UNIT-9 CHANGING NORMS OF SOCIAL EQUITY, PARTICIPATION, AUTONOMY AND FLEXIBILITY

Structure

9.0   LEARNING OUTCOME

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Appreciate the contemporary people-centric and increasingly socially inclusive public administrative discourse

- Understand the concept of social equity

- Locate the emergence of social equity concern in the study of public administration

- Analyse the changing norms of participation; and

- Bring out the meaning and relevance of the norms of autonomy and flexibility.

9.1   INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of public administration over time, the norms of social equity, participation, flexibility and autonomy have been changing. The issues related with recognition and accommodation of diverse ethnicity, religions, languages and values have become an inescapable feature of the landscape of socio-political arena and the governance agenda in the 21st century. More often than not, public policy, depending on the character of the governing regime, has tended to underplay and even suppress these norms. In general also, these norms have in many instances been neglected in public management through everyday exclusion as well as economic, social and political discrimination. These norms are closely related to social as well as administrative development, and have, as a result, witnessed a sort of paradigmatic shift in terms of their use and importance. Currently, the accent on globalisation that has turned the whole world into a global village, and the new activist role of civil society that has been envisaged by the 'governance' school of public administration

have lent a new complexion and relevance to these terms. This Unit will discuss the meaning and nature of these terms and throw light on their changing relevance in the context of recent transformation in the contents and methodologies of 'people-centric' and 'governance-focused' public administrative studies.

9.2 CONCEPT OF SOCIAL EQUITY

So far as the norm of 'social equity' is concerned, it could be called relatively new. The term has been conventionally referred to as equality, and now is being understood in terms of social justice. In the contemporary context, it is called social engineering. With the gradual change in the terminology, some new inputs have been incorporated to widen its scope. For example, present concept of social equity is not just confined to earlier emphasis on caste reform, removal of untouchability etc. On the contrary, it includes the expansion and democratisation of social structure making society more and more equitable in terms of social resources, human capital, gender-equity, educational awareness, demographic composition and ethnic profile. To broaden the canvas of social equity, factors of common good, community services, multi-culturalism, cultural freedom, human rights, ethnicity, social harmony and ecological concern have also been made an integral part of it.

Managing diversities and respecting cultural identities are the major challenges for India and other countries as well. No country is entirely homogenous. Nearly 200 countries of the world have some 5,000 ethnic groups. Two thirds have at least one substantial minority, either an ethnic or a religious group consisting of at least 10 per cent of the population. Cultural liberty is vital for maintaining social harmony. Therefore, the State should work out appropriate ways and means to manage it. The present era of globalisation has been criticised as culturally 'homogenising' because communication and information technology, economic integration and trade flows have been continually shrinking the world and changing the landscape of cultural diversity.

In addition, the spread of democracy, accent on human rights and new global networks have given the people the necessary means to mobilise around a cause, insist on a response and strive to achieve it. In this scenario, social equity cannot be actualised unless the State and its citizens respect diversity and maintain unity through common bonds of humanity. The process of development and change brings the question of 'what is social equity' to the forefront. George Frederickson (1987) defines it as "The need or requirement to deliver public services fairly or equitably ... to connote the value of fairness in the use of administrative discretion...and government programmes designed to help the minorities, women, poor, or others who may have limited political power."

Other scholars define social equity as a principle that each citizen has a right to equal treatment by the political system. George Frederickson (*ibid.*) argues that the criteria for judging the worth of public administration should not be limited to efficiency and economy but should also include social equity. If public administration focuses only on neutrality in policy making and efficiency and economy in carrying out the will of the legislature, social equity concerns are bound to be ignored. Social equity also competes with the values of neutrality, economy and efficiency.

