

10th - Gender, Religion & Caste



In this chapter, we are going to study three kinds of social differences that can take the form of social divisions and inequalities. These are social differences based on gender, religion and caste.

Gender and Politics: Gender is a form of hierarchical social division which is present everywhere, but is rarely given importance in the study of politics. Gender is not based on biological difference. It is based on social expectations and stereotypes.

Public/Private Division of Labour: Gender division is a form of social division under which unequal roles are assigned by the society to men and women. Sexual division of labour is seen in most families. For example, women do all work inside home such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, tailoring, looking after children etc, while men do all the work outside home. It is not that men cannot do housework; it is their mindset that women have to attend all these works. When these jobs are paid for, men are ready to accept it as profession. Most of the good chefs in hotels and tailors are men. On the other hand, it is not that women do not work outside. Women are working in fields, offices everywhere. They do paid work vis-a-vis domestic labour which is not recognised.

Result of Public/Private Division of Labour: The result of the division of labour is that women's role in public life (especially in politics) is minimal in most societies. Earlier, only men were allowed to take part in politics. Gradually, the gender issue was raised in politics. Women in different parts of the world organised and protested for equal rights. The radical women's movements aimed at equality in personal and family life, which are known as Feminist movements. This was done to get equal voting rights as well as educational and career opportunities for women. Newly developed political consciousness helped to improve women's role in our society.

Stereotype Fixed image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Sexual division of labour A system in which all work inside home is either done by the women of the family, or organised by them through domestic helpers.

Feminist: A woman or a man who believes in equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Now it is found that many women are working as scientists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, managers, college and university teachers. Earlier these jobs were not considered suitable for women. In Scandinavian countries, such as in Sweden, Norway and Finland, the participation of women in public life is very high.

Women's Status in India: In India, women still lag behind men despite some improvements have been made since Independence. India is still a male dominated, patriarchal society. Women in India are facing discrimination in various ways. The following points this explain:

1. **Literacy Rate** The literacy rate among women is lower as compared to men. According to Census 2011, total literacy rate is 74.04% in which male literacy rate is 82.14% and female literacy rate is 65.46%. In schools and colleges, dropout rate among girls is very high mainly because parents prefer to spend their resources for their boys.

2. **Unpaid Works** On an average, Indian woman works one hour more than an average man, but remains unpaid for work done at home.





3. Difference in Wages The Equal Remuneration Act 1976 provides that equal wages should be paid to equal work. In spite of this act, women workers are paid less than men, even when both do exactly the same work.

4. Child Sex Ratio In many parts of India, parents prefer sons and find ways to have the girl child aborted before she is born. This sex-selective abortion has led to a decline in child sex ratio (number of girls per thousand boys). The country has a low sex ratio—merely 940 females per 1000 males. (Census 2011)

Violence against Women: In India, various kinds of harassment, exploitation and violence are common against women. In urban areas, violence against women has increased in recent years. Women are not safe even in their own home from domestic violence.

Women's Political Representation: Feminist Movement suggests that unless women control power, their problems will not get adequate attention. For this, more women are needed to be elected as representatives. In India, the proportion of women in the Legislature has been very low. The percentage of elected women members in Lok Sabha has crossed 10% of its total strength in 2009 for the first time. Their share in State Assemblies is less than 5%. In this respect, India is behind the averages for several developing countries of Africa and Latin America. Even when women become Chief Minister or Prime Ministers cabinets are largely all male. To solve this problem, India has reserved one-third of seats in local government bodies, i.e. panchayats and municipalities, for women. As a result, now there are more than 10 lakh elected women representatives in rural and urban local bodies. Women's organisations and activists have been demanding a similar reservation of at least one-third seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. The Upper House, Rajya Sabha has passed Women Reservation Bill (WRB) on 9th March, 2010 but the Lower House, Lok Sabha has yet to pass the bill because there is no consensus over this among all political parties. Gender division as a form of social division becomes a political agenda.

Religion, communalism and politics: The religious division is not as universal as in the case of gender, but religious diversity is fairly widespread in the world today. Many countries including India have in their population, followers of different religions their population. Unlike gender differences, religious differences are often expressed in the field of politics. There are various instances which involve relation between religion and politics. These are:

- Gandhiji believed that politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion. By this he did not mean any particular religion, but moral values of all religions.
- Human rights groups are demanding special steps protect religious minorities, as most of the victims of communal riots in our country are people from religious minorities.
- Women's Movement demanded that government should change the family laws of all religions which discriminate against women.

Everyone should be able to express their needs, interests and demands as a member of a religious community. This can happen if ideas, ideals and values taken from different religions play an effective role in politics. These political acts are not wrong as long as they treat every religion equally.

Patriarchy: Literally, rule by father, this concept is used to refer to a system that values men more and gives them power over women.

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Family laws: Laws that deal with family related matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance etc. In our country, different family laws apply to followers of different religions.

