
UNIT 24 EMPOWERMENT

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24.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

On reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept and dimensions of 'empowerment'
- Trace the paradigm shift in development strategy and the emergence of the notion of 'empowerment'; and
- Examine the issues and strategies of women's empowerment

24.1 INTRODUCTION

Development discourse has been undergoing momentous changes in recent times. To expand the social base of democracy and development, the trend now is to work towards mobilising people's initiatives in the development process. The notion of 'empowerment', in this context, assumes considerable significance. It is acquiring a wider connotation implying strengthening the capacities of individuals, eliciting their participation in the development process. Civil society as an important part of the socio- political and public administrative framework is emerging as a new and important actor in the processes of development. Empowerment of hitherto marginalised groups - those deprived in social, economic, political, administrative and cultural terms - is featuring as a major issue in development discourse. In this Unit, we shall discuss the various aspects of 'empowerment' as a concept and its

significance in development discourse. Emphasis will be laid on the issue of 'women's empowerment' as a category deserving special treatment in the contemporary context of women's participation in political and administrative fields.

24.2 EMPOWERMENT: CONCEPT AND DIMENSIONS

Let us start with a clear idea of what 'empowerment' really means. To follow the World Bank's definition (which is fairly straight forward), empowerment stands for 'the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives'. No doubt, therefore, empowerment is essentially a political process. Central to the concept of empowerment are four core elements:

- (a) Access to Information
- (b) Inclusion and participation
- (c) Accountability; and
- (d) Local organised capacity and subsequent networking with wider movement groups to create a climate of pressure on the holders of power (www.worldbank.org/poverty/empowerment).

Before we take up further the issue of empowerment, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the following interrelated dimensions of this process.

There is a notion of empowerment being looked at as possession of power. ***Dimension of legitimacy of Power:*** The centrality of the notion of empowerment is located in the dynamics of sharing, distribution and redistribution of power, which has a basis of legitimacy. In the sociological sense of Max Weber, power is one's capacity to have control over others; and as such, when this capacity to control is legitimised, it becomes authority (Julien, 1968). Indeed the logic of empowerment essentially involves the dynamics of authority. Max Weber has talked about three types of authority, which have three distinctive bases of legitimacy. For example, the rational legal authority draws its legitimacy from the established rules and procedures, traditional authority from the established values, norms, mores, customs, traditions etc., and charismatic authority from the personalised capacity or aura. While one talks of the process of distribution/redistribution of authority or in that sense legitimised power, one naturally questions not only the bases of legitimacy for the authority, but also the societal arrangements through which power relations are operated. Following the same logic, powerlessness has also been legitimised within the given social order. Hence empowerment will mean a process of distribution of power through legitimised means.

Context of Use: While talking of authority (legitimised power) as the accompaniment of empowerment, Herrick (1995), points out that authority in general is used in the following contexts:

- 1) Regulatory, based on one's formal position and status in relation to others;

2) Expert knowledge, where the expert may possess the power to define ordinary people or to withhold knowledge from those whose well-being is affected by it; and

3) Relationship ability or interpersonal skills, where power comes from interpersonal influence based on abilities to work with people. In human society, however everybody has no equal authority as people have unequal access over the resources that determine power. Indeed, those who have power are those who have control over material resources, knowledge and ideology. Hence the process of gaining control over self, ideology, material and knowledge resources, which determine power may be termed empowerment (Batliwala, 1993).

Dynamics of Power Relations: The meaning of power in empowerment practice needs to be examined in terms of power relations. First, that there should be the ability to exercise power in a given context as having power is not the same as exercising it. Second, the exercise of power takes in the objective reality of empowerment – the structural conditions that affect the allocation of power; seizing or creating opportunities in the environment, changing structural conditions. Third, power relations can be symmetrical or asymmetrical (Heller, 1984 cf. Herrick 1995). Relations of symmetry are those where relatively equal amounts and type of power and authority, are exercised and are based on reciprocity. Relations of asymmetry are those involving unequal amount and types of authority and are those of subordination and superordination. It is the later case, power relations of asymmetry, which we suggest is the major stage for empowerment practice (*Ibid*).