Social equity is defined as the application of three factors that Frederickson calls equalities: 'simple individual equality', 'segmented equality' and 'block equality'. The concept of *individual equality* consists of one class of equals, such as one person-one vote. *Segmented equality* is the result of society's complex division of labour. Equality may exist in one segment of society, while there may be disparities of

treatment between different segments of society. For example, the same laws of professional conduct that regulate all lawyers in private practices within a jurisdiction do not regulate medical doctors. *Block equality* calls for equality within a group. Women lawyers seeking equal pay as male lawyers would be an example of block equality. It would be ludicrous to apply *block equality* to lawyers, accountants and doctors. Therefore, Frederickson suggests that each of the three equalities has a certain domain. If one of the equalities is applied outside its domain, the concept of equity as a whole is harmed.

9.3 EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

Both in theory and practice, public administration has always emphasised the concepts of decision-making, systems analysis, operations research or management science, and rationality. It has been observed, that the administrator's job has to be efficient (getting the most service possible for available dollars) or economical (providing an agreed upon level of services for the fewest possible dollars). It should be no surprise, therefore, that issues of inequity and injustice have not been central to public servants or to public administration theorists.

Social equity began as a challenge to the adequacy of concepts of efficiency and economy as guiding principles for public administration. In time, social equity has taken on a broader meaning. Social equity is a phrase that comprehends an array of value preferences, organisational design preferences, and management style preferences. Social equity perspective emphasises and includes equality in government services; responsibility for decisions and programme implementation for public managers; change in public management perspective towards responsiveness to the needs of citizens rather than the needs of public organisations; a transformative approach to the study of public administration that is interdisciplinary, applied, problem-solving as well as theoretically sound.

The development of the concept of social equity was followed by a burgeoning literature on the subject. Philosophically, the views ranged from social equity as providing the proper normative basis for New Public Administration, on the one hand, to social equity as an attempt by some to smuggle in the notion of popular sovereignty, on the other. Researchers, especially in the public policy fields, began to analyse the variations in the distribution of public service in terms of income, race and neighbourhood, and eventually gender.

The concept of equity was included in the first adopted principles of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), which later became the Code of Ethics. In 1981, the ASPA, *Professional Standards and Ethics Workbook and Study Guide for Public Administrators*, in the Section on Professional Ethics, listed its the first two principles in the pursuit of equality, which is to say citizen A being equal to citizen B, and equity, which is to say adjusting shares so that citizen A is made equal with citizen B.

Public administration, is considered to be the union of the art and science of government, and the art and science of management. Efficiency and economy are primarily the theories of management while social equity is mainly the theory of government. In the early years of modern American Public Administration, this kind of mix, particularly in the conceptions of Woodrow Wilson, was balanced. Theories of business efficiency were routinely mixed with theories of democratic government, the argument being that a government can and should be efficient and fair. However, by the 1950s , the union was dominated by management theories and issues, and

questions of equity and fairness were kept at bay. Even though, it was generally agreed that public administration was a part of the political process, there was little interest in developing specifics regarding the ends to which politics and public administration could be applied.

In the early years, it was also the conventional wisdom that public administration was neutral and only marginally involved in policy making. Under those conditions it is possible to ignore social equity. Now the theology holds that public administration is a part or form of politics that it often exercises leadership in the policy process, and that neutrality is next to impossible. If this is the case, then it is not logically possible to dismiss social equity as a suggested guide for administrative action, equal to economy and efficiency.

York Willbern, in his review of the early literature that appeared in the 1973 issue of *Public Administration Review*, by the title "Social Equity and the So-called New Public Administration", observed that critics were not very precise in defining the goals or values toward which administration and knowledge must be directed. Therefore, the task was clear, social equity needed flesh on its bones if it was to be taken seriously as a third pillar of public administration. The process began with a symposium on "Social Equity and Public Administration," which appeared in the *Public Administration Review* in 1974.

The symposium was particularly illustrative of theory building in public administration. The theme was to consider social equity as: i) Basis for a just, democratic society, ii) An Influence on the behaviour of the organisation man; iii) Legal basis for distributing public services; iv) Practical basis for distributing public services; v) Completely operationalised in compound federalism; and vi) Challenge for research and analysis.