Communalism: It is a situation when a particular community tries to promote its own interests at the cost of other communities. This problem becomes more critical when

- Religion in politics is expressed as exclusive and in partisan terms.
- One religion and its followers are pitted against another.
- Beliefs of one religion are presented as superior to those of other religions.
- The demands of one religious group are formed in opposition to another.
- State power is used to establish domination of one religious group over the rest.

This manner of using religion in politics is communal politics. Communal politics is based on the idea that religion is the principal basis of a social community. Communalism involves thinking along the following lines

1. The followers of a particular religion just belong to one community.
2. Their fundamental interests are the same.
3. Any difference in them may have is relevant or trivial for community life.
4. The people who follow different religions cannot belong to the same social community.
5. If the followers of different religion have some commonalities these are superficial and immaterial.

In its extreme form, 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 other groups or they have to form different nations.

Form of Communalism in Politics: Communalism can take various forms in politics

1. The most common expression of communalism is in everyday beliefs. This involves religious prejudices, stereotypes of religious communities and beliefs in the superiority of one's religion over other religions.

2. A communal mind often wants to dominate one's own religious community. For majority community, they adopt the majoritarian dominance and for minority, they have a desire to form a separate political unit.

3. Political mobilisation on religious lines is another frequent form of communalism. This involves the use of sacred symbols, religious leaders, emotional appeal and also plain fear in order to bring the followers of one religion together in the political arena.

4. Sometimes, communalism takes its ugliest form in communal violence, riots and massacre. India and Pakistan suffered some of the worst communal riots at the time of partition. The post-independence period has also seen large scale communal violence.

Secular State: A state which has no official religion of its own. The secular state provides religious equality and equal status to all religions. The makers of our Constitution were aware with the challenge of communalism. Thus, our Constitution maker adopted the model of secular state. This means

1. There is no official religion for the Indian states, i.e. unlike Sri Lanka (Buddhism), Pakistan (Islam) and England (Christianity).
2. All individuals and communities have the freedom to profess, practise and propagate any religion or not to follow any.
3. It prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.





4. It allows the state to intervene in the matters of religion in order to ensure equality within religious communities, viz, it bans untouchability.

Idea of Secularism: This idea constitutes one of the basic foundations of our country. Secularism is very opposite to the communalism which threatens the very idea of India. Communalism cannot be combated only with a secular Constitution. Communal prejudice and propaganda need to be countered in everyday life.

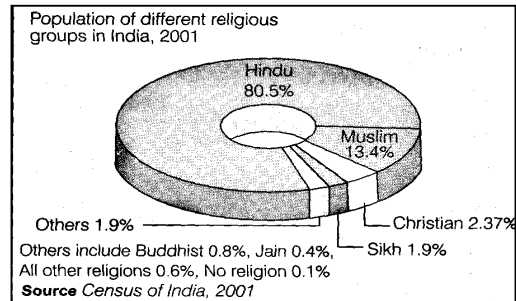
Caste and Politics: Politics over Caste division has both positive and the negative aspects.

Caste Inequalities: Social structure of India is based upon the caste system. Unlike gender and religion, caste division is special to India. In the caste system, hereditary occupational division was sanctioned by rituals. Caste system is both hierarchical and segmented. In this system, all the members of the same caste group lived as one social community. No one was allowed to perform other customs and rituals. People had to opt similar occupations and should marry within the caste group. They were also not allowed to eat with other caste members. Caste system was based on exclusion and discrimination of the 'outcast group'.

Untouchability: Untouchability is a state of affairs in which some backward and lower caste people are treated as outcaste people or untouchables. They are not allowed to mingle with the so called upper castes. The most important aspect of the caste inequality is untouchability. Thus, social reformers like Jotiba Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker advocated and worked for removal of caste inequalities in society. Partly due to the efforts of social reformers and partly due to other socio-economic changes, castes and caste system in modern India have undergone great changes.

Breaking the Old Notions of Casteism: With economic development, large scale urbanization, growth of literacy and education, occupational mobility and the weakening of the position of landlords in the villages, the old notions of caste hierarchy are breaking down. The Constitution of India prohibited any caste based discrimination and laid the foundation of policies to reverse the injustice of the caste system. Yet some of the older aspects of caste have persisted in modern India. Even now most people marry within their own caste or tribe. Untouchability has not ended completely.

Social and Religious Diversity of India: The Census of India records the religion of the population every ten years. Thus, we have reliable information on the proportion of different religious communities in the country and how it has changed over the years. The pie chart given below shows the population proportion of six major religious groups in the country. It shows that since Independence, the total population of each group has increased substantially, but their proportion in the country's population has not changed much. However, the population of the Hindus, Jains and Christians has declined marginally since 1961, while the proportion of Muslim, Sikh and Buddhist population has increased slightly in overall terms, the population balance of different religious groups is thus not likely to change in a big way in the future.