Principle of Change and Transformation: The process of empowerment challenges the power structures of subordination. In the words of Sen and Grown (1988), empowerment is concerned with the transformation of the structure of subordination. It implies a process of redistribution of power within and between families/societies and a process aiming at social equality, which can be achieved only by disempowering some structures, system and institutions. To Sharma (1992), it has a specific focus for the disadvantaged sections. It aims at changing the nature and direction of the systemic forces, which marginalise them.

Of late, the concept of emancipation has been widely used in relation to the notion of empowerment. Though the concept of emancipation was widely used during the colonial struggle against the imperialism, it owes its origin to the Enlightenment. By the turn of the nineteenth century, emancipation was associated with a view of progress as a movement towards freedom and equality. Over the years, it has been circumscribed in a general sense of gaining freedom and especially in the process of entry of the disadvantaged into the mainstream (Pieterse, 1992).

Empowerment as Part of Social Movement

Conventionally social movements have broadly been perceived as organised collective mobilisation to bring about changes in the thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes, relationships and major institutions in society, or to resist changes in any of the above structural elements of society (*H. Blumer 1951, H. Toch 1965, Haberle 1972, Guesfield 1971, Wilson 1973*). However in the wake of the proliferation of new social movements, the dimensions of new collective identity formation and resources mobilisation have got added emphasis. *Touraine (1981)*, emphasised that social movements are characterised by the realisation of historicity, self-conscious awareness and collective identity. To *Melucci (1996)*, social movements grow around

relationships of new social identity that are voluntarily conceived 'to empower' members in defense of this identity. According to Scott (2001), 'a social movement is a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interest, and at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity'.

Here we submit that the process of empowerment is to be understood in the context of transformative politics. Empowerment deals with the process of gaining power by way of transforming the pre-existing arrangement of sharing and distribution of power. The pre-existing arrangement(s) of distribution of power (legitimate power/authority) is but hierarchical in nature with a powerful few at the social and economic command, deciding the mainstream of the society, polity and the economy. As the normative, institutional, ideological foundations of the society legitimise this process of unequal distribution of power, from the perspective of the marginalised sections of the society, empowerment implies a process of gaining power by transforming the preexisting normative, ideological and institutional arrangements. Indeed empowerment is a long drawn process and cannot be achieved within the given arrangements without a proactive State intervention. In this backdrop, the notion of empowerment has been widely integrated with the development strategy of the state since early 1990s. We shall throw light on this aspect in the following section.

24.3 PARADIGM SHIFT IN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND EMERGENCE OF THE NOTION OF EMPOWERMENT

The post-colonial developing world since early 1970s, has experienced a phenomenal shift in the development strategy of the marginalised (who were otherwise known as the deprived, underprivileged, disadvantaged, weaker sections, dispossessed, socially and economically depressed groups etc.). For example, immediately after independence, India adopted a developmental strategy of 'growth with stability' with the basic thrust on industrialisation, agricultural modernisation, expansion of infrastructure, education and mass communication. However, in the backdrop of the declining access of a vast number of people to the means of livelihood security, literacy/education, health care facilities, housing and other basic necessities of life, the philosophy of 'social justice' was integrated in the development discourse in 1970s. Again, since early 1990s, especially in the wake of globalisation, the strategy of 'empowerment with development' has been adopted to integrate the marginalised sections into the mainstream (Singha Roy, 2001).

In this context, it is essential to examine the recommendations of the World Social Development Summit, 1995 that talks about 'people's initiatives', 'people's empowerment' and 'strengthening capacities of the people'. Regarding the objectives of development, it specifically mentions that "empowering people particularly women, to strengthen their capacities is the main objective of development and its principal resource. Empowerment requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and well-being of the societies". To ensure the full participation of the people, it is pointed out that State should provide 'a stable legal framework' in accordance with the 'Constitution, laws and procedures consistent with international laws and obligations' which promotes among the other things, the encouragement of 'partnership with free and representative organisations of civil society, strengthening of the abilities and

opportunities of civil society and local communities to develop their own organisations, resources and activities'.