The phrases 'social equity' and 'equality' though advanced in the 1960s and 1970s as an essential third pillar of public administration were essentially without definite contours for quite sometime. As has been pointed out, equality is the simplest and most abstract of notions, yet the practices of the world are concrete and complex. How, imaginatively, could the former govern the latter is certainly ponderable? Recent developments in public administration in the name of New Public Management (NPM) and even the New Public Service (NPS) do not provide adequate answers to the question pertaining to the creation of a balance between economy efficiency and social equity. More pedantic discourse on 'Citizens first', 'Serve rather than steer', 'Value people', 'Act democratically', will have to find teeth at the empirical level as well.

9.4 CHANGING NORM OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in the governance processes is the new 'mantra'. Old concept of democracy revolves around direct participation by the citizens in policymaking. This kind of participation is quite old and almost a classic one. Participation in modern times is indirect and takes place through representation. The modern form of indirect and representative democracy is based on people's participation. However, the findings of behavioural political scientists have found the participation levels to be faulty and half-hearted one. According to the Elitists, only few influential exercise participation and power in the so-called representative democracy. The Pluralists speak of involvement of varied groups and organisations in participatory democracy. Therefore, the new norms of participation are to insure the involvement of the people from all the classes, especially from the weaker sections and minorities. The advocates of participatory democracy lay stress upon the availability of opportunity to

all *subaltern* sections. Not only is percentage of participation important but representativeness is also deemed necessary.

Participation merges into 'empowerment', when considered in terms of opportunities for the rural poor to engage in political processes to enhance their control over society's resources. In India, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have paved new ways for political parties and citizens to participate in the democratic process of the country. The Asoka Mehta Committee had also suggested the need for participation of political parties in order to make them more accountable and link them with the political process at the higher level. In the changing context, the political parties can work more significantly as agents of political participation. Simultaneously, the subaltern, backward, poor, disadvantaged, and women have got opportunities to participate in the governance process.

Political parties are compelled to utilise their machineries cautiously, and responsively whereas the weaker sections of the society have been given a chance to fully participate in decision making process at the rural level. The latest data with regards to the panchayat elections show that representation of weaker sections in rural governance is increasing. An important contributory factor that has led to increased citizens' participation is the perceived failure of bureaucracy to meet policy needs, especially in the rural areas. Another assertion is that rural people now know more about policy needs at the grass roots level than the professional administrators do.

Participation is vital for good and effective governance. The latter part of the 20th century has shown a growing concern towards enlarging the role of citizens in the process of decision-making. Political leadership has come to feel the need for it in view of the citizens' apathy towards public administration. The traditional institutional means available to the people have proved to be inadequate and insufficient in impacting on the issues of public policies. There could be many reasons for this like poor planning and execution, specialised nature of administration, and alienation of people from governance.

Decision-making matters demand a greater role for citizens because of their diminished trust in public administration. Equally significant is the realisation in the society that decision-making without citizens' participation is bound to be ineffective and unsuccessful. People's participation in public administration is a part of the larger process, emphasising on the values of representation, responsiveness and accountability to the people of the country. This ordains that people be provided with planned means for participating in both the policy making and policy implementing processes in public administration.

This enhances the administrative understanding of, and responsiveness to the public's concerns. This also obliges the administrators to explain their actions to the public and thus concede to people's Right to Information. One may, thus, see citizens' participation in administration contributing to transparency in administration. More precisely, following advantages flow from citizens' participation in administration:

- An absence or inadequacy of people's participation in governance erodes the government's capacity to be representative and responsive

- Participation in public administration promotes better understanding between government and the people, which has an integrative influence on the society

- Participation evokes a feeling among the people at large that they together control the government, which adds to the moral authority of the government vis-à-vis citizens

- People's participation keeps the governance legitimate and thus deepens its propensity towards obedience. In other words, people's respect for the laws of the land is strengthened by participative process in administration.

There are many factors pointing to the need for people's participation in public administration. An administrative set-up today encounters numerous problems, which do not seem to have readymade or definitive solutions. Many new types of problems have begun to baffle the public administrators and they seek solutions to such stubborn problems from the citizens, who while helping them with solutions often create new sets of problems too (Maheshwari, 2002). Today, we are living in the midst of a transition. While most administrators think that decision-making is their exclusive prerogative, the citizens, too, have come to believe that they have a 'right' to greater involvement in the affairs of administration. An encounter between these two sets of perceptions, which is inevitable in a transitional phase, creates tension on points of contact. Even when the administrators feel the need for citizens' participation, they cannot find a way to accommodate the public into the decision-making process.