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The same is true of in major caste groups. The Census of India counts two social groups, viz the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The Scheduled Castes, commonly known as Dalits, include those that were previously regarded as 'outcasts' in the Hindu social order and were subjected to Untouchability. The Scheduled Tribes often referred to as Adivasis include those communities that led a secluded life, usually in hills and forests and did not interact much with the rest of society. In 2001, the Scheduled Castes were 16.2% and the Scheduled Tribes were 8.2% of the country's population. According to Census 2011, the Scheduled Castes are 16.6% and Scheduled Tribes are 8.6% of the country's population. The Census does not yet count the Other Backward Classes (OBC's). Hence, there are some differences about their proportion in the country's population in the country's population.

The Sachar Committee Report of 2006 revealed that Scheduled Castes and Tribes of India are not limited to the religion of Hinduism. The 61st round survey of NSSO found that 90% of the Buddhists, one-third of the Christians and one-third of the Sikhs belonged to the SCs STs of India.

Urbanisation: The process of shifting of population from rural areas to urban areas for better facilities and job opportunities.

Occupational mobility: Shifting from one occupation to another, usually when a new generation takes up occupations other than those practised by their ancestors.

Caste hierarchy: A ladder like formation in which all the caste groups are placed from the 'highest' to the 'lowest' castes.

Caste in Politics: Casteism is rooted in the belief that caste is the sole basis of social community. Caste can take various forms in politics.

Negative Aspect:

1. While choosing candidates, parties keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate.
2. When governments are formed, political parties usually take care that representatives of different caste and tribes find a place in it.
3. While campaigning for parties, political leaders are trying to get support from their own community.
4. Some political parties are known to favour some castes and seen as their representatives.

Positive Aspect

1. Universal Adult Franchise and the principle of one-person one-vote compelled political leaders to gain the political support.
2. No parliamentary constituency in the country has a clear majority of one single caste. Every party needs to win the confidence of more than one caste and community to win an election.
3. No party wins the votes of all the voters of a caste or community.
4. Many political parties may put up candidates from the same caste.
5. The ruling party and the sitting MP or MLA frequently lose elections in our country. This could not be possible if all caste and communities were frozen in their political preferences.

Caste is an important factor in electoral politics, but it is not the only determining factor to win election. People's own perception and economic difference between the same caste also play a major role. People's assessment of the performance of



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the ruling government and the popularity of its leaders play a decisive role in elections.

Caste Inequality: Caste is an important source of economic inequality because it regulates access to resources of various kinds like post, land etc. Although this kind of explicit and formalised inequality based on caste is now outlawed, the effects of centuries of accumulated advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt. However, today it is possible to find very rich and very poor people in every caste, whether low or high. This was not true twenty or thirty years ago – it was very rare to find rich people among the lowest castes. However, as evidence from the National Sample Survey carried out in the year 1999 shows, caste continues to be very strongly linked to economic status in many important ways. The results of the survey show that

- The average economic status (measured by criteria like monthly consumption expenditure) of caste groups still follows the old hierarchy – the ‘upper’ castes are best off, the Dalits and Adivasis are worst off and the OBCs are in between.
- Although every caste has some poor members, the proportion living below the official poverty line is much higher for the lowest castes and much lower for the upper castes, with the OBCs in between.
- Although every caste has some members who are rich, the upper castes are more among the rich while the lower castes are very much less in this group.

Casteism: It is discrimination on the grounds of caste.

Universal Adult Franchise: Every adult citizen of India is entitled to cast his/her vote in all state elections unless that citizen is ‘convicted of certain criminal offences’ or ‘deemed unsound mind’.

Politics in Caste: There is not only a one way relation between caste and politics.

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. It takes several forms

1. Each caste tries to become bigger by incorporating within it other subcastes.
2. Various caste groups are required to enter an alliance with other castes or communities.
3. New kinds of caste groups like ‘backward’ and ‘forward’ caste groups have come up in the political field.

Thus, caste plays different kinds of roles in politics. Sometimes, caste division leads to tensions, conflict and violence. But sometimes it gives many disadvantaged communities like Dalits and OBCs the space to demand their share of power. As in the case of religion, politics based on caste identity alone is not very healthy for our democracy. Many more important issues like poverty, development and corruption are not getting proper attention due to excessive focus on caste-politics. Caste-division leads tensions, conflict and even violence in some cases.

Percentage of Population Living Below the Poverty Line (According to 1999-2000)		
Caste and Community groups	Rural	Urban
Scheduled Tribes	45.8	35.6
Scheduled Castes	35.9	38.3
Other Backward Classes	27.0	29.5
Muslim Upper Castes	26.8	34.2
Hindu Upper Castes	11.7	9.9
Christian Upper Castes	9.6	5.4
Sikh Upper Castes	0.0	4.9
Other Upper Castes	16.0	2.7
All Groups	27.0	23.4

