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COMMUNALISM, CASTE AND RESERVATIONS

In a democratic system, it is quite common that people use different methods for expressing solidarity and achieving political power. In a country like India, politics has been dominated by promoting communalism and castism. The social diversities and disparities in our country are understood in terms of the existence of many groups linked to a caste or religion. Tensions have prevailed for long among them due to suspicion, economic deprivation and social dissemination. Playing up these factors and pitting one group against another describes the politics of communalism and castism. These trends have vitiated not only the democratic process at the time of election, but have also become serious obstacles to good governance, economic development and social harmony. For upliftment of the backward and downtrodden classes, provision has been made for reservation.

In this lesson, we will understand the use of caste and religious identity, its significance and also effects on Indian political system.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- explain the meaning of communalism ;
- describe the impact of communalism on Indian Politics ;
- explain various factors behind communal violence ;
- explain the role of caste in our society ;
- describe the impact of casteism upon the Indian electoral system ;
- describe the reservation policy and the rationale behind it ;
- describe the various constitutional provisions for reservation ;
- recognise the importance of women's reservation ;
- analyse reservation policy in the context of electoral politics.



22.1 Meaning of Communalism

India is a land of multiple faiths and religions leading often to violence and hatred among the people. Those who fan this religious violence do not consider religion as a moral order but use it as a means and weapon to pursue their political ambitions. Communalism essentially leads to violence as it is based on mutual religious hatred. This phenomenon leads to distinction between a communal organisation and a religious organisation. Communalism essentially has following main features.

- 1) It is based on orthodoxy.
- 2) It is exclusive in out look, a communalist considers his own religion to be superior to other religions.
- 3) It is based on intolerance.
- 4) It also propagates intense dislike of other religions.
- 5) It stands for elimination of other religions and its values.
- 6) It adopts extremist tactics including use of violence against other people.

22.2 Impact of Communalism

Communalism has divided our society for long. It causes belief in orthodox tenets and principles, intolerance hatred of other religions and religious group, distortion of historical facts and communal violence.

22.2.1 Communal Violence

Most communal riots prior to 1947 were rooted in the 'divide and rule' policy of the British colonial rule. But after the partition of the country, sections of the Indian elite from both the communities are also to be blamed for the problem. Communal violence in independent India has been caused by many factors. Some **general** factors are : First the class divisions of our society and the backwardness of our economy has resulted in uneven development of the economy. It is the upper classes of the less-developed communities that have enjoyed the fruits of limited growth and hence it is they who have also enjoyed political power. Over a period of time some sections among this elite developed a sense of rivalry vis-à-vis their counterparts in other communities. In order to draw support from the masses of their own community, these leaders have often encouraged communal feelings to strengthen their political support. Thus, the traditional beliefs of the society are perpetuated to the advantage of the elites. When they, many among common people, feel insecure because of some adverse circumstances, they often tend to rely on religion, which make them vulnerable to political manipulation to inflame communal passions, some times leading to violence.

Communal violence also increases because communal parties carry on religious propaganda in an offensive manner, thereby creating ill-will among the members of the various communities. The political parties in India which adopt a communal attitude should be blamed for encouraging communal feelings which often cause communal violence.

Apart from these general factors, some specific local causes also account for communal violence in India. First, because the power of smugglers and criminal gangs, local rivalries



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between traders of different communities often leads to such violence. Large cities are also prone to periodic communal riots because of the power of smugglers and criminal gangs. The communal violence after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1993 is an example. Secondly, communal riots occur in towns which have a history of communal riots. Aligarh and Hyderabad, among other cities, suffer from this trend. Presence of a large proportion of religious minorities increases political rivalry between the upper strata of both these communities who often appeal to their communal identity to gain support.

Whatever may be the cause of communal violence, whenever it occurs, it immediately attracts attention of the nation. In our society class identities still remain submerged under caste and communal identities. With economic problems becoming important, the ruling elite of our country manages to convert economic problems like poverty unemployment, price rise etc. into caste and communal ones. People should be careful not to be influenced by such tactics. Economic problems of the people, like-poverty and unemployment must be resolved in the country before the problem of communal violence can be totally eliminated.