The case for citizens' participation in public administration in William Morrow's words is worth mentioning:

Contemporary policies… have been marked by a revolution seeking more direct participation by citizens in policy-making. In contrast to the tendency of institutions to represent organised interests, this resurgence of participatory democracy seeks direct access to decision centres and involvement in decision making regardless of any connections or affiliations that the participants might have with organised interests. In fact, the participation movement has stressed the representation of unorganised public that have been given only casual concern in policy arenas.

James Midgley explains the position on participation by pointing out, "It is naïve to argue that State involvement in social development is superfluous and that local communities in the Third World can solve the serious problems of poverty and deprivation wholly through their own efforts. But it is equally naïve to assume that a cosy relationship between the centralised, bureaucratic State and the local community will emerge and that political elites, professionals and administrators will readily agree to the devolution of their authority to ordinary people" (C f Bhattacharya, 2002).

People's participation in administration is not free from its barriers. One of them being the existence of widespread inertia in the larger society resulting in apathy and passivity. In addition, under the name of people's participation, what may happen is a situation, which Selznick calls 'co-option'. Citizen's participation does not necessarily lead to the leaders representing their constituencies. Rather, they strike a tie-up with the local bureaucracy, which may silence them. The representatives, when interfacing with the bureaucrats represent their individual interests, not their constituencies' cause. It has also been observed that the citizens' participation, when not prudently directed, may add to unnecessary delay in decision-making and implementation, and finally increase the red tape.

It, therefore, follows that genuine citizens' participation presupposes radical mental restructuring in the larger society to make it effective. An obvious need exists to educate the people to make them aware of their rights no less than their obligations in the society. Along with this is the urgency for proper selection of people's representatives. It is also essential that openness should be the hallmark of public administration in the country.

There is a need to ensure that our development programmes and plans are not subverted and sabotaged under the garb of citizens' participation. Local vested interests emerge under the label of citizens' participation and become assertive of their narrower goals, which has the ultimate effect of nullifying the overall policy. Citizens' participation in administration is, thus, a basic political process for promoting public bureaucracy towards representativeness, responsiveness and accountability to the ultimate sovereign of the land, namely the people.

Yet, the fact is that participation is inevitably coloured by the political perspective. This may occasionally create tension for day-to-day administration. It is, therefore, necessary to have a sharper and deeper understanding between the public and the administration. Woodrow Wilson, acclaimed as the father of the discipline of public administration in the U.S.A, has rightly observed as early as in 1887:

"The problem is to make public opinion efficient without suffering it to be meddlesome. Directly exercised, in the oversight of the daily details and in the choice of the daily means of government, public criticism is, of course, a clumsy nuisance, a rustic handling of delicate machinery. But, as superintending the greater forces of formative policy alike in politics and administration, public criticism is altogether safe and beneficial, altogether indispensable. Let administrative study find the best means for giving public criticism this control and for shutting it out from all other interference."

Wilson correctly pointed out when he observed: "In order to make an advance at all, we must instruct and persuade a multitudinous monarch called public opinion. As we all know, public opinion is a constraint and a stimulus for a large number of administrative actions." Administrators and scholars claim that participative management, which is an integral part of participative administration, is a reality of tomorrow. They contend that public organisations are sure to look different in future because contemporary organisations, based as they are on yesterday's social traits and values, are outdated or are fast becoming so. Their call is for participative management. This kind of management has the following features:

- Free, frank and full communication regardless of hierarchical level

- A reliance on consensus rather than voting or other customary forms of coercion or compromise for conflict management

- Primacy of technical competence and knowledge, not prerogatives of power or hierarchy

- Congeniality of environment conducive to task-oriented acts as well as emotional expression

- Prevalence of a mental attitude that views the conflict between the organisation and the individual as inevitable and a disposition to mediate the conflict on rational grounds

- Freedom to experiment and innovate

- Maximum transparency in decision-making

9.5 NORMS OF AUTONOMY AND FLEXIBILITY

Indian Federalism offers the disadvantaged groups to voice their demands on developmental priorities on any perceived injustice. The voices of the disadvantaged have manifested in varied demands ranging from just distribution of resources to

autonomy for state councils, to even separate statehoods. The demands stem from a scenario that perpetuates an unequal share of economic and social opportunities to the disadvantaged or less advantaged sections of the country.