It is in relation to the above that the World Development Report 1997 emphasised the need for an effective role of the State for social and economic development but in a new form. According to it, the State is central to economic and social development, not as a direct provider for growth but as a partner, catalyst and a facilitator. The world is changing, and with it our ideas about the State's role in economic and social development. In view of the collapse of the command and control economies, fiscal crisis of the welfare states, explosion in humanitarian emergencies in several parts of the world, growing lack of confidence in the governance by the private investors, increase in the corruption and poverty, various dramatic events especially the technological change in the world economy on the one hand, and the growing discontent of the people, manifestation of grass-roots mobilisation and increasing pressure of the civil society on the other, a redefinition of the State's responsibilities was suggested as a strategy for the solution of the some of these problems. According to World Bank (1997), this will include strategic selection of the collective actions that States will try to promote, coupled with greater efforts to take the burden off the State, by involving citizens and communities in the delivery of the collective goods. It observes, for human welfare to be advanced, the State's capacity - defined as the ability to undertake or promote collective actions efficiently - must be increased.

It is apparent that within the given perspectives of the 'stable-legal framework', 'strategic selection of collective action' by the State, possible 'partnership of the State with civil society and State sponsored initiatives of the civil society to have their own organisations' certain important dimensions have emerged. These encompass that (a) all initiatives for empowerment of the marginalised groups should be in accordance with the prescribed rule of the land. (b) State will selectively co-opt peoples' initiatives as and when required. (c) the civil society organisations would play a significant role for empowerment of the marginalised. Besides the proactive state intervention, civil societies are going to play an important role in the emerging development discourse with empowerment. Let us now discuss the role of civil society.

Civic involvement has always been an inseparable part of the development process of human creativity. In Putnam's (1993) argument, higher levels of civil involvement gives rise to 'social capital' which in turn makes possible more civic involvement. Civil society has long been playing a pivotal role to influence the State's policy on social welfare, articulate views on the current issues, serve as voice to constructive debates, provide forum for exchange of new ideas and information, initiate social movements by way of creating new norms, identities, institutions (Cohen and Arato, 1994). The civil society is, together with State and market, one of the three *spheres* that interface in the making of the democratic societies. Civil society is the sphere in which social movements become organised (UNDP, 1993). In the wake of globalisation, introduction of the structural adjustment programme and paradigm shift in the social development strategy, there has been an attempt to redefine the role of the State and the civil society. In the emerging scenario the emphasis has been (a) on the increasing roles of the civil societies "to take burden off the State, by involving citizen and communities in the delivery of the collective goods" (World Bank, 1997), and (b) on "strengthening of the abilities and opportunities of civil society and local

communities” to ensure the process of empowerment of the marginalised in society (UN, 1995).

The status of civil society organisations has been widely explained in terms of their relationship with the State and the market. In Tocqueville’s view, civil society represents a vision of politics and democracy that is State-centered and that has taken root in contemporary social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Smythe and Smith, 2003). However to the liberals and the neo-liberals, the sphere civil society is organised around the market economy (Taylor, 1990) as a non-political privatised delivery system for services such as welfare, education, health care, clean water and so on. In recent years there has been a phenomenal proliferation of the civil societies all over the globe. Social scientists have attributed this phenomenon to the crises in the states on the one hand and that of the market triumph on the other. At times, the State is beset by legitimisation deficit that destroys the conditions of its own stability paving the way for the civil society (Chandhoke, 1995).

Notwithstanding such debate civil societies have been viewed as a force for democratisation, counter weight to the State and economic power and have emerged as alternative vehicles of citizens’ participation at both the national and transnational levels of governance. Their activism and initiatives have also been viewed as a movement for transformation of regional, national and global politics and economies (Edwards, 2000). Here in Gramscian (1998) sense, civil society is the terrain where the State, people and the market interact and where people wage war against the hegemony of the market and the State. Many scholars however see the society beyond the State and market syndrome, as State and market contribute some thing, but not every thing toward the cohesion and the dynamics of the society (Beteille, 2000). However in the contemporary development initiatives, there has been a process of co-option of the civil society organisations by the State and in may places civil society organisations have emerged to be the states in disguise to hegemonise over the local beneficiaries (Singha Roy, *op.cit*). As against this backdrop, role of the civil societies for the empowerment of the marginalised should be viewed very critically.

24.4 MARGINALISATION AND THE MARGINALISED: TARGET OF EMPOWERMENT

As this development strategy has envisaged the marginalised groups to be the ‘target groups’ for empowerment, it is but imperative that an understanding ought to be developed on the processes of marginalisation and empowerment and there after about the role of education for empowerment of the marginalised.

