



Introduction

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Chapter 4: Gender, Religion and caste

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Introduction

In India, gender, religion and caste differences are the three biggest issues which have challenged social equality.

Gender Politics

Gender differences assume the following forms in India:

- There is sexual division of work in our society. While office work and high-paid jobs are considered men's domain in India, household work such as washing, cooking and tailoring are done by women.

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Gender Politics

- It is only when these forms of work become paid jobs do men readily accept them; for example, chefs. Even women work outside their homes; for example, they plough the fields in villages, fetch water etc., but again, these forms of work are neither valued nor acknowledged.
- Although women constitute fifty percent of society, they do not enjoy equal power with men. Women had to struggle hard to gain voting and other democratic rights in many countries. While women in Scandinavian countries such as Finland and Norway actively participate in public life, women in India are far behind men in many spheres.

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Gender Politics

- Indian society is a patriarchal society; it is dominated by men.
- The literacy rate is only 54% for women compared to 76% for men. At the school level, although girls perform better than boys, they drop out during higher education as parents prefer to spend money on educating boys.
- Only few women are currently working in highly paid jobs. Although the Equal Wages Act lays down that equal wages should be given to both men and women for the same work, women are still paid less than men.

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Gender Politics

- **As the Indian society is patriarchal, many girls are aborted, resulting in a decline in the child sex ratio. The child sex ratio is the number of girl child per thousand boys.**
- **Domestic violence against women and the physical and mental harassment of women at the office place are some issues which most women face in the country.**

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Political Representation of Women:

It has to be realised that until women get an adequate representation in the legislatures of their countries, their conditions will not improve. Institutions such as the Panchayati Raj have reserved one-third of their seats for women. Many women's organisations are also demanding reservation of one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

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Political Representation of Women:

Women's political participation has been significantly lower than men's across the globe. Women's well-being can be improved by providing them political power and placing them in decision-making and law-making roles in society. When women gain power, they will devote their efforts to meeting women's demands and finding answers to their challenges.

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Political Representation of Women:

- Women's political participation in India is lower than the global average. In India, women make up about 10% of legislators, compared to 19% globally.
- In India, women are underrepresented in state legislatures. Only roughly 5% of the population.
- The Panchayati Raj Act mandates that women candidates be given 1/3 of all seats in local bodies. Women's participation in municipalities and panchayats has increased as a result of this.

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Political Representation of Women:

- However, attempts to introduce such legislation in the Lok Sabha and various state legislatures have failed before 2023.

Indian legislators passed the first legislation considered in the country's new Parliament building: the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023. The Bill seeks to reserve one-third of the total number of seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women.

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Religion, Communalism and Politics:

Religion: Religious divisions frequently manifest themselves in the realm of politics. There are people who follow several religions in India. As members of a religious community, people should be able to express their needs, interests, and demands in politics.

Family Law: These are the laws that govern family-related issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, etc. Different family laws apply to people of various religions in our country.

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Communalism:

Communalism is one of the major problems faced by our country currently. Communalism becomes a problem when

- Religious fanaticism reaches its height and religion becomes more important than the interests of the wider society or a nation.
- One religious community is pitted against the other religious community.

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Communalism:

- Beliefs of one religion is regarded as superior to the other religion
- Religion becomes an inseparable part of politics; the state power is used to emphasise superiority and domination of one religion over the other

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Communalism:

- In politics, communalism can acquire various forms. These are
 1. When religious beliefs of a person involve prejudices and stereotypes, claiming one religion's ideas to be superior than another.
 2. Communal violence is the worst form of communalism. It acquires the political form when it is sponsored by the state.

