

Gender, Religion and Caste

Social Diversity and its Expression in Indian Democracy

Gender and Politics

Understanding the Public/Private Division

The Public/Private Division

Sexual Division of Labour: A system where work inside the home is done by women or organized by them.

The Double Burden: Boys and girls are brought up to believe women are responsible for housework, while men work outside.

Invisible Work: Women often do paid work (fetching water, farming, offices) in addition to domestic labor, but their work is largely undervalued and unrecognized.

Political Impact: Because of this division, women's role in public life and politics has historically been minimal.



Feminist Movements



Striving for Radical Equality

Feminist movements are agitations organized by women globally demanding equal rights, opportunities, and political representation.

More radical movements aimed at achieving equality not just in the public sphere, but in **personal and family life** as well.

Political mobilization has improved women's roles, enabling them to work as scientists, doctors, and engineers—fields previously considered unsuitable.

Women's Disadvantage: Literacy

54%

Women's Literacy Rate





(Compared to 76% among men)

A Patriarchal Society

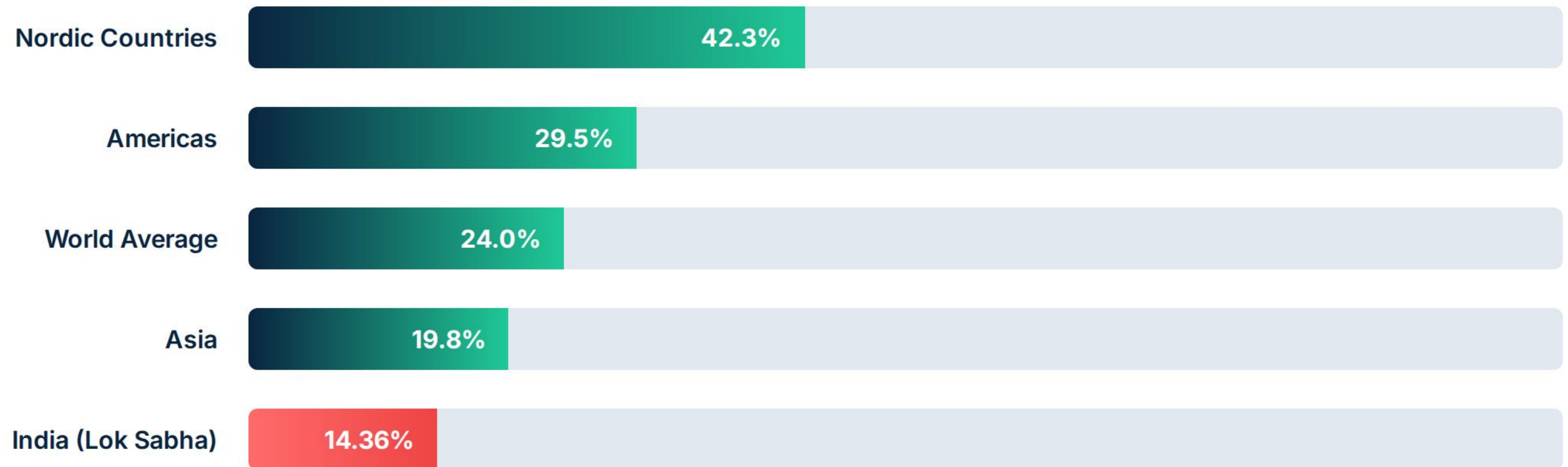
Despite improvements since Independence, India remains a male-dominated, patriarchal society where women face severe disadvantages.

A smaller proportion of girl students pursue higher studies. Parents often prefer spending their resources on boys' education rather than spending equally on daughters, leading to higher dropout rates for girls.

Discrimination and Disadvantage

-  **Unequal Pay:** Despite the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), women are paid less than men across almost all areas of work, even when performing the exact same duties.
-  **Declining Sex Ratio:** Preference for sons has led to sex-selective abortions, dropping the child sex ratio (girls per 1000 boys) to alarming levels below 919 in India.
-  **Harassment & Violence:** Urban areas have become unsafe. Women face exploitation, harassment, and are not even safe within their own homes from domestic violence.
-  **Underrepresentation in Top Jobs:** The proportion of women in highly paid and valued jobs is still disproportionately small.

Women in National Parliaments



India ranks among the bottom group of nations globally regarding women's representation in national legislatures, trailing behind averages for many developing countries.

Empowering Local Government

To ensure women's issues get adequate attention, legally binding quotas were introduced in local government.

Panchayati Raj: One-third of seats in rural (panchayats) and urban municipalities are strictly reserved for women.