Marginalisation in the conventional parlance is a complex process of relegating specific group(s) of people to the lower or the outer edge of the society. It effectively pushes these groups of people to the margin of the society following the parameters of exclusion and inclusion economically, politically, culturally, and socially. Sociologically, there are several important dimensions of marginalisation and one is to understand it in a larger context.

Dimensions of denials and deprivations: The process of marginalisation *economically* denies a large section of the society equal access to productive resources, avenues for the realisation of their productive human potential, and opportunities for their full capacity utilisation. These denials ultimately push this population to the state of rampant poverty, human misery, devaluation of their work,

low wage and wage discrimination, casualisation in the workforce and livelihood insecurity. Thus they are provided with very limited space for upward occupational and social mobility, and are excluded from the range of economic opportunities and choices. **Politically**, this process of relegation denies these people to have equal access to the formal power structure and participation in the decision-making processes leading to their subordination to and dependency on the economically and the politically dominant groups of the society. Politically these groups emerge to be the underdogs, un/under represented and dis-empowered. In the continuous process of this relegation they emerge to be **culturally** excluded from the mainstream of the society becoming the 'part society with part culture', 'outsider for within', alienated and disintegrated. They eventually get a stigmatised cultural existence, an ascribed low social status and become the victims of cultural segregation. As a consequence of the economic, political and cultural deprivation a vast chunk of the population of the country has emerged to be **socially** ignorant, illiterate, uneducated and dependent. Devoid of the basic necessities of life, they are relegated to live in the margin of the society with a subhuman existence.

Marginalisation, as a social process has widely been strengthened by various forms of deprivation and poverty. In every human society, there is a section of marginalised groups, which suffers from the burnt of deprivation. The Human Development Report (1998), observed that all over world over a billion people are deprived of basic consumption needs. Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, nearly three fifths lack basic sanitation. Almost a third has no access to clean water. A quarter does not have adequate housing. A fifth has no access to modern health services. A fifth of children do not attend school. About a fifth do not have enough dietary energy and protein. The report states "deprivation in basic capabilities encompasses deprivation in years of life, health, housing, knowledge, participation, personal security and environment. When these different kinds of deprivation interact, they severely constrain human choices".

Artificial structure of hierarchy: Indeed marginalisation is a human creation and socially constructed process and which is permuted and continuously reproduced on the basis of on unequal relationship of dependency and domination. In this context, even the natural differentiation between men and women, linguistic or ethnic groups and so on are put in an order of hierarchy with the guiding principle of domination and subordination. This process of hierarchisation has arranged social groups in steep ordering of people, with a powerful few at the social and economic command deciding the mainstream of the society, polity and the economy. On the other hand, within the same arrangement, the vast majority has remained powerless, occupying the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy and surviving at the periphery of the social order.

Bases of legitimacy and reproduction: The process of marginalisation has also been historically embedded in a socio-cultural context. Significantly there are strong institutional, normative and ideological bases, stemming out of the primordial interpretation of the institutional and normative arrangements of caste, ethnicity, race, gender, patriarchy, religion and so on, to provide legitimacy to the processes of marginalisation. Again, the ongoing processes of socialisation, education, politicisation, enculturation etc contribute to their reproduction in the society. Thus over time the socially constructed marginalised categories tend to appear to be the empirical categories viz. the low caste, tribes, women, blacks and so on.

By providing legitimacy to this system of unequal sharing and distribution of power, the systemic arrangements not only legitimise the process of subordination of vast masses of the society, but also contribute to the process of reproduction of this inequality and social construction of marginalisation. Thus the process of marginalisation has also been historically embedded in a socio-cultural context to provide a very limited public space for the upward mobility of the marginalised groups within this arrangement. The modern welfare state, while is mostly engaged in the maintenance of law and order (system integration), has also started expressing its concern (notwithstanding the theoretical rhetoric) on the issues of subordination of marginalised groups.

The development strategies, which were implemented within the preexisting structural arrangements of the society, have not been able to bring an end to the deprivation of the marginalised groups, rather have largely contributed to the social reproduction of marginalisation. The Human Development Report (1996), has drawn attention to the realities of 'jobless', 'voiceless', 'ruthless', 'fruitless' and 'futureless' growth, all of which contribute, directly into creating marginalised population. It considers that development that perpetuates today's inequalities is neither sustainable nor sustaining. Here it is important to mention that 1995 World Social Development Summit, Copenhagen in which all the heads of the states of the UNO are the signatories, has emphasised on the strategy of empowerment as a mainstreaming endeavour of the marginalised groups (United Nations, 1995).