Autonomy is a term that refers to self-government. It can apply to individuals and political communities. The `autonomous individual' is in control of her/his life, free to act independently of external circumstances. The notion thus lies at the base of liberal thinking. Among political scientists, autonomy has been seen as a sort of half way stage to full independence for regions and provinces. An elected assembly often controls it, with tax raising powers and authority over schooling and other aspects of governmental services. In some countries, autonomous regions are, may be to some extent, harbingers of regionalised states.

Autonomy is also the ability of an individual to select personal values and to withstand social pressures for conformity in a given situation. An autonomous individual is able to act independently of the norms of an immediate group situation in favour of his own personal norms or convictions. It is a state or condition in which self-direction is enjoyed; this self-direction relates to the property of a group or people within a geographical area, or even scattered at different places.

Autonomy has always been a 'catch and cry' word of political theory and practices. Autonomy in the literal sense has been associated with the degree of freedom from the superior centre of power. For example, lower units aspire to enjoy some quantity and quality of non-interference from higher units of power. In terms of Indian Federalism, the federal units i.e. the states demand for autonomy from the Centre. But this autonomy gradually has been interpreted, reinterpreted and misinterpreted as well as stretched to the extent of secession and disintegration. However, in the context of present era of globalisation, liberalisation and growing integration of the world economy, the notion of autonomy has changed beyond recognition.

In the era of reckless globalised economy and world media, the globe seems to have shrunk. The so-called modernity of the Nation State has come under serious threat of survival. In such a global scenario and titular sovereignty, the word, `autonomy' is likely to be a word of political antiquity. As far as flexibility is concerned, it is expected in politics to advocate prospect of change, rise and fall. Flexibility refers to a system's ability to adapt and adjust with the changing norms and environs. A flexible set up has autonomous, adaptive and strong institutions that can innovate and experiment, produce new knowledge and skills, build capacity, make rectification and reinvent with time. No system is totally flexible as vested interests, narrow goals, stringent rules, hierarchical concerns, tunnel vision, lack of political will, administrative rigidities, and archaic mind-sets make it fall well short of requisite adaptation and adjustment capacities, to meet the organisational and developmental goals.

9.6 THE INDIAN CONTEXT

This Section focuses on specific issues related to the generic concept of 'social equity' when applied to issues such as 'gender', 'human development', 'ethnicity', 'human rights', and 'poverty' in context of India.

Gender Issue

Gender equality means both men and women are equal and free to develop their personal abilities as well as make their respective choices without social, political and other prejudices. The behaviour, needs and aspirations of men and women are considered, valued and favoured equally by the State and society. This does not mean

that both men and women are necessarily alike in nature and aspirations, but just that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are male or female. It means that their rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities are the same and do not receive differential treatment by the State.

The status of women can only be changed through the development process. India is witnessing this fact. The welfare approach of the State and the pressure that has been built up by the autonomous groups have changed the attitude of the government. This is visible in the form of Constitutional status accorded to the local governments, and thirty per cent reservation to the women in panchayats so that they could enter into the domain of decision-making process of at grass roots level. A similar percentage of reservations for them in the Parliament and state legislatures is also under consideration. We will discuss the issue of gender in detail in our next Unit.

Human Development

The human development issue is also closely related to the issue of gender development. The well being of a society depends on the well being of its women. This close relationship can be gauged by looking at the very high human development indicators from the states of Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu where a general improvement in the health of women has improved the health of both the male and female child. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines human development as "A process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical of these wide ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and have an access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect."

