Chapter 15: Gender, Religion and Caste

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Exercise 15.1 — Short and Long Answer Questions

Q1 Mention different aspects of life in which women are discriminated or disadvantaged in India.

SOLUTION

Women in India face discrimination and disadvantage in several aspects of life:

Education: The literacy rate among women is only 54 per cent compared with 76 per cent among men, and a smaller proportion of girl students go for higher studies. Girls often drop out because parents prefer to spend their resources on their boys' education.

Work and wages: Although the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 provides that equal wages should be paid for equal work, in almost all areas of work women are paid less than men even when both do exactly the same work. The proportion of women among the highly paid and valued jobs is still very small.

Sex-selective abortion: In many parts of India parents prefer to have sons and find ways to have the girl child aborted before she is born. Such sex-selective abortion led to a decline in the child sex ratio to merely 919.

Safety and violence: There are reports of various kinds of harassment, exploitation and violence against women. Urban areas have become particularly unsafe for women, and they are not safe even within their own home from beating, harassment and other forms of domestic violence.

Answer: Women are discriminated against in education, employment and wages, through sex-selective abortion, and face harassment and domestic violence.

Q2 State different forms of communal politics with one example each.

SOLUTION

Communalism can take various forms in politics:

1. Everyday beliefs: The most common expression of communalism is in everyday beliefs, involving religious prejudices, stereotypes of religious communities and belief in the superiority of one's religion over others. Example: cracking jokes about people of another religion or holding stereotyped views about them.

2. Quest for political dominance: A communal mind often leads to a quest for political dominance of one's own religious community. For the majority community this takes the form of majoritarian dominance; for the minority community it can take the form of a desire to form a separate political unit.

3. Political mobilisation on religious lines: This uses sacred symbols, religious leaders, emotional appeal and plain fear to bring followers of one religion together in the political arena. Example: in electoral politics, making special appeals to the interests or emotions of voters of one religion in preference to others.

4. Communal violence: Sometimes communalism takes its most ugly form of communal violence, riots and massacre. Example: India and Pakistan suffered some of the worst communal riots at the time of the Partition.

Answer: Everyday prejudices, quest for political dominance, political mobilisation on religious lines, and communal violence (e.g. Partition riots).

Q3 State how caste inequalities are still continuing in India.

SOLUTION

Caste inequalities have not disappeared from contemporary India; some of the older aspects of caste have persisted:

Most people still marry within their own caste or tribe, and untouchability has not ended completely despite constitutional prohibition.

The effects of centuries of advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt. Caste groups that had access to education under the old system have done well in acquiring modern education, while those that were denied education have lagged behind. This is why there is a disproportionately large presence of 'upper caste' among the urban middle classes.

Caste continues to be closely linked to economic status. 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 proportion living in extreme poverty is much higher for the lowest castes, and the upper castes are heavily over-represented among the rich.

Answer: People still mostly marry within their caste, untouchability persists, and caste remains strongly linked to economic status with upper castes best off and Dalits/Adivasis worst off.

Q4 State two reasons to say that caste alone cannot determine election results in India.

SOLUTION

Two reasons that caste alone cannot determine election results:

1. No parliamentary constituency in the country has a clear majority of one single caste. So every candidate and party needs to win the confidence of more than one caste and community to win elections.

2. No party wins the votes of all the voters of a caste or community. People within the same caste or community have different interests depending on their economic condition - rich and poor, or men and women, from the same caste often vote very differently. Voters' assessment of the government's performance and the popularity of leaders also matter and are often decisive.

Answer: No constituency has a single-caste majority (so parties must win over several castes), and no party wins all votes of one caste since people of the same caste vote differently based on other interests.

Q5 What is the status of women's representation in India's legislative bodies?

SOLUTION

The proportion of women in India's legislature has been very low. The percentage of elected women members in the Lok Sabha touched 14.36 per cent of its total strength for the first time in 2019. Their share in the state assemblies is less than 5 per cent. In this respect India is among the bottom group of nations in the world and is behind the averages for several developing countries of Africa and Latin America.

Representation is better at the local level. One-third of seats in local government bodies - panchayats and municipalities - are now reserved for women, and there are more than 10 lakh elected women representatives in rural and urban local bodies. In 2023, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Act, 2023) was passed, which will give 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and the Delhi Assembly.