Marginalised groups in India

The social categories such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), educationally backward minorities, women, children, aged, spatial categories like backward/remote village and slum dwellers, economic categories including people living below poverty line, petty artisans, landless agricultural labour, semi-landless marginal cultivators, unskilled or semiskilled construction labours, workers of the unorganised sectors etc., special categories like the physically challenged etc., are generally considered to be the marginalised groups. However as reproduction of marginalisation has been a historical process, and these are sustained and reproduced within the ideological and the normative arrangements, some of the social categories like the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, educationally backward minorities, women, and the special categories like the physically challenged have emerged to be the empirical epitome of the marginalised groups in India. Indeed the dimensions of deprivation of all the marginalised categories are structurally in built in the live situation of these empirical social categories. Even though they are not a homogenous category, they have emerged to be the most deprived in terms of economic, political, social and cultural indicators of development. In general, the overwhelming majority of these people are cumulatively deprived socially, culturally, economically and politically. This is not to oversight the fact that there are creamy layers or elite sections among them, and that these small sections have been able to get the maximum benefits of the policy of protective discrimination. However these sections do not represent the totality of the marginalised groups.

As the list of the marginalised groups is vast, within the ambit of our discussion, it would not be possible to address the issue of empowerment of all the marginalised groups. Hence, in the following section we shall focus on only one group i.e. women for extensive discussion.

24.5 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

Women as a social category cuts across the boundaries of all other social categories caste, class, gender, race status and so on. Within the social category of all the marginalised groups they are the most oppressed.

Deprivation, Poverty and Women's Marginalisation

According to the Human Development in South Asia Report (1998), "while growing up in South Asia is a perpetual struggle, to be women in this region to be a non-person. Women bear the greatest burden of human deprivation in South Asia... there has been very limited investment in improving the basic capabilities of women and enabling them to take full advantage of the opportunities of life". In India, there has been a sharp decline in the female sex ratio (number of female to per 1000 male) from 998 in 1910 to 927 in 1991. The extent of teen-age pregnancy is as high as 56.35%. Only 25.9% of the pregnant mothers receive recognised medical attention during delivery. As many as 88% of the pregnant women aged 15-49 suffer from anaemia. Over two thirds of the female adult population is illiterate.

Socio-cultural factors put several constraints on their work participation, access to productive resources, information and human development, education and training facilities. Only 14% of Indian women are in the work force. The prevailing state of low sex ratio, low rate of literacy, consequent low access to training and information, advanced health care resources, low participation in the decision making processes (both in the formal and in formal set up) have characterised the mode of survival and issues for struggle of women in India. There are more so especially for the women from the lowest sections of the society mostly represented by the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, and the minorities. The higher extent of gender disparities in areas of income distribution, health facilities, educational attainment, decision making bodies, representation in the administration and management services etc., is closely related to the situation of poverty of the marginalised groups. Here 'poverty brings not only mere hardship for women but also squeezes opportunities and life options for them. It accentuates gender gap and affects women more adversely than men. It ultimately takes the shape of feminisation of poverty' (Human Development Report, 1997).

Age-old traditions, beliefs, values, customs, the processes of education, socialisation and the prevailing institutional arrangements essentially structure the social and economic positions of women, of the society. Indeed, the socio-economic bases of their marginalisation, and powerlessness are legitimately institutionalised within these set-ups. Hence any development initiative, without altering the pre-existing structural arrangement and of the broad ideological foundation, only reinforces the structure of subordination and marginalisation of the vast majority of the people.

Constitutional Mandate for Gender Equality in India

The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution were aware of the fact that within the given socio-cultural order, it may not be possible for women to get gender justice. They suggested special provisions for women on the lines of other weaker sections of society especially in the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy, in the Constitution of India. Various important articles are introduced

accordingly to provide protective discrimination and to promote and protect the interests of women.

Article 10 of Indian Constitution assures equality before law and equal protection of laws. Articles 14 and 15 guarantee a life of dignity without discriminating against women on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, belief, faith or worship. Article 15(1), categorically prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, sex, caste, birth and host of other factors. Article 15(3) is vital since it declares, 'nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children.' Article 16 of the Indian Constitution focuses exclusively on the specific subject of equality in public/state employment. While Article 16(1) seeks to guarantee equality of opportunity in such employment, Article 16(2) prohibits discrimination in public employment on ground inter alia of religion, race or sex.

