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Gender, religion and Caste

⇒ Gender and Politics

⇒ The gender division tends to be understood as natural and unchangeable. It is not based on biology but on social expectations and stereotypes.

⇒ Public/Private Division

⇒ The belief that women should perform household work and look after kids and elders still prevails in many families. However, It does not mean that all women are just confined to their household chores. They work outside also. Moreover, women have political as well as educational rights these days. Yet, the percentage of such women is not satisfactory.

⇒ Most changes we see today happened because people spoke up for gender equality. Women in many countries organised and protested to get equal rights. They asked for better political representation and stronger legal rights. Some groups also demanded equality at home and in family life. These movements are known as Feminist movements.

⇒ The political expression of gender division and political mobilisation helped to improve women's role in public life. As India is a male-dominated, patriarchal society, women face disadvantage, discrimination and oppression in various ways:

1. The literacy rate among women is only 54 per cent compared with 76 per cent among men.
2. On average, an Indian woman works one hour more than an average man every day and yet much of her work is not paid. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 provides that equal wages should be paid to equal work.

3. In India, sex-selective abortion led to a decline in the child-sex ratio (number of girl children per thousand boys).

4. Urban areas have become particularly unsafe for women.

⇒ **Women's Political Representation**

⇒ In India, the proportion of women in the legislature has been very low.

⇒ For Example: the percentage of women members in Lok Sabha was 14.36 percent for the first time in 2019.

⇒ The share in the state assemblies is less than 5 percent.

⇒ But after decentralization, women's participation at least in local government bodies have increased.

⇒ For Example: More than 10 Lakh women are elected in panchayats and municipalities.

⇒ Note: In 2023, Parliament passed the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Act, 2023)**, which provides 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Delhi Assembly.

⇒ Since people need platform to express such issues they take up the matter of gender bias in politics.

⇒ **Religion, Communalism and Politics**

⇒ **Religion**

⇒ Religion is another type of social division. Unlike gender differences, the religious differences are often expressed in the field of politics. It is due to following reasons:-

⇒ Religion and politics are inseparable: In every religion, there are moral values and ethics which guide people towards humanity. So we must incorporate such values in politics in order to promote religious equality. Hence, both religion and politics become inseparable.

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

⇒ Demand of Religious minorities: Since religious minorities remained the worst sufferers during communal riots, they demanded protection and recognition. This way, religion becomes a political matter.

- ⇒ Discrimination in family Laws: Almost in every religion, male dominance could be seen in family laws. So, women demanded change in these laws to make them more equitable. Thus, politics came into play. **For Example: The matter of Triple Talaq**
- ⇒ Here one thing to note is that religion is not the problem but the ideas any religious community promotes become the reason for differences. So, let's read about these ideas and understand which one should any country prefer.

⇒ **Communalism**

- ⇒ It is defined as the use of religion in politics to divide people and create conflict. It is often used to promote the interests of one religious group over others and can lead to violence and discrimination.

⇒ **Communal belief is flawed because:**

- ⇒ People of one religion do not have the same interests and aspirations.
- ⇒ There are many voices inside every community. All these voices have a right to be heard.
- ⇒ Therefore, any attempt to bring all followers of one religion together in a context other than religion is bound to suppress many voices within that 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, etc.
- ⇒ A communal mind often leads to a quest for political dominance of one's own religious community.
- ⇒ Political mobilization on religious lines involves the use of sacred symbols, religious leaders, and emotional appeal to bring the followers of one religion together in the political arena.
- ⇒ Sometimes communalism takes its ugly form of communal violence, riots, and massacre.

⇒ **Secular State**

- ⇒ A secular state is a state that is neutral in matters of religion. It does not favor any one religion over another, and it does not promote or discourage

religious belief. Secular states guarantee freedom of religion for all citizens, regardless of their beliefs.

⇒ **The constitutional provisions that make India a 'secular state' are as follows:**

- (A) There is no official religion in the Indian state.
- (B) Our constitution does not give a special status to any religion.
- (C) It provides all individuals and communities the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate any religion, or not to follow any.
- (D) The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion.
- (E) It allows the state to intervene in matters of religion in order to ensure equality within religion to ensure equality within religious communities.