Intext Questions 22.1

1. The growth of Communalism in India can be traced to
 - (a) ‘divide and rule’ of British
 - (b) Freedom Struggle
 - (c) India’s secular ideals
2. The chief characteristics of communalism are _____ and _____.
3. The nexus between political class and _____ has often fanned communal violence.
4. Economic problems of common people are solved through communalism.
(True/False)

22.3 Role of Caste in Indian Society

The political process of any society is influenced by the nature of the society. To understand the nature of the society we study its social structure. India’s social structure is best understood in terms of caste system wherein the cast is hierarchically arranged. Over the years, the caste system developed into an elaborate system to maintain socio-economic inequalities in the society. Individuals born in and belonging to the lower castes and the out-castes suffered from many disadvantages and were oppressed and exploited by the upper castes. The conditions of the outcastis (Dalits) was particularly pathetic. The practice of untouchability epitomized their conditions.

1. In the typical Varna-Vyavastha there are four Varnas: Brahmin (the priest and the intellectual class), Kshatriya (warrior and the ruling class), Vaisyas (the producing class - peasants and artisaas) and Shudra (those who performed menial and ‘polluting’ jobs).

One must note here that the ‘varna-vyavastha’ provides more the theory than the actuality of the caste. In reality, there are not four but thousands of castes and jatis, in which the caste system is organized. It is possible, nevertheless to classify most of the jatis in



accordance with the Varna distinctions, although it is easier to be done at the extreme ends of the social spectrum than at the middle ranges. In other words, Varna system is related to jati in that it gives a holistic frame-work to which any jati will fit.

2. Caste is a localized group having a traditional association with an occupation. The principle of birth forms the exclusive basis of membership in a caste group. Accordingly, the choice of occupation is not open but is determined on the basis of one's birth in a caste. In addition caste groups have rules governing food and marriage. The group defines rules of behaviour for its members and exercise some degree of authority over them including the right to expel those who defy its authority.

Caste as group identity, however, got strengthened in the new context of modern ideas and institutions. This happened because it became one of the bases of political mobilization among the many castes and classes before, during the freedom struggle and afterwards.

The socio-religious movements of the 19th century had made the lower castes conscious of their backward conditions and also of their rights that had been denied to them over the centuries. As a result, many amongst them were no longer prepared to accept their inferior status as divinely ordained. In the backdrop of this awakening, the introduction of democratic principle of governance, the emergence of party-centered politics and the attempt of the British rulers to mobilize the lower and the out-castes along with the Muslims in its support to thwart the growing national movement — all combined to prepare the ground for the politicization of the castes.

By the time India gained Independence, the Backward classes, because of politicization, had become a force to reckon with. Their claims and demands could no longer be ignored. At the same time the nationalist leaders were also committed to the task of improving their conditions.

In light of the above, the constitution makers enjoined upon the new state to take positive measures for bringing the backward classes at par with the rest of the society. They realized that without the positive intervention by the state it would not be possible to remove their historically accumulated backwardness. The policy of reservation for the backward classes needs to be understood in this context. Backward classes refer to three categories of the people — the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the other backward classes (OBC).

**Intext Questions 22.2**

Fill in the blanks :

- 1) are at the base of India's social structure.
- 2) In the caste system, castes are _____ arranged.
- 3) The caste system also known as _____ was based on the _____ division of labor.
- 4) In the caste system, the choice of occupation is not _____ but is determined on the basis of one's _____.

22.4 Caste in Politics

Caste began to play an important role after independence as its involvement in politics increased. The fact that it existed as easily identifiable social cluster of people made it an easy object of political mobilization by political parties in their quest for political support and votes. While the political parties sought to exploit caste for its own electoral purposes, caste groups by making politics their sphere of activity got a chance to assert their identity and bargain for benefits and position in society. Thus, caste and politics interaction has been a two-way process.

In politicizing the castes, the caste associations played a crucial role. Caste associations were quasi-voluntary associations in the sense that its membership was open only to the individuals of the caste community. These associations were formed to secure economic benefits or educational openings or for more clearly political purpose of uniting to fight the hegemony of the upper castes. In either case, involvement in politics was considered necessary for securing the specific purpose for which they were formed. Thus, once formed on the basis of caste identity, caste associations went on to acquire non-caste functions.

In electoral politics the role of the caste in politics has become powerful. This can be seen at all levels of the political process of the country. All political parties tend to give party ticket to candidates for contesting elections from amongst the numerically or otherwise dominant caste in every constituency. Major caste groups get representation in the council of ministers. Be it elections, political appointments or even formation of political parties, caste has been the major consideration.

