

STUDY MATERIAL OF CH. GENDER RELIGION AND CASTE CLASS 10TH SST

Gender division: This is 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. However, it is not based on biology but on social expectations and stereotypes.

Women face disadvantage, discrimination and oppression in various ways:

- The literacy rate among women is only 54 per cent compared with 76 per cent among men. Similarly, a smaller proportion of girl students go for higher studies. When we look at school results, girls perform as well as boys, if not better in some places. But they drop out because parents prefer to spend their resources for their boys' education rather than spending equally on their sons and daughters.
- No wonder the proportion of women among the highly paid and valued jobs is still very small. 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.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

In India, the proportion of women in legislature has been very low. For example, the percentage of elected women members in Lok Sabha has crossed 10 per cent of its total strength for the first time in 2009.

India is behind the averages for several developing countries of Africa and Latin America. 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. This is what the **Panchayati Raj** has done in India. One-third 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

This division is not as universal as gender, but religious diversity is fairly widespread in the world today. 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.

Consider the following:

- Gandhiji used to say that religion can never be separated from politics. What he meant by religion was not any particular religion like Hinduism or Islam but moral values that inform all religions. 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.

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.

COMMUNALISM

when beliefs of one religion are presented as superior to those of other religions, when the demands of one religious group are formed in opposition to another and when 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 social community.

Communalism involves thinking along the following lines:

- The followers of a particular religion must belong to one community. Their fundamental interests are the same.
- Any difference that they may have is irrelevant or trivial for community life.
- It also follows that people who follow different religions cannot belong to the same social community.
- If the followers of different religion have some commonalities these are superficial and immaterial.

Their interests are bound to be different and involve a conflict. 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 rest or they have to form different nations.

SECULAR STATE

Communalism was and continues to be one of the major challenges to democracy in our country. The makers of our Constitution were aware of this challenge. That is why they chose the model of a secular state.

- 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 INEQUALITIES

Unlike gender and religion, 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.

Caste system is an extreme form of this. What makes it different from other societies is that in this system, hereditary occupational division was sanctioned by rituals.

Partly due to their efforts 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.

Now, most of the times, in urban areas it does not matter much who is walking along next to us on a street or eating at the next table in a restaurant. The Constitution of India prohibited any caste-based discrimination and laid the foundations of policies to reverse the injustices of the caste system.