Answer: Very low - women were 14.36% of the Lok Sabha in 2019 and under 5% in state assemblies; only local bodies reserve one-third of seats, and the Women's Reservation Act, 2023 promises 33% reservation in Parliament and assemblies.

Q6 Mention any two constitutional provisions that make India a secular state.

SOLUTION

Two constitutional provisions that make India a secular state:

1. There is no official religion for the Indian state. Unlike the status of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Islam in Pakistan or Christianity in England, our Constitution does not give a special status to any religion.

2. The Constitution provides to all individuals and communities the freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion, or not to follow any; it also prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.

Answer: India has no official religion, and the Constitution gives everyone freedom to profess, practise and propagate any religion (or none) while prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion.

Exercise 15.2 — Multiple Choice Questions

Q1 When we speak of gender divisions, we usually refer to:
(a) Biological difference between men and women
(b) Unequal roles assigned by the society to men and women
(c) Unequal child sex ratio
(d) Absence of voting rights for women in democracies

SOLUTION

Gender division is not based on biology but on social expectations and stereotypes; it refers to the unequal roles that society assigns to men and women, such as the sexual division of labour.

Answer: (b) Unequal roles assigned by the society to men and women

Q2 In India seats are reserved for women in
(a) Lok Sabha
(b) State legislative assemblies
(c) Cabinets
(d) Panchayati Raj bodies

SOLUTION

One-third of seats in local government bodies - panchayats and municipalities (Panchayati Raj) - are reserved for women. (The Women's Reservation Act for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies was passed only in 2023.)

Answer: (d) Panchayati Raj bodies

Q3 Consider the following statements on the meaning of communal politics.
Communal politics is based on the belief that:
A. One religion is superior to that of others.
B. People belonging to different religions can live together happily as equal citizens.
C. Followers of a particular religion constitute one community.
D. State power cannot be used to establish the domination of one religious group over others.
Which of the statements are correct?
(a) A, B, C, and D (b) A, B, and D (c) A and C (d) B and D

SOLUTION

Communal politics is based on the belief that one religion is superior to others (A) and that the followers of a particular religion constitute one community (C).

Statement B contradicts communal thinking, and statement D (that state power cannot be used for domination) is the opposite of communalism, which seeks to use state power to establish the domination of one religious group over the rest.

Answer: (c) A and C

Q4 Which among the following statements about India's Constitution is wrong? It
(a) prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.
(b) gives official status to one religion.
(c) provides to all individuals freedom to profess any religion.
(d) ensures equality of citizens within religious communities.

SOLUTION

Statement (b) is the wrong one. India is a secular state: there is no official religion for the Indian state, and the Constitution does not give a special status to any religion. The other three statements correctly describe constitutional provisions.

Answer: (b) gives official status to one religion.

Q5 Social divisions based on _____ are peculiar to India.

SOLUTION

Unlike gender and religion, caste division is special to India. The caste system is an extreme form of dividing labour where hereditary occupational division was sanctioned by rituals, making caste-based social division peculiar to India.

Answer: caste

Exercise 15.3 — Match the Following

Q1 Match List I with List II and select the correct answer using the codes given below the Lists:

List I:

1. A person who believes in equal rights and opportunities for women and men
2. A person who says that religion is the principal basis of community
3. A person who thinks that caste is the principal basis of community
4. A person who does not discriminate others on the basis of religious beliefs

List II:

A. Communalist

B. Feminist

C. Secularist

D. Castiest

Codes:

(a) 1-B, 2-C, 3-A, 4-D

(b) 1-B, 2-A, 3-D, 4-C

(c) 1-D, 2-C, 3-A, 4-B

(d) 1-C, 2-A, 3-B, 4-D

SOLUTION

Matching each person to the correct term:

1. Believes in equal rights and opportunities for women and men = Feminist (B).
2. Says that religion is the principal basis of community = Communalist (A).
3. Thinks that caste is the principal basis of community = Castiest (D).
4. Does not discriminate others on the basis of religious beliefs = Secularist (C).

So the correct pairing is 1-B, 2-A, 3-D, 4-C, which is option (b).

Answer: (b) 1-B, 2-A, 3-D, 4-C