Legislative and Policy Initiatives by the State

The Indian State has taken several initiatives besides introducing several constitutional provisions for women. The Constitution of India was adopted in 1950. It also states (Article 40) that "the State shall take steps to organise Village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." Towards this endeavour the 73rd amendment has been introduced to the Constitution of India to ensure the representation of women in the various statutory local bodies of self-government. The provisions of 73rd Amendment Act included that:

- Not less than one-third of the seats be reserved for women (including that of SCs and STs) and these may be allotted by rotation of different constituencies of a Panchayat.
- In proportion of the total population of SCs and STs to the population of areas, seats will be reserved for SCs and STs. There would be reservation for women in these seats allotted to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Not less than one third of the total number of seats may be reserved for women
- Not less than one third of the total number of seats of for the offices of the chairpersons at each level would be reserved for women. This would be rotated among different Panchayats at each level-Gram-Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.
- In addition, there are certain general features, which could be taken advantage of by women, such as direct elections for membership and Sarpanch (President) posts, at the local (Gram Panchayat) as well as the intermediary level (Panchayat Samiti).
- It was left to the different states to provide for reservation for membership or chairperson to a member belonging to backward classes, if they choose to do.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment, dated 24 April, 1993, directed all state legislatures to amend their respective Panchayat legislation to conform to the Constitutional amendment, within one year. All the states complied and adopted new Panchayat legislation by 23 April 1994 (Kaushik, 1995)

The Bill for 33 percent reservation of women in Parliament and state legislatures was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1996 for the first time. The passage of this

Constitutional Amendment Bill [Article 330(A)] however had to be deferred several times. The first time the bill was introduced on September 12, 1996, discussion on it was stalled and the next day it was promptly referred to a Joint Select Committee. The main objection was the exclusion of reservations for women in minority and the backward groups, specifically the OBCs (Other Backward Classes). Some important features of the proposed Bill are as follows:

- 33% seats to be reserved for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- One third of these to be reserved for SC/ST women.
- 181 Lok Sabha seats to be rotated by a draw of lots.
- The bill is not to apply to State/Union Territories where seats reserved for SC/ST is less than three. So it will not apply in 10 States/Union Territories.

However such changes have not been without a strong women's movement in the country. There have been certain landmarks in the history of women's struggle in India. The Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1975 has come out with its report *Towards Equality*. After several decades of struggle, the *National Perspective Plan for Women's Development 1988-2000* was formulated in 1988. *The Shramshakti* Report also appeared in the same year. *The National Commission for Women* about which we have discussed in Unit 3 of this Course has come into effect by an act of the Parliament in 1990 to investigate and examine all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other laws.

The Indian State in view of its commitment to various international conventions specially *the Mexico Plan of Action 1975*, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) 1979, the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy* 1985, the *Beijing Declaration* as well the *Platform of Action* 1995 has designed a **National Policy for Empowerment of Women** in 1996. This policy clearly stipulates that:

1. Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom for women on equal basis with men to be equally ensured.
2. All forms of violence against women, physical, mental, domestic or social through recourse to customs, traditions and practices would be eliminated.
3. No discrimination would be allowed in law or practice against women in view of recognition that human rights and fundamental freedom are entitled to all women.
4. All forms of discrimination against and violation of the rights of girl child would be eliminated by undertaking strong measures including punitive ones.
5. Synergy of development measures would be designed for holistic empowerment of women.
6. Women's active participation in the decision making is to be ensured for achievement of goal of equality, development and empowerment.