India has a well-developed statistical system for collecting the data on the various aspects of economy, polity, environment and available resources, etc. This system includes governmental and non-governmental institutions like National Population Census, National Family and Health Survey, National Sample Survey etc. We also have Human Development Report at the national level published every year by the states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh for their own use. The information generally collected is mainly connected to infant mortality and child mortality rates, nutrition, Human Development Index (HDI) and per capita district-wise domestic production, literacy rate, achievement and improvement indices for literacy, district-wise classification of village amenities, etc.

Ethnicity

India is still facing the problem of ethnicity in the states like Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East. These states have been witnessing growing insurgency, ethnic conflicts, and communal riots since Independence. The elements of insurgency can be found in all the states in the country; however, the North-Eastern states are worst affected. They want to secede from India and have their own sovereign States because as they feel alienated from India. The insurgent groups of Nagaland did not accept the Indian Constitution and thus boycotted the general elections held in 1952. The areas of Assam inhabited by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos have witnessed the movement for an autonomous State in 1960s. The southern state of Tamil Nadu could also be regarded as an example of ethnic trouble as the Dravidian movement in the state found manifestation in the form of the Justice Party, and the Dravid Munitra Kadaggam (DMK). The demand for secession, anti-Hindi agitation and later for more autonomy for the state, are all examples of challenges to ethnicity.

Ethnic challenges in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) got manifested mainly in the form of movement for autonomy and insurgency. Punjab had its regional, religious and economic bases for the demand of autonomy; whereas Jammu and Kashmir attributed its insurgency to historical, religious and geographical factors. The Akali leaders in Punjab followed three pronged strategy viz. Constitutional protests, infiltration and agitation to press their demands, while J&K played the games of Plebiscite, autonomy and secession. J&K has now joined with other states for its regional autonomy struggle. The involvement of Pakistan in the insurgency movement has given a different dimension to this issue and poses a big challenge. The other reasons for insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir seem to be the derailment of democracy, increasing unemployment, and government's apathy toward the people.

Human Rights

The Indian Constitution includes a detailed Bill of Rights that elaborates civil and political rights. These are guaranteed and enforced by the Supreme Court and high courts. There are five important features of the Constitution regarding the human rights and duties. *First*, our Constitution includes rights of the individuals as well as the cultural and educational rights of minorities under Articles 29 and 30. *Second*, it has abolished untouchability under Article 17, and has also enacted many other laws to abolish discriminatory treatment to untouchables, and also to women whose rights have been extremely limited in comparison to their male counterpart. The Government in India is also trying to replace the traditional, unjust and exploitative nature of social order with egalitarian and democratic norms. *Third*, it provides for positive or affirmative action against policies that are discriminatory towards weaker sections of the society like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, women, children and other backward classes. The positive policy the government is unparalleled and not found anywhere in the world. Under this endeavour, the government has reserved 49.50 per cent seats in jobs for these groups, besides 22.5 per cent reservation of seats in educational institutions and legislative bodies. Some even suggest that human rights must form a vital part of economic development policy.

The Constitutional Amendments 73rd and 74th of 1993 have reserved 33 per cent seats in panchayats and municipal bodies for the women. Resultantly, about a good number of women have been elected for the local bodies and have participated in the rural democratic process. This has certainly strengthened the roots of democratic institutions. *Fourth*, the Directive Principles of State Policy, give such socio-economic rights which do not fall under judicial review as rights to adequate means of livelihood, right to equal pay for equal work for both sexes, right against economic exploitation, rights of children, right to equal opportunity for justice and free legal aid, right to work, right of disadvantaged sections, etc. *Fifth*, the Constitution under Article 51A includes ten fundamental duties that were incorporated by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1976.

