

## Chapter - 4 Gender Religion and Caste

1. In the previous chapter, we noted that the existence of social diversity does not threaten democracy.
2. In this chapter, we apply this idea to the practice of democracy in India.
3. We look at three kinds of social differences that can take the form of social divisions and inequalities.
4. These are social differences based on gender, religion and caste.

### Gender and politics

#### Public/private divisions:

1. Boys and girls are brought up to believe that the main responsibility of women is housework and bringing up children.
2. This is reflected in a SEXUAL DIVISIONS OF LABOUR in most families: women do all work inside the home.
3. When these jobs are paid for, men are ready to take up these works. Most tailors or cooks in hotels are men.
4. In urban areas, poor women work as a domestic helper in middle-class homes, while middle-class women work in offices.
5. The result of this division of labour is that although women constitute half of the humanity, their role in public life, especially politics, is minimal in most societies.
6. Women in different parts of the world organised and agitated for equal rights.
7. More radical women's movements aimed at equality in personal and family life as well. These movements are called FEMINIST movements.
8. We now find women working as scientists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, managers, managers and college and university teachers which were earlier not considered suitable for women.
9. In Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland, the participation of women in public life is very high.
10. In our country, women still lag much behind men despite some improvement since

independence.

11. Ours is still a male-dominated, PATRIARCHAL society.

12. Women face disadvantage, discrimination and oppression in various ways:

a) The literacy rate among women is only 54% compared with 76% of them.

b) On an average 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.

c) In almost all areas of work, from sports and cinema to factories and fields, women are paid less than men, even when both do exactly the same work.

d) In many parts of India, parents prefer to have sons and find ways to have the girl child aborted before she is born.

13. Urban areas have become particularly unsafe for women.

14. They are not safe even within their own home from beating, harassment and other forms of domestic violence.

### **Women's political representation:**

1. Yet issues related to women's well being or otherwise are not given adequate attention.

2. One way to ensure this is to have more women as elected representatives.

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

4. The percentage of elected women members in Lok Sabha has never reached even 10% of its total strength.

5. In the government, cabinets are largely all male even when a woman becomes the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister.

6. 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.

7. There is more than 10 lakh elected women representatives in rural and urban local bodies.

8. Women's organizations and activists have been demanding a similar reservation of at least one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women.

9. A bill with proposal has been pending before the Parliament for more than a decade.

10. Gender division is an example that some form of social division needs to be expressed in politics.

### **Religion, communalism and politics:**

1. Let us now turn to a very different kind of social division, the division based on religious differences.

2. Many countries including India have in their population, followers of different religions.

3. Consider the following:

a) Gandhiji used to say that religion can never be separated from politics.

b) Human rights groups in our country have argued that most of the victims of communal riots in our country are people from religious minorities.

c) Women's movement has argued that FAMILY LAWS of all religions discriminate against women.

### **Communalism**

1. The problem begins when religion is seen as the basis of the nation.

2. Communal politics is based on the ideas that religion is the principal basis of social community.

3. Communalism can take various forms in politics:

a) The most common expression of communalism is in everyday beliefs.

b) A communal mind often leads to a quest for political dominance of one's own religious community.

c) Political mobilization on religious lines is another frequent form of communalism.

d) Sometimes communalism takes its most ugly form of communal violence, riots, and massacre.

### **Secular state**

1. Communalism was and continues to be one of the major challenges to democracy in our country.

2. Secularism is not just an ideology of some parties or persons.

### **Castes and politics**

We have seen two instances of the expression of social divisions in the arena of politics, one largely positive and other largely negative.

### **Caste inequalities**

1. Unlike gender and religion, caste division is special to India.

2. In most societies, occupations are passed on from one generation to another.

3. Caste system was based on the exclusion of and discrimination against the 'outcaste' groups.

4. Partly due to their efforts and partly due to other socioeconomic changes, castes and the caste system in modern India have undergone great changes.
5. Large scale URBANISATION, the growth of literacy and education, OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY and old notions of CASTE HIERARCHY are breaking down.
6. Now, most of the times, in urban areas it does not matter much who is walking along the next to us on a street or eating at the next table in a restaurant.
7. Yet caste has not disappeared from contemporary India. Some of the older aspects of caste have persisted.
8. Effects of centuries of advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt today.

### **Caste in politics**

1. As in the case of communalism, casteism is rooted in the belief that caste is the sole basis of social community.
2. Caste is one aspect of our experience but it is not the only relevant or the most important aspect.
3. Caste can take various forms in politics:
  - a) When governments are formed, political parties usually take care that representatives of different castes and tribes find a place in it.
4. Thus, it is not politics that gets caste-ridden; it is the caste that gets politicized.
5. This takes several forms:
  - a) Each group tries to become bigger by incorporating within it neighboring castes or sub-castes which were earlier excluded from it.
  - b) Various caste groups are required to enter into a dialogue and negotiation.
  - c) New kinds of castes groups have come up in the political arena like 'backward' and 'forward' caste group.