



Class 10th

POLITICAL SCIENCE
CHAPTER-3
GENDER, RELIGION AND CASTE

GENDER AND POLITICS

Gender Division

- A form of hierarchical social division seen everywhere, but is rarely recognised in the study of politics. The gender division tends to be understood as natural and unchangeable.
- This belief is not based on biology but on social and expectations and stereotypes.

Public/private division

- Boys and girls are brought up to believe that the main responsibility of women is housework and bringing up children.
- **Sexual division of labour:** women do all work inside the home such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, tailoring, looking after children, etc., and men do all the work outside the home.
- Although women constitute half of the humanity, their role in public life, especially politics, is minimal in most societies.
- Earlier, only men were allowed to participate in public affairs, vote and contest for public offices. Gradually the gender issue was raised in politics.
- Women in different parts of the world organised and agitated for equal right
- There were agitations demanded enhancing the political and legal status of women and improving their educational and career opportunities.
- More radical women's movements aimed at equality in personal and family life as well —→ These movements are called feminist movements.
- Political expression of gender division and political mobilisation —→ helped to improve women's role in public life.
- In some parts of the world, for example in Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden, Norway and Finland —→ the participation of women in public life is very high.
- In our country, women still lag much behind men despite some improvement since Independence. Ours is still a male-dominated → patriarchal society.
- The literacy rate among women is only 54 per cent compared with 76 per cent among men.
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 provides that equal wages should be paid to equal work.
- In many parts of India, parents prefer to have sons and find ways to have the girl child aborted before she is born. Such sex-selective abortion led to a decline in child sex ratio (number of girl children per thousand boys) in the country to merely 919. ratio has fallen below 850 or even 800 in some States.
- There are reports of various kinds of harassment, exploitation and violence against women. Urban areas have become particularly unsafe for women.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Women's Oppression in various ways

- **Literacy Rate:** The literacy rate among women is only 65.46% compared with 82.14% among men.
- **Jobs:** There is very low percentage of women in the high paid and high value jobs as just a few girls are encouraged to take up higher education.
- **Wages:** Despite the Equal Wages Act, women in all areas are paid lesser than men, be it sports, cinema, agriculture or construction works.
- **Sex Ratio:** Most parents prefer boy children to girl children. Female infanticide and feticide are common in our country. This has resulted in unfavourable sex ratio.
- **Social Evil:** Society in general and urban centres in particular, is not safe for women. Dowry harassment, physical abuse, sexual harassment are routine tales.



Women's political representation

- Political representation of women in India is very low.
- For example, the percentage of elected women members in Lok Sabha has touched 14.36 per cent of its total strength for the first time in 2019.
- Their share in the state assemblies is less than 5 per cent.
- India is behind the averages for several developing countries of Africa and Latin America.
- One way to solve this problem —→ 1/3rd of seats in local government bodies – in Panchayats and Municipalities – are now reserved for women. Now there are more than 10 lakh elected women representatives in rural and urban local bodies

RELIGION, COMMUNALISM AND POLITICS

Religious Differences in Politics

- Gandhiji said —→ Religion can never be separated from politics. Religion was not any particular religion like Hinduism or Islam but moral values. He believed that politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion.
- 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.
- Women's movement has argued that family laws of all religions discriminate against women. So they have demanded that government should change these laws to make them more equitable

Communalism

- Extreme and partisan attachment to one's own religion is called Communalism.
- Communal politics is based on the idea that religion is the principal basis of social community.
- Communalism involves thinking —→ The followers of a particular religion must belong to one community.

Communalism can take various forms in politics:

- The most common expression of communalism is in everyday beliefs —→ These involve religious prejudices, stereotypes of religious communities and belief in the superiority of one's religion over other religions.
- A communal mind often leads to a quest for political dominance of one's own religious community.
- Political mobilisation on religious lines is another frequent form of communalism. —→ This involves the use of sacred symbols, religious leaders, emotional appeal and plain fear in order to bring the followers of one religion together in the political arena.
- In electoral politics, this often involves special appeal to the interests or emotions of voters of one religion in preference to others.
- Sometimes communalism takes its most ugly form of communal violence, riots and massacre. —→ India and Pakistan suffered some of the worst communal riots at the time of the Partition



Secular state

The makers of our Constitution chose the model of a secular state. This choice was reflected in several constitutional provisions:

- There is no official religion for the Indian state. Unlike the status of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, that of Islam in Pakistan and that of Christianity in England, our Constitution does not give a special status to any religion.
- The Constitution provides to all individuals and communities freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion, or not to follow any.
- The Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.
- At the same time, the Constitution allows the state to intervene in the matters of religion in order to ensure equality within religious communities. For example, it bans untouchability.

CASTE AND POLITICS

Caste Inequalities

- Caste division is special to India. All societies have some kind of social inequality and some form of division of labour.
- In most societies, occupations are passed on from one generation to another.
- Members of the same caste group were supposed to form a social community that practiced the same or similar occupation, married within the caste group and did not eat with members from other caste groups.
- Caste system was based on exclusion of and discrimination against the 'outcaste' groups.
- Due to efforts of political leaders and social reformers like Jotiba Phule, Gandhiji, B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker and partly due to other socio-economic changes —→ castes and caste system in modern India have undergone great changes.
- With economic development, large scale urbanisation, 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.

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:
 - When parties choose candidates in elections —→ they keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate and nominate candidates from different castes so as to muster necessary support to win elections.
 - Political parties and candidates in elections make appeals to caste sentiment to muster support.
 - Universal adult franchise and the principle of one-person-one-vote compelled political leaders to gear up to the task of mobilising and securing political support.

The focus on caste in politics can sometimes give an impression that elections are all about caste and nothing else. That is far from true. Just consider these:

- 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.
- No party wins the votes of all the voters of a caste or community. When people say that a caste is a 'vote bank' of one party, it usually means that a large proportion of the voters from that caste vote for that party.
- Many political parties may put up candidates from the same caste. Some voters have more than one candidate from their caste while many voters have no candidate from their caste.
- 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



Politics in caste

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

- Each caste group tries to become bigger by incorporating within it neighbouring castes or sub-castes which were earlier excluded from it.
- Various caste groups are required to enter into a coalition with other castes or communities and thus enter into a dialogue and negotiation.
- New kinds of caste groups have come up in the political arena like ‘backward’ and ‘forward’ caste groups.

Positives

Thus, caste plays different kinds of roles in politics. In some situations, expression of caste differences in politics gives many disadvantaged communities the space to demand their share of power. In this sense, caste politics has helped people from Dalits and OBC castes to gain better access to decision making.

Negatives

At the same time, exclusive attention to caste can produce negative results as well. As in the case of religion, politics based on caste identity alone is not very healthy in a democracy. It can divert attention from other pressing issues like poverty, development and corruption. In some cases, caste division leads to tensions, conflict and even violence