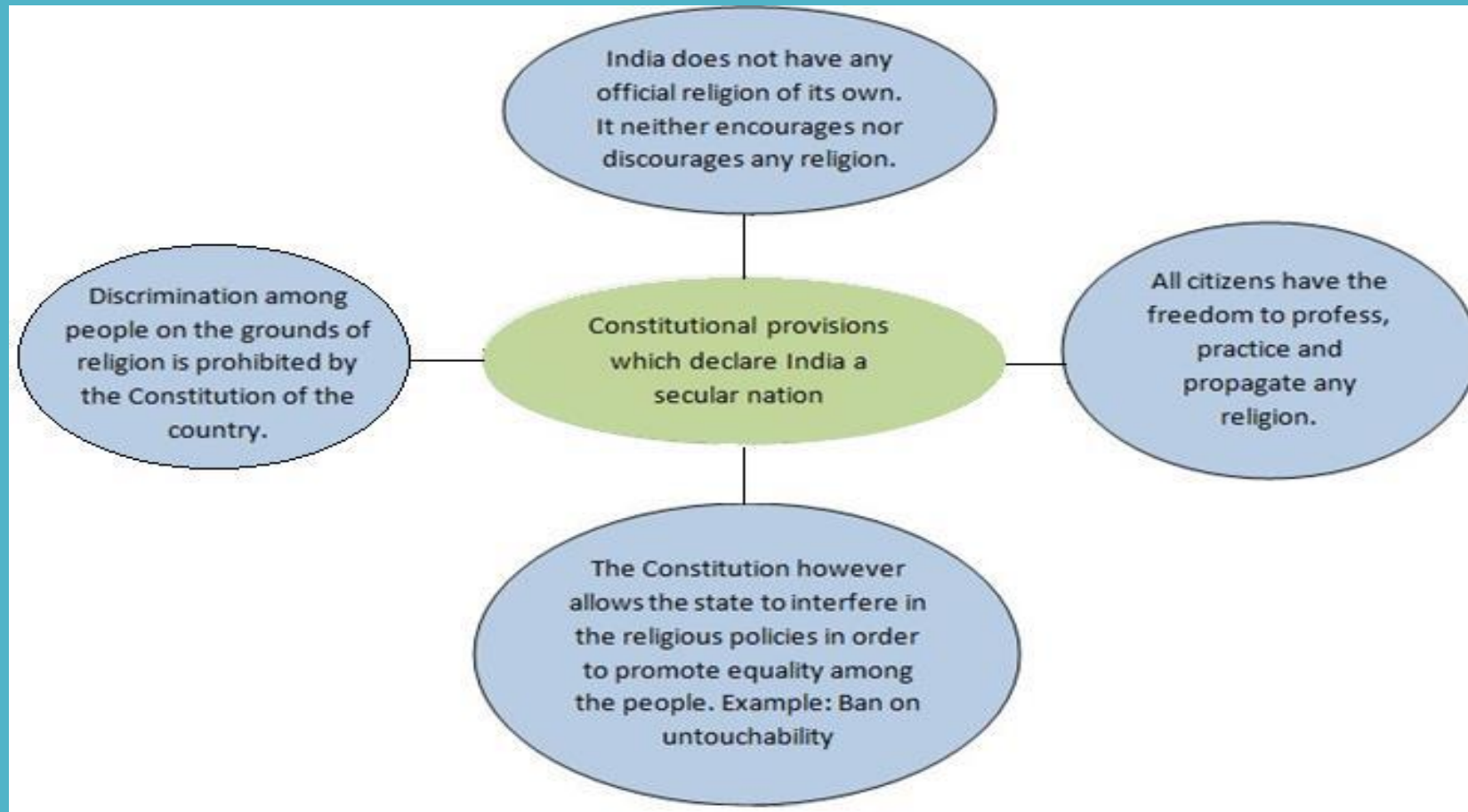
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Communalism:

3. When a majority community tries to establish its domination over the other communities with the help of the state. Minority communities under such circumstances, retaliates by demanding the formation of separate state for them. Political mobilisation on religious lines occurs when religious symbols and leaders make an emotional appeal to the people in order to bring the members of a particular community together.

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A Secular State - India:



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A Secular State - India:

The framers of our Constitution declared India as a secular state. The Constitution of our country declares India as a secular state. This is reflected in many constitutional provisions.

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Caste and Politics:

The caste system has been an integral part of Indian society since ancient times. It is based on the occupations of the people which are hereditary. People belonging to the lower caste are considered outcastes and untouchables.

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Caste and Politics:

We find that caste inequalities are breaking down because of the following reasons:

- **Development of urban centres**
- **Weakening of the position of the landlords**
- **Occupation mobility**
- **Economic growth and development**

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Caste and Politics:

However, the caste system has not disappeared from the country altogether. It still exists in most rural societies and to some extent in urban societies. The caste system takes the following forms in politics:

- While choosing candidates for contesting the elections, the caste composition of the electorate is always kept in mind. This is done to win the support of the people for a candidate belonging to a particular caste.

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Caste and Politics:

- When forming the Government, political parties try to include representatives of different castes and tribes.
- Political parties appeal to the caste sentiments of the people to help their candidates to win the elections.

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Caste Inequalities:

Occupation is typically passed down from generation to generation in most countries. This is taken to its logical conclusion in the caste system. Members of the same caste were intended to establish a social community that practiced the same or comparable occupations, married within the caste group, and did not eat with members of other caste groups, according to this system.

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Caste Inequalities:

The traditional conceptions of Caste Hierarchy are crumbling as a result of economic progress, large-scale urbanization, increased literacy and education, job mobility, and the weakening of the status of landowners in communities. The Indian Constitution outlawed caste-based discrimination and set the groundwork for policies to correct the system's inequities.

