

Module 4 Casteism, Communalism, Regionalism and Language Conflicts

Lecture 22

Casteism: Characteristics and Causes

Casteism

The Indian social system is caste-bound. Though the forms of caste oppression have undergone changes, the content of caste domination, subordination, oppression and exploitation remains the same. A number of castes are placed in subordination and superordination to each other in relation to the status of Brahmins. Stratification based on caste system not simply implies division of labour in Hindu society but this pattern of division in Hindu society solidified its base and members of a particular caste identified themselves only with their own caste. Thus narrow caste loyalties developed the feeling of superiority / inferiority among the members of a particular caste and simultaneously undermined the interests of other castes and ultimately led to the ignorance of human values and social welfare. This partial or extreme one-sided loyalty may be termed as casteism. Casteism has led to many problems in Hindu society and has become a major threat to national integration because of its divisive tendencies.

According to N. Prasad, 'Casteism is the loyalty to the caste translated into politics.'

K. M. Pannikar holds, 'Casteism is the loyalty to the subcaste translated into political. This is unavoidable as long as the conception of subcaste exists, for that is the one permanent loyalty that the Hindu has inherited. In fact, no organization of society on the basis of equality is possible so long as the subcaste exists.'

Kaka Kalelkar considers casteism 'an overriding, blind and supreme group loyalty that ignores the healthy social standards of justice, fair play, equity and universal brotherhood.'

Characteristics of casteism

The following characteristics may be deduced from the definitions cited above:

- (a) Casteism is the extreme caste or subcaste loyalty in the most irrational form. It completely undermines the interests of other caste or subcaste groups.
- (b) Casteism ignores human values and social welfare.
- (c) Casteism acquires a new lease of life through the provisions of constitutional safeguard to the deprived sections of the population.
- (d) Casteism contrasts with the aim of bringing about a casteless society. Hence, it is anti-democratic.
- (e) Casteism is contrary to the spirit of our Constitution.
- (f) Casteism adversely affects the outcome of elections.
- (g) Casteism hinders the process of national integration.

Causes of casteism

There are multiple causes of casteism:

- **The feeling of caste prestige:** The feeling of superiority / inferiority by the members of a caste over the rest may be construed as an important cause of casteism. The Hindu society is divided into many castes on the basis of superordination and subordination. The members of any caste want to enhance the prestige of their own caste group. Therefore, they endeavour to stabilize the position of their own caste, which ultimately results in casteism.
- **Connubium:** The practice of caste endogamy, which proclaims that a person can marry only within her/his caste, has been responsible for the emergence of the feeling of casteism. By restricting the circle of marriage to one's own caste, people have developed different degrees of social distance within and outside their own caste.
- **Lack of scientific worldview:** Though science and technology have advanced in India, we have not been able to develop scientific worldview in our practices. A nation becomes stronger based on its scientific and technological outlook, not on the basis of superstition, orthodoxy and obscurantism propagated by casteism.

- **Lack of urbanization:** Urbanization, and to a lesser extent industrialization, emerged in colonial India. Even after India's independence, the mode of production hardly changed. The ruling class in India has used casteism for its political mileage. The sluggish pace of industrialization has resulted in the continuity of caste feeling in the Indian psyche.