

10th Standard

Social Science-Civics

Gender, Religion and Caste

Feminist:

A woman or a man, who believes in equal rights and opportunities for women and men, is called a feminist.

Feminist Movements are radical women's movements aiming at attaining equality for women in personal and family life and public affairs. These movements have organized and agitated to raise channels for enhancing the political and legal status of women and improving their educational and career opportunities.

Patriarchal society:

A patriarchal society is essentially male dominated. The line of descent is traced through the father. Men are valued more in terms of work they do and the place they hold in society. This gives them more power than women.

Communal politics:

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 called communal politics.

Discrimination against women:

- In studies girls mostly perform better than boys, but they drop out simply because parents prefer to spend their resources on their boys' education. A smaller proportion of girls go for higher studies.
- On an average, a woman works more than an average man everyday. Since much of her work is not paid for, therefore often not valued.
- The Equal Wages Act provides for equal wages for equal work. But in almost all areas of work from sports to cinema, from factories to fields, women are comparatively paid less.
- The child sex ratio (number of girl children per thousand boys) is very low. In India the national average is 927. In some places it is as low as 850 or even 800, because parents prefer to have sons so they get the girl child aborted before her birth.
- In urban areas, women are unsafe. Even in their homes they suffer from beating, harassment and other forms of domestic violence.

Caste inequalities in India:

Caste has not disappeared from contemporary India and caste division is special to India. Even now most people marry within their own caste. The caste groups that had access to education under old system have done well, whereas those groups that did not have access to education have lagged behind. There is a large presence of 'upper caste' among the urban middle classes in our country. Caste continues to be linked to economic status as is evident from National Sample Survey.

The average economic status of caste groups still follows the old hierarchy—the ‘upper’ castes are best off, the Dalits and Adivasis are worst off and the backward classes are in between. The upper castes are heavily over-represented among the rich while the lower castes are under-represented. The SC, ST and OBC together account for about two-thirds of India’s population.

Status of women’s representation in India’s legislative bodies:

The one way to ensure that women related problems get adequate attention is to have more women as elected representatives. To achieve this, it is legally binding to have a fair proportion of women in the elected bodies.

- Panchayati Raj in India has reserved one-third seats in Local Government bodies for women.
- In India, the proportion of women in legislature has been very low. The percentage of elected women members in Lok Sabha is not even 10 per cent and in State Assemblies less than 5 per cent. Only recently, in March 2010, the women’s reservation bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and State Legislative bodies.

Religion and politics in India:

Gandhiji said, “Religion can never be separated from politics”. By religion he did not mean any particular religion like Hinduism or Islam, but moral values and ethics drawn from religion to guide politics. Religion in politics is not as dangerous as it may seem to us. Ethical values of each religion can play a major role in politics.

According to human rights groups, most of the victims of communal riots in our country are from religious minorities. Government can take special steps to protect them. These instances show a relationship between religion and politics. People should be able to express in politics their needs, interests and demands as members of a religious community. Thus, it is the responsibility of those whose political power is able to regulate the practice of religion, to prevent discrimination and oppression.

Reasons which have contributed to changes in caste system:

- Efforts of political leaders and social reformers like Gandhiji, B.R. Ambedkar who advocated and worked to establish a society in which caste inequalities are absent.
- Socio-economic changes such as: urbanization; growth of literacy and education; occupational mobility; weakening of landlord's position in the village; breaking down of caste hierarchy; have greatly contributed.
- The Constitution of India prohibited any caste-based discrimination.
- Provision of fundamental rights has played a major role because these rights are provided to all citizens without any discrimination.