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Caste in Politics:

However, we also need to keep in mind that the caste system always does not play a role in shaping politics or deciding the candidates from a constituency. This is due to the following reasons:

- Not every constituency in the country has a clear majority of one single caste. Therefore, every party is required to win the trust of the people belonging to different castes.

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Caste in Politics:

- No political party wins all the votes of a particular favoured caste or community. When people say that caste is a 'vote bank', they simply mean that many people from that one particular caste may vote for the party.
- Because several political parties fight elections, there may be many candidates from the same caste fighting elections against each other.
- It has been seen that many elected MPs or MLAs may lose the elections. If candidates are elected on caste lines, then no candidate can ever lose the elections.

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Politics in Caste:

The caste system in India can also become politicised in the following ways:

- When a particular caste tries to gain prominence by adding many neighbouring castes and sub-castes which were earlier not included.
- The caste system also becomes politicised when caste groups are required to enter into a coalition with other castes. In such a case, every caste tries to gain maximum benefits for itself.

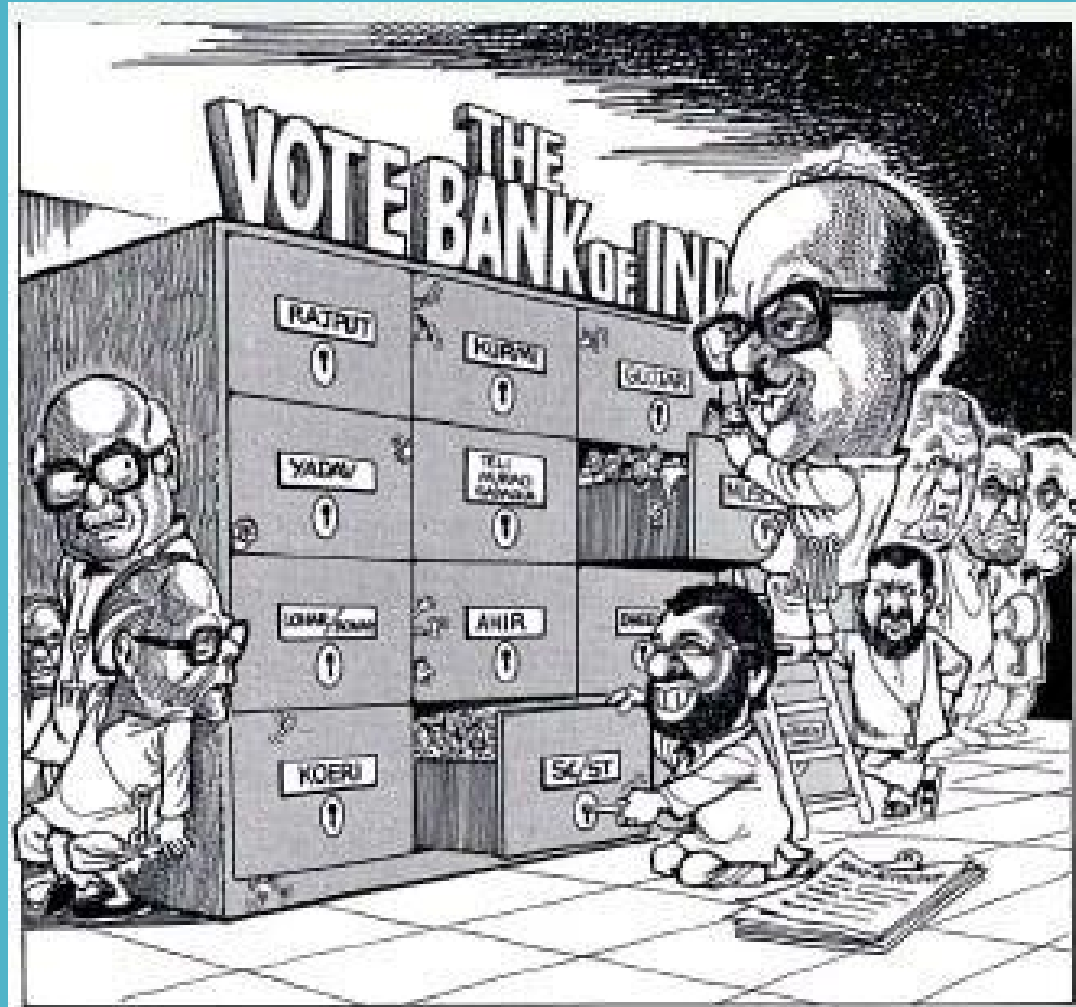
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Politics in Caste:

- Of late, many caste groups have gained entry into politics by terming themselves as 'backward' or 'forward' caste groups.

It is to be noticed that the existence of the caste system is itself not healthy for any democracy. It mostly produces negative results. In India, it has resulted in the vicious circle of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy for many castes. The caste system may also lead to caste division, caste violence and conflicts resulting in violence.

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