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Challenging the Caste System

Lesson Plan

Contents

- ▶ An overview of the caste system, its origins and transformation into a social evil
- ▶ Understanding the efforts made to bring changes in the caste system

Objectives

- ▶ To understand the origins of the caste system in ancient times
- ▶ To learn how the varna system, which was based on the division of work, gradually transformed into the hereditary caste system
- ▶ To know about the evil aspects of caste—the social ostracism and exclusivity
- ▶ To appreciate the work of individuals and groups in breaking the taboos created by the caste system

■ Teacher's Aids

- ▶ Globe
- ▶ Pictures, charts, atlas and wall maps
- ▶ Blackboard
- ▶ Internet

■ Tips for Teacher

- ▶ Explain the origins of varna system which was based on occupation—a verse in one of the Vedas says a father, mother and children can each belong to a different caste, based on the work they do.
- ▶ Explain comparable situations in other countries—the treatment of African slaves in the USA before the abolition of slavery and even till and after the Civil Rights movement—the segregation of people in residential areas, hotels, buses, public places, etc.—the apartheid in South Africa and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela for 27 years.
- ▶ Explain the reservation extended for education and employment as a measure to correct historical wrongs, not to be used as a tool for gaining political and social mileage in India.

- ▶ Students should be encouraged to know people, customs, places, locations and their placement on the maps.

■ Background and Reading

- ▶ Read the lesson aloud and explain, sharing the aids, etc., pausing to examine and explain the data in the boxes.
- ▶ Particularly focus on the transformation of the caste system from a flexible to a rigid one, and the way it is used at present to form social and political lobbies and pressure groups.

The Caste System and its Evils

- ▶ Caste system—an evil in our society—varna system was based on division of work—later system followed by Hindus became hereditary and rigid—developed into caste system—divided nation into groups—made national unity difficult—many reformers of 19th century—efforts to eradicate caste discrimination.

Movement Against the Caste System

- ▶ Social and religious reformers—principle of equality, liberty and fraternity—tried to modernise society—Mahadev Govind Ranade: Political and economic progress possible only when there is social change.
- ▶ Social organisations—Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission—helped create sympathy towards suppressed people—apart from the caste system opposed in many parts of the country.
- ▶ Satyashodhak Samaj—established by Jyotiba Phule in 1848—condemned caste system—ideas compiled in book 'Satya Shodh'—published in 1887.
- ▶ Prarthana Samaj—founded by Mahadev Govind Ranade—opposed caste system.
- ▶ Kandakuri Veerasalingam—Andhra Pradesh—fought against caste system and social evils—great writer—wrote 'Rajashekhar Charita', first novel in Telugu—constructed first Brahmo Mandir in Andhra Pradesh in 1887—started a home for widows.
- ▶ Swami Vivekananda—disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa—a religious teacher—preached against caste discrimination—founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897—original name Narendranath Dutta—said the God can be served by serving mankind—his speech at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893—impressed reformers and freedom fighters—Mission involved in many charitable activities for social causes.
- ▶ Shri Narayana Guru—founded Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903—to educate people about one religion, one caste and one God for mankind—fought for Ezhavas, a caste considered untouchable.
- ▶ Periyar—spent life in fighting caste discrimination and Brahmin dominance—founded Dravida Kazhagam for benefit of dalits—fought for reservation in government jobs for dalits—consequently, amendment in Indian Constitution made later to protect rights of lower caste Indians.
- ▶ Gandhiji—fought against untouchability—coined the term Harijan, meaning 'Men of God'—started magazine called 'Harijan' in 1933—made social reform a part of National Movement—gave importance to removal of untouchability.

Other Movements

- ▶ Dadabhai Naoroji with U B Wacha–started Rahnumai Mazdayasan Sabha for safeguarding Parsis from social evils and to protect Zoroastrian religion–he worked for improving position of women and providing education for girls.
- ▶ Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee–movement for reforms and proper functioning of Gurudwaras for welfare of Sikh community–In 1923 law passed giving right to SGPC to manage all Gurudwaras.
- ▶ Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar–architect of the Indian Constitution–devoted life to fighting caste discrimination–started Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha to promote economic and social upliftment of deprived classes–during British rule fought against ill effects of untouchability–not eradicated during British rule–government of free India took up the task–untouchability made punishable by law under Article 17 of the Constitution–but the struggle is still a challenge.

Assessment Corner

Oral Assignment

- Ask for answers at random from the students. Confirm the right answers. Let them write down the correct answers if they like in their books.

Written Assignment

- The teacher has two options–(i) Either do these exercises orally first and then ask the students to write them down. OR (ii) Ask the students to write the answers on their own. Then the teacher can announce the correct answers to the students and they can ask their partners to cross-check them.

In either case, the answers can be written as homework and the teacher can check them in the class.

Think Tank

- HOTS questions:** Discuss the questions in the class and let the students write the answers to G and H as homework. Teacher should assess individual work.