and cultural changes.