The influence of caste, however, varies depending upon the level of election and the region. Its influence is far more at the local and state-level political process than at the national level. Caste plays greater role in the rural than in urban areas. In the rural areas and at the local level, the smallness of constituency and the fact that there is greater face to face interactions account for the strong influence of caste in politics.

Since independence two factors have especially brought the issue of caste in Indian politics into sharp focus. These are (1) the introduction of universal adult franchise and (2) the constitutional provisions for protective discrimination in favour of the backward classes. The introduction of universal adult franchise brought a very large section of the populace, who had been hitherto excluded on account of property qualification to vote, into the arena of electoral politics. This made the task of mobilizing votes enormously difficult for the political parties. The daunting task was, however, made easy when political parties relied upon castes to get their votes. In the process castes' involvement in politics deepened with every election in India.

In addition to the enlarged arena of electoral politics, the constitutional provisions for protective discrimination also provided the ground for castes to play a significant role in politics.

One may note here that protective discrimination was meant for three categories of people – the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the OBC — collectively called as the backward classes. Of these three categories, the SCs and STs were easily identifiable and there was a large measure of consensus on the need and the desirability of having reservations for them. But the case of the OBCs was different.



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Since Independence two types of caste politics can be discerned. The first type involved the caste groups clamouring either for being recognised as OBC by the state governments or those already recognised for getting a higher quota in the reservations. The decision of the State governments to appoint Backward classes Commission from time to time provided the occasion for such caste politics to flourish. The second type of caste politics, involved mobilization of social and political forces for and against reservations for the OBC based solely on caste criteria. The extent of castes involvement in politics can be appreciated by noting a simple fact that over 50% of the populace belong to the category of the OBCs. While the first type of caste politics sought to influence the reservation policy of the state government, the second type of caste politics was aimed to resist the reservation policy of the central government.

The reservation issue thus, provided a fertile ground for castes to play an active role in politics.

22.5 Reservation Policy

22.5.1 Rationale

Keeping in mind the backward conditions of the backward classes, the constitution makers also made special provisions for the upliftment of the backward classes. The special provisions are in the form of protective discrimination. The policy of reservation is an instance of protective discrimination. Before we discuss the policy of reservation and its constitutional provisions, let us briefly look at the constitutional provisions relating to the backward classes.

Articles 38 and 46 in the chapter of Directive principles, enjoin upon the state the duty to strive for the welfare of the people in general and the backward classes in particular. Article 38 states: 1) the state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and promoting as effectively as it may a social order in which Justice — social, economic and political shall form all institutions of national life; 2) the state shall in particular, strive to minimize the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate the inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities not only amongst individuals but also amongst group of people residing in different areas and engaged in different vocations.

Article 46 stipulates: “The state shall promote with special care the educational and the economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and shall protect them from injustices and all forms of exploitation.”

The policy of reservation is based on the principle of protective discrimination. Protective discrimination in favour of the backward classes was felt necessary by the constitution makers because of the realization that equality of opportunity alone would not suffice to bring the backward classes at par with the rest of the society. Equality of opportunity in absence of equality of conditions would result in deepening of inequality instead of promoting equality. One must note here that the provision of protective discrimination is not an exception to but integral to the Right to Equality.

22.5.2 Reservations for SCs and STs

The constitution recognizes three categories of people as backward classes. In this section we will deal with the provisions relating to the SCs and STs.



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The constitution provides for three types of reservations for the SCs and STs. These are (1) reservation of jobs in government services and in public sector, (2) reservation in educational institutions, and (3) reservations in legislative representations.

Under Articles 16(A), 320(4) and 333, 15% and 7% of the jobs are reserved at all levels in the public services for the SCs and STs respectively. This reservation however, must as far as it may be, consistent with the maintenance of efficiency of the administration (Article 35).

Article 15(4) deals with the reservation of seats in the educational institutions. Article 15(4) states: “Nothing in Article 15 or clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.” Accordingly, the Union and the State governments have reserved 20% of the seats in all educational institutions maintained by public money. Moreover, qualifications for admission have also been relaxed for the SCs and STs so that they can get access to educational opportunities.

Articles 330 and 332 provide for reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. 78 seats for the SCs and 38 seats for the STs are reserved in the Lok Sabha. In State Legislative Assemblies 540 and 282 seats are reserved for SCs and STs respectively. Moreover seats are also reserved in the Panchayati Raj institutions.