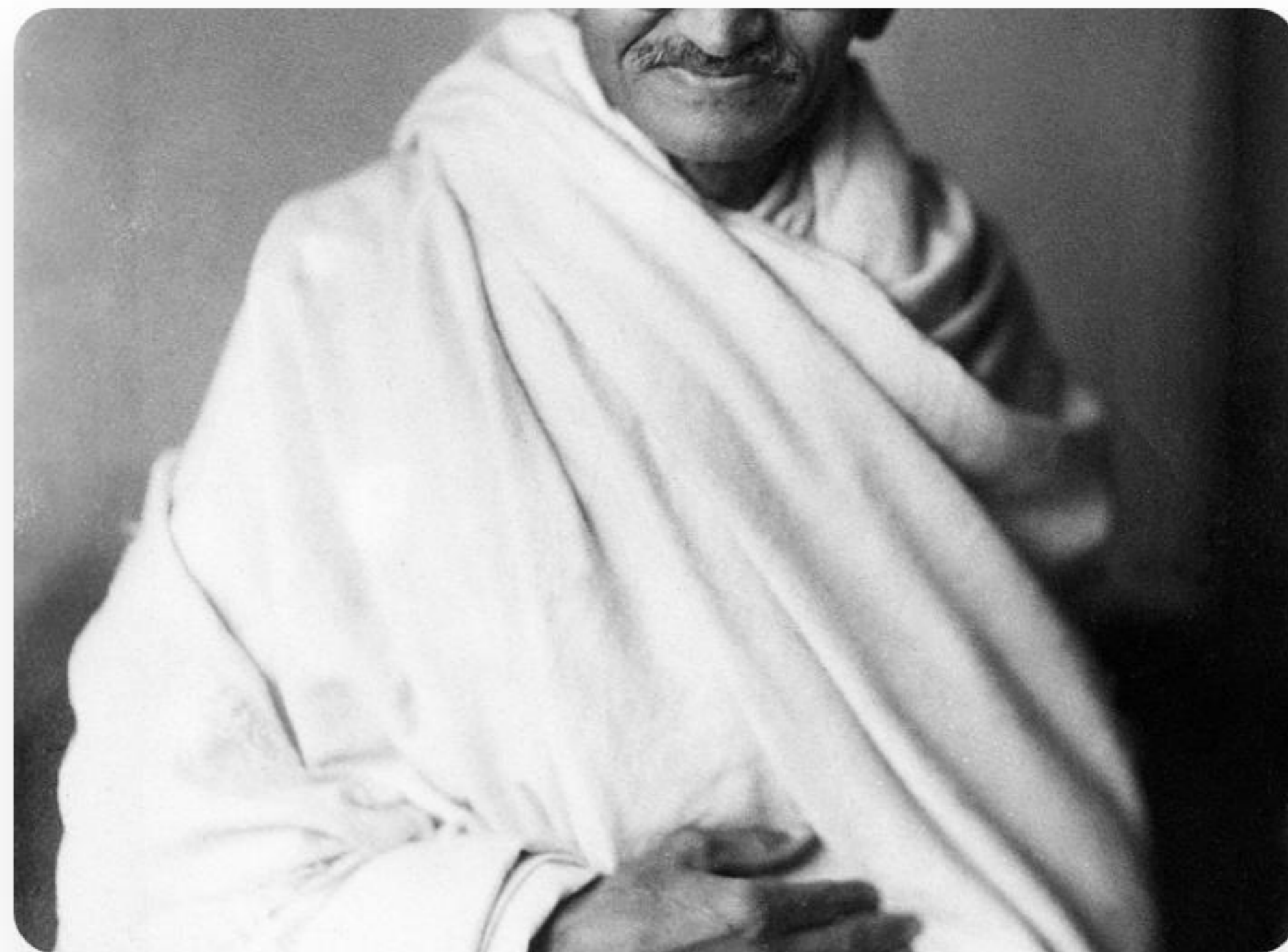
Impact: There are now over 10 lakh elected women representatives across India. Furthermore, the Women's Reservation Act (2023) promises 33% reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.



Religion, Communalism and Politics

When Religious Differences Enter the Political Arena

Religion's Role in Politics



Moral Values

Gandhi believed politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion, not denoting a specific faith, but universal moral values.



Human Rights

Human rights groups demand that the government protect religious minorities and take active steps to prevent communal riots.



Family Laws

Women's movements argue that family laws of all religions discriminate against women, demanding equitable legal reforms.