⇒ **Caste and Politics**

- ⇒ The caste system is a social hierarchy that has existed in India for centuries. It is based on the idea that people are born into different social groups and that their social status is determined by their birth group.
- ⇒ The caste system is a form of social inequality and discrimination. People from lower castes are often denied access to education, employment, and other opportunities.
- ⇒ 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 were absent

⇒ **The caste system has undergone changes in modern India: (Socio-economic changes)**

- ⇒ Economic development and urbanization have broken caste hierarchies in India.
- ⇒ Growth of literacy and education, as well as occupational mobility, have also changed the mindset of people towards caste.
- ⇒ The Constitution of India prohibits caste-based discrimination.
- ⇒ Practicing untouchability is a punishable offense in India.

⇒ **Caste has not yet disappeared from contemporary India:**

- ⇒ Even now most people marry within their own caste or tribe. Untouchability has not ended completely, despite constitutional prohibition.
- ⇒ The effects of centuries of advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt today.
- ⇒ The caste groups that had access to education under the old system have done very well in acquiring modern education as well. Those groups that did not have access to education or were prohibited from acquiring it have naturally lagged behind.
- ⇒ **Caste can take various forms in politics:**
- ⇒ When parties choose candidates in elections, they keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate.
- ⇒ Political parties and candidates in elections make appeals to caste sentiments to muster support.
- ⇒ Universal adult franchise and the principle of one-person-one-vote compelled political leaders to gear up for the task of mobilizing and securing political support.
- ⇒ **The focus on caste in politics can sometimes give an impression that elections are all about caste and nothing else. But This is not true:**
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ **It is not politics that gets caste-ridden, it is the caste that gets politicized.**
- ⇒ Each caste group tries to become bigger by incorporating within it neighboring castes or sub-castes that were earlier excluded from it.

- ⇒ Various caste groups are required to enter into a coalition with other castes or communities.
- ⇒ New kinds of caste groups have come up in the political arena like 'backward' and 'forward' caste groups.
- ⇒ **Positive aspects of caste in politics:**
- (A) Expression of caste differences in politics gives many disadvantaged communities the space to demand their share of power.
 - (B) Several political and non-political organizations have been demanding and agitating for an end to discrimination against particular castes, and for more dignity and more access to land, resources, and opportunities.
- ⇒ **Negative aspects of caste in politics:**
- (A) Caste politics lead to tension and violence.
 - (B) Politics based on caste identity alone is not a healthy feature in a democracy.
 - (C) It can divert attention from other pressing issues like poverty, development, corruption, etc.

PRACTICE QUESTION

⇒ Short questions

1. Mention three two constitutional provisions that make India a secular state.
2. What is the status of women's representation in India's legislative bodies?
3. State how caste inequalities are still continuing in India.
4. What is communal politics ? Explain.

Or

when does the communal problem become acute?

5. Mention different aspects of life in which women are discriminated or disadvantaged in India.
6. How can religion influence politics? Explain.
7. What are Feminist Movements? What were their major demands ?

Or

What was the Feminist Movement ? Explain the political demands of the Feminist Movement in India.

8. 'Political mobilisation on religious lines is a frequent form of communalism.' Explain.

9. 'Caste has not still disappeared from contemporary India'. Write any three examples to justify the statement.

⇒ **Long questions**

1. What forms can caste take in politics?

Or

Explain any four forms of casteism in Indian Politics.

Or

Explain the role of caste in Indian politics.

Or

Explain any three forms of caste politics in India.

2. Explain the various forms that communalism can take in politics.

Or

What is communalism? Explain the various forms that communalism take in politics.

Or

Explain the main features of Communalism. What form does it take in politics?

Or

What is communalism? How is communalism a hinderance in the functioning of our democracy? Explain.

3. Explain the different aspects of life in which women are discriminated or disadvantaged in India.

Or

How women in India still face discrimination and oppression in various ways ? Explain.

Or

In our country, women still lag much behind than men despite some improvements since independence. Justify this statement by giving four reasons.

4. 'Politics too influences the caste system.' Explain.

Or

In what ways does politics influence caste system?

Or

How caste is politicised? Explain any three points.

5. Mention any positive role of caste in politics.

Or

Describe the positive and negative aspects of relationship between caste and politics.

6. "In India women's political representation is very low". Justify.

Or

Explain the need for more representation for women as elected representatives. How can it be achieved?

Or

What is the status of women representation in India's legislative bodies?

7. Case Based Questions

Caste is an important source of economic inequality because it regulates access to resources of various kinds. For example, in the past, the so-called 'untouchable' castes were denied the right to own land, while only the so-called 'twice born' castes had the right to education. 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. Moreover, new kinds of inequalities have also developed.

(a) Why is caste considered an important source of economic inequality? (1)

(b) Which castes were denied the right to own land in the past? (1)

(c) Explain how caste-based inequality has changed from the past to the present. (2)



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