22.5.3 Reservations for the OBCs

As we have already noted, the task of specifying and identifying other Backward Classes (OBCS) was left to the union and state government.

In many States where the backward classes movement was strong, such as in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Bihar, to name a few, the state governments have reserved jobs at all levels in the public services and seats in educational institutions.

The Union government, however, took a very long time in deciding to provide reservation to the OBCs in the central services. The Union government had as early as 1953 appointed Kalelkar Commission under Article 340. The Commission submitted its report in 1956, but its recommendations were not implemented by the Union government. The second Commission under Article 340 was appointed by the Janta Party Government in 1978. This Commission known as Mandal Commission submitted its report in 1982. It identified 3943 castes as OBC and recommended 27% reservation in government and semi-government jobs and admission to educational institutions.

On 13th August 1990 the Union Government headed by V.P. Singh issued an office memorandum extending reservation to the OBCs on the lines recommended by the Mandal Commission. Soon thereafter, widespread protests were staged. Writ petitions were filed in Supreme Court and many High Courts questioning this measure. The Supreme Court examined the issue in November 1992 and permitted the Union Government to reserve 27% of the jobs for the OBCs subject to the exclusion of the ‘creamy layer’ among the OBCs. Ramanand Prasad committee was set up by the Union government to identify the “creamy layer”. Once it had done its job, the government executed the order of 13th August 1990 in September 1993.

Thus, we can see that it took nearly forty years for the union government to provide the benefits of reservations to the OBCs. It also took as much time to accept caste as a valid basis for the identification of socially and educationally backward classes.

We must also note that benefits of reservation to the OBC apply only to government jobs but no seats have been reserved for the OBC in Lok Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies — a benefit which has been given to the SCs and STs.

22.5.4 Importance of Woman's Reservation

Women constitute nearly half of the entire Indian population. But condition of women in India is miserable, due to illiteracy, poverty and backward social values. Keeping in view the prevalent circumstances, reservation for the women was started to emancipate the women from the drudgery of household. A debate has been going on to ensure women's reservation at every level of representative system of Indian Democracy and even in the state administrative services. Under the Panchayati Raj system women's seats have been reserved at both the Panchayat level, and the block & district levels. Some political parties are also debating the issue of giving at least 30% tickets to women candidates for contesting elections of state legislative assembly and also for the parliamentary elections but women's reservation bill is still pending in the parliament.

**Notes**

Intext Questions 22.3

1. The constitution provides _____ and _____ percentage of jobs to Schedule Caste and Schedules tribes.
2. The constitution does not identify other backward classes. (True/False)
3. Name the commission that recommended reservations to OBCs
 - (a) Sarkaria Commission
 - (b) Mandal Commission
 - (c) Ramanand Prasad Committee.
4. As per the Supreme Court _____ is not eligible for OBC reservation.



What You Have Learnt

Communalism has divided Hindus and Muslims on religious lines and thwarted communal harmony. The British during the colonial rule and the self-centred political class promoted religious extremism. As a result communal violence has disrupted normal life in the country practically. The criminal forces also caught on to this. Minority communalism and majority communalism alike are harmful to healthy democracy and economic progress.

In light of the historically accumulated backwardness of the backward classes and the need to bring them at par with the rest of the society, constitution provided for protective discrimination. Protective discrimination is not an exception but integral to the Right to Equality. While the SCs and STs got the benefit of reservation from the state and central governments since the inception of Indian Republic, the OBCs could get the benefits of reservation in central services much later in 1993. No reservation in legislative Representation is provided to the OBCs.

MODULE - 5

Major Contemporary Issues



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Terminal Exercises

- 1) What is communalism?
- 2) Briefly discuss the role of caste in Indian Society?
- 3) Discuss about the Reservation Policy in India?



Answers to Intext Questions

22.1

1. (a).
2. Intolerance and extremism.
3. Criminals.
4. False.

22.2

- 1) Castes,
- 2) Hierarchically,
- 3) Varna-Vyavastha, social
- 4) Open, caste

22.3

- 1) 15 and 7.5
- 2) True
- 3) Mandal Commission
- 4) Creamy layer.

Hints for Terminal Exercises

- 1) Refer to Section 22.1
- 2) Refer to Section 22.3
- 3) Refer to Section 22.5