Understanding Communalism

The Flawed Premise

Communalism is based on the flawed idea that religion is the principal basis of social community. It assumes all followers of a religion share fundamental interests and cannot coexist as equals with other faiths.

The Political Danger

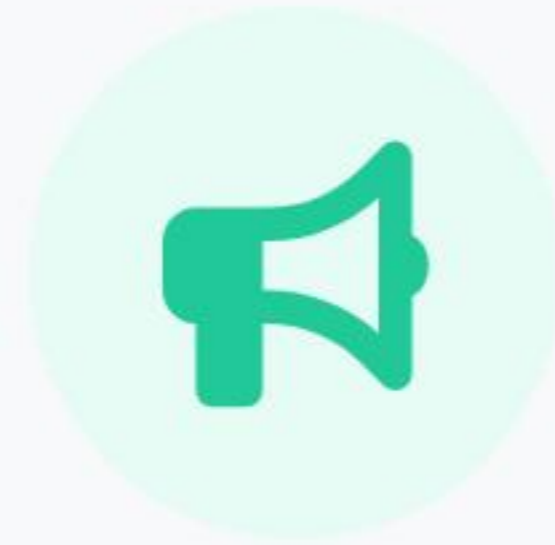
The problem turns dangerous when religion is expressed in exclusive, partisan terms. It involves pitting one religion against another and utilizing state power to establish the domination of one religious group.

Forms of Communalism in Politics



Everyday Beliefs

Routinely involves religious prejudices, stereotypes, and an underlying belief in the superiority of one's own religion over others.



Political Mobilization





Using sacred symbols, religious leaders, emotional appeals, and plain fear to unite followers in the electoral and political arena.



Violence & Riots

The most ugly form. India has suffered severe communal riots and massacres, stemming from the quest for majoritarian dominance.

The Secular State of India

-  **No Official Religion:** Unlike Pakistan or England, India does not give special status to any religion.
-  **Freedom of Religion:** The Constitution provides all individuals the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate any religion.
-  **No Discrimination:** The Constitution strictly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion.
-  **State Intervention:** The state can intervene in religious matters to ensure equality, such as banning the practice of untouchability.



Caste and Politics

A Social Division Peculiar to India

Caste Inequalities

Unlike other social divisions, the caste system is special to India. It involves **hereditary occupational division sanctioned by rituals.**

The system was based on the exclusion of and discrimination against 'outcaste' groups, subjecting them to the inhuman practice of untouchability.

Political leaders and social reformers like Jotiba Phule, Gandhiji, B.R. Ambedkar, and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker fiercely advocated for a society free from caste inequalities.



The Changing Face of Caste

Drivers of Change

- Economic development and large scale **urbanization**.
- Growth of literacy and education.
- **Occupational mobility** (choosing different jobs than ancestors).
- Weakening of the landlord system in villages.

Lingering Inequalities





- Most people still marry within their own caste or tribe.
- Untouchability has not ended completely.
- **Economic Disparity:** Groups historically denied education lag behind, leading to a disproportionately large 'upper caste' presence in urban middle classes.

Poverty Linked to Caste (1999-2000)

Caste and Community Groups	Rural Poverty (%)	Urban Poverty (%)
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	45.8%	35.6%
Scheduled Castes (SC)	35.9%	38.3%
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	27.0%	29.5%
Hindu Upper Castes	11.7%	9.9%
All Groups Average	27.0%	23.4%

Data clearly shows that caste continues to be strongly linked to economic status, following old hierarchies.

Caste Dynamics in Politics

-  **Candidate Selection:** Parties choose candidates keeping the caste composition of the electorate in mind to muster necessary support.
-  **Vote Bank Politics:** Political parties appeal to caste sentiments. When a caste is called a 'vote bank', it means a large proportion of its voters support a specific party.
-  **Universal Adult Franchise:** The 'one-person-one-vote' principle compelled political leaders to mobilize and secure support from castes hitherto treated as inferior.
-  **No Absolute Majority:** No single constituency has a clear majority of one caste. Candidates must win the confidence of multiple communities.

Politics Influencing Caste

It's not just that caste influences politics; **politics also politicizes the caste system.**



Caste Expansion

Each caste group tries to become bigger by incorporating neighboring castes or sub-castes that were earlier excluded from it.



Political Coalitions

Various caste groups enter into coalitions with other castes or communities, facilitating dialogue, negotiation, and shared power.



New Categorizations

New kinds of broad caste groups have emerged directly in the political arena, such as 'backward' and 'forward' caste groups.

Exam Ready!

You've successfully covered Gender, Religion, and Caste.

Good luck with your Political Science exams!

Image Sources



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