Poverty

The issue of social equity is also linked with the problem of abject poverty. Most of the developing countries are reeling under impoverished conditions and the problems of population growth, illiteracy, unemployment, malnutrition, squalor and crime associated with poverty. The Government in India has implemented several anti-poverty programmes to deal with the situation ever since independence. The anti-poverty policy of the government starting from Community Development Programme in the 1950s to area development programmes of 1970s, and to target group oriented programmes of the 1980s, has benefited several poor and destitute families. But the

accent on meeting the statistical figures rather than overall development goals has not produced the desired results. With the revitalisation of grass roots institutions and panchayati raj bodies, the approach towards poverty removal is becoming more people-centric and participatory. Poverty alleviation is expected to make better progress in the future, as a result of increased focus on education, reservation of seats in government jobs, empowerment of women and weaker sections. We must locate all these issues of poverty, health and nutrition, status of women, and human rights in the overall strategy that goes into public policy process for the holistic development for the country.

9.7   CONCLUSION

It is evident that the meaning and modes of application of the terms 'social equity', 'participation', 'autonomy' and 'flexibility' are in a state of flux. Taking cognisance of the problems arising out of internal as well as external situations in a broader socio-political canvas, the words, such as, common good, community services, multi-culturism, cultural freedom, human rights, ethnicity and ecological issues have become a part of social equity. Likewise, participation is being perceived as one of the important ingredients of Good Governance that makes the administrative system efficient and accountable. Participation is a political process to promote better understanding between public and the government that, in turn, produces integrative influence on the society. We have many marginalised sections in our country that belong to different communities and ethnicities but have no access to justice, job security and basic services.

These deprived sections have tremendous potential of influencing the policy process, but only if they could participate in it. Norms of social equity and social participation are changing because the issues of poverty, human rights, health and nutrition, food security, status of women have all come under the purview of the larger economic development policy in India. Poverty reduction has become multi-faceted in nature. International organisations are aiming at development focussed programmes that include empowerment of women, national dialogue on poverty issues, sound economic management, emphasis on basic human needs, capacity building, promotion of participatory approaches, strengthening of institutions; and monitoring and review of programmes and projects. This Unit has attempted to examine some of these changing norms of social equity, participation, autonomy and flexibility in the Indian context.

9.7   KEY CONCEPTS

Co-option

Basically a fundamental process of evolutionary biology in which structures which have evolved for one use become employed for a different use. The term is frequently used in social sciences to connote mobilisation of people by the State and non-state actors. This strategy is being propagated specially due to two issues involved in the process of co-option:

(1)   The process of co-option has been emphasised in view of the emerging need for the unquestioned hegemony of the State over all the sections of the population. To extend hegemony and maintain stability, the need for the co-option of the collective initiative of the marginalised by the State in

the name of empowerment of the former has been articulated in development discourse.

(2)   The process of co-option looks for institutionalisation of the collective initiatives that have remained so far outside the contours of the initiatives taken by the State.

(Debal SinghaRoy, 2003, "Women, Society and the State" in Alka Dhameja (Ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Public Administration,* Prentice-Hall, New Delhi).

Empowerment

The concept of empowerment is contextualised for marginalised people. The centrality of the notion of empowerment is located in the dynamics of sharing, distribution and redistribution of power, which has a basis for legitimacy. Empowerment deals with power, from the perspective of the marginalised groups. It challenges the power structures of subordination. Redistribution of power and empowerment aims at social equality, on the one hand, and disempowerment of structures, systems and institutions that perpetuate inequality, on the other.

(Debal SinghaRoy, 2003, *ibid).*

Human Development

A complex concept of development, based on the priority of human well-being. It aims at ensuring and enlarging human choices which lead to equality of opportunities for all people in society as well as empowerment of the people so that they participate in – and benefit from the development process.

Subaltern

Literally it means 'subordinate' but it has been used by the study groups to mean 'disadvantaged', 'poor' and 'weaker' sections of the society. The Subaltern Studies Collective is a group of scholars in India, interested in the post-colonial and post-imperial societies in particular, and the developing world in general. Their approach is one of history from below, focused more on what happens among the masses at the base levels of society rather than among the elite.

en.wikipedia@org/wikisubaltern-studies

9.8   REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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9.9 ACTIVITY

1. Visit some nearby government office or NGO office or a panchayat or municipal office and write down your observations on the changing norms of equity, autonomy and participation in its policies and functioning.