



6. What is untouchability?

Ans: Untouchability is a social practice within the caste system in which members of the lowest castes are thought to be ritually impure to such a limit that they cause pollution by mere touch or even sight. Untouchable castes are at the bottom of the hierarchical system. These low castes are excluded from most social institutions. It is an extreme and vicious aspect of the caste system. It uses stringent social and ritual sanctions against members of castes located at the bottom of the purity pollution scale. They are considered to be outside the caste hierarchy.

7. Describe some of the policies designed to address caste inequality.

Ans: At the state level, there are special programmes for scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. Because of massive discrimination practised against them, special provisions have been made for them.

The OBCs have also been added to this special provisions.

The laws passed to end, prohibit and punish caste discrimination, especially untouchability are:

(i) Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, disallowed the curtailment of rights of citizens due solely to change of religion or caste. It allowed entry of Dalit to government schools. .

(ii) Constitution Amendment (93rd Amendment) Act of 2005, for introducing reservation for OBCs in institutions of higher education.

(iii) Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, to abolish untouchability (Article 17) and introduced reservation provisions.

(iv) 1989 Prevention of Atrocities Act revised and strengthened the legal provisions against Dalits and Adivasis.

8. How are the Other Backward Castes different from the Dalits (or Scheduled Castes)?

Ans. Untouchability was the most visible and discriminatory form of social inequality. Despite this, there was a large group of castes which were of low status and were also subjected to varying levels of discrimination. The ex-untouchability communities their leaders have coined, another term, 'Dalit', which is now the generally accepted term for referring to these groups. The term Dalit literally means 'down-trodden' and conveys the sense of an oppressed people.

However, the constitution of India recognises the probability that there may be groups other than SCs and STs who suffer from social disadvantages. These groups were described as "socially and educationally" backward classes or other backward classes." The OBCs are neither part of the formed castes at the upper end of the caste hierarchy, nor the Dalits at the lower end. The OBCs are a much more diverse group than the Dalits.

9. What are the major issues of concern to Adivasis today?

Ans. The tribes, were considered to be "people of the forest" whose special habitat in the hilly and forest regions made their economic, social and political attributes. At present, except the North-Eastern states, there are no areas of the country which are inhabited exclusively by tribal people. The regions where tribal population are concentrated, their economic and social conditions

are much more than those of non-tribals. However, after independence Adivasi lands were acquired for new river and dam projects. Consequently, millions of Adivasis were displaced without any adequate compensation or rehabilitation. The resources of Adivasis are being taken away in the name of 'development' and 'economic growth'. For example projects such as Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river Narmada and the Polavaram Dam on river Godavari would displace hundred of thousands of Adivasis. The policy of economic liberalisation is leaving Adivasis to greater destitution.

10. What are the major issues taken up by the women's movement over its history?

Ans. Scholars and social reformers have shown that the inequalities between men and women are social rather than natural. The women's question became prominent in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Raja Rammohun Roy's attempt to reform society, religion and status of women in Bengal. He undertook the campaign against "Sati" which was the first women's issue to receive public attention. Jyotiba Phule was from socially excluded caste and he attacked both caste and gender discrimination. He established the Satyashodhak Samaj with its primary emphasis on truth seeking. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan made efforts to reform Muslim Society. He wanted girls to be educated, but within the precincts of their homes. He stood for women's education but sought for a curriculum that included instruction in religious principles, training in arts of housekeeping and handicrafts and rearing of children. Tarabai Shinde a Maharashtrian housewife, wrote, *Strree Purush Tulana* as a protest against the double standards of a male dominated society. Women's issues emphatically surfaced in 1970s. The burning issues were rape of women in police custody, dowry murders and gender injustice, etc. The new challenges have come in the form of social bias against the girl child sex ratio which is falling very « sharply.

11. In what sense can one say that 'disability' is as much a social as a physical thing?

Ans: The disabled are struggling not because they are physically or mentally challenged but also because society is built in a manner that does not cater to their needs.

In the Indian context, one of the leading scholars of disability, Anita Ghai, argues that the invisibility of the disabled can be compared to the Invisible Man of Ralph Ellison which is a famous indictment of racism against African Americans in the USA.

Common features of the public perceptions of disability are:

1. Disability is understood as a biological factor.
  2. Whenever a disabled person is confronted with problems, it is taken for granted that the problems originate from his/her impairment.
  3. The disabled person is seen as a victim.
  4. Disability is supposed to be linked with the disabled individual's self perception.
  5. The very idea of disability suggests that they are in need of help.
- In India, in a culture that looks up to "bodily perfection", all deviations from the "perfect body" signify abnormality, defect and distortion. Labels such as "bechara" accentuate the victim status for the disabled person.

- The roots of such attitude lie in the cultural conception that views an impaired body as a result of fate. Destiny is seen as the culprit, and disabled people are the victims. The common perception views disability as retribution for the past karma (action) from which there can be no reprieve. The dominant cultural construction in India, therefore looks at disability as essentially a characteristic of the individual. The popular images in mythology portray the disabled in an extremely negative fashion.

- The very term 'disabled' challenges each of these assumptions. The disabled are rendered disabled not because of biology but because of society.
- The social construction of disability has yet another dimension. There is a close relationship between disability and poverty. Malnutrition, mothers weakened by frequent childbirth, inadequate immunization programmes, accidents in overcrowded homes, all contribute to an incidence of disability among the poor people that is higher among people living in easier circumstances.
- Disability creates and exacerbates poverty by increasing isolation and economic strain, not just for the individual but for the family.
- Recognition of disability is absent from the wider educational discourse. This is evident from the historical practices within the educational system that continues to marginalize the issue of disability by maintaining two separate streams—one for disabled students and one for everyone else.
- The concepts of inclusion is still an experimental concept in our educational system which is restricted to few public schools only.

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