7. Policies, programmes and systems are to be established to ensure mainstreaming of women perspective.
8. Gender sensitisation programmes would be conducted on regular basis for all sections of society.
9. Media to be used to portray a positive image of girls and women.
10. For eradication of poverty and ensuring provision of women's basic needs, several programmes would be initiated to a) ensure food security, b) arrange for housing and shelter, c) provide equal education, d) devise a holistic approach to women's health, e) formulate macro economic and social policies by institutionalising women's participation in economic development. f) arrange support services like child care facility etc., to enable women to participate effectively in development processes and to provide special attention to the needs of women in providing safe drinking water, sewage disposal and sanitation.
11. Women's perspective would be reflected in the policies and programmes for eco-system management.
12. Diversity of women situation is to be acknowledged and special programmes would be made for women in disadvantaged groups. These groups include, women in extreme poverty, in conflict situation, affected by natural calamities, from less developed regions, dalits, tribal minority, disabled, widows, single women, displaced migrants and sex workers.
13. Budgetary provision to be enhanced in the programmes relating to women.
14. Non governmental organisations to be involved for the formulation and implementation of all policies and programmes affecting women.
15. Gender development indices would be developed by the government
16. International, regional and sub-regional cooperation for the empowerment of women will be encouraged through sharing of experiences, exchange of ideas and technology and networks of institutions and organisations through bilateral and multilateral arrangement.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (1996), has also suggested elaborate strategies and action plan to actualise the prescribed goal of this policy. It has action plans to be initiated at the grass roots, district/ sub-district and state and national levels. At the state and national levels, the policy suggests that there would be councils for giving broad policy advise, guidance and directions. The Prime Minister of India would head the national council while the state councils would be headed by the Chief Ministers of the respective states to oversee the operationalisation of this policy on a regular basis. It also suggests that all the central and state ministries would have the gender component in their action plan. It suggests elaborate action for the executive and legislature in all the areas related to physical, social, cultural, and economic and livelihood security of women. Though this plan has worked out elaborate details to be initiated at the state and national levels, it highlights very little for the actions to be initiated at the grass roots level. It states "at the grass-roots, women will be organised into self-help groups at the Anganwadi level; these womens groups will be helped to institutionalise themselves into registered societies and to federate at the Block/Town level; these societies will bring about synergistic

implementation of all the social and economic development programmes by drawing resources made available through government and non-government channels, including banks and financial institutions and by establishing a close interface with the Panchayats/Municipalities”.

There are several significant dimensions of this strategy of women's empowerment, especially from the perspective of the women of the deprived sections of the society. Globally the emerging paradigm on 'development with empowerment' however, has been very legalistic, routinised and procedural in nature in the deep sense of the term for it emphasises on the need for 'legal action' and 'stable legal framework' in accordance with the 'Constitution, laws and procedures' of the country. Hence the form and extent of 'full participation of the people', and 'equal partnership' of the non-government organisations with the State, for development have been conditioned by the established power structure and the prevailing norms of the states concerned. It is apparent that within the given perspectives all initiatives for empowerment of women and in that sense of the marginalised groups should be in accordance with the prescribed rule of the land. The State will selectively co-opt peoples initiatives as and when required, and the NGOs would acquire a significant role to take the burden off the state for empowerment of the marginalised. Let us examine the possibilities of women's empowerment within these perspectives.

Indeed, the ideology of the contemporary institutionalised grass roots mobilisation provides a very limited potential for empowerment of the marginalised women since it is able to create too little space to generate new social identity. In the grass-roots politics of poverty, they have been subordinate to and dependent on the political leaders. The contemporary development strategy advocates for the institutionalised initiatives and selective coordination of people's mobilisation. One is afraid of the intention and social ramification of such cooption, since the process of cooption takes care of the interests and the aspirations of the leaders and not of the masses who are mostly left high and dry. There are two important issues involved with the process of co-option. (a) The process of co-option has been emphasised in view of the emerging need of the unquestioned hegemony of the State over all sections of the population. Here to extend the hegemony and to 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 have been well articulated within the contemporary development discourse. (b) The process of co-option is looking for institutionalisation of the collective initiatives, which have remained so far outside the contours of the initiatives of the state. Perhaps apparently there is no wrong with the process of institutionalisation. The problem lies with the fact as to what gets institutionalised. It is very often than not within the broader strategy of the State that only those aspects of the mobilisation get selectively institutionalised which were of the strategic significance to the State. The issues of the livelihood security of the marginalised groups even seldom get represented within these processes of institutionalisation. The enterprising local leaders, who often look for the opportunity to be integrated with the State in the name of people's representation, have got a fertile ground to act as a global partner of social and political mobilisation and development.

Empowerment through Social Movements and Institutionalised Mobilisation

The processes of social movements and empowerment have some things in common. They help demolish the old traditions, systems and values and create new identities to break the structure of subordination imposed on the marginalised. Marginalised groups in India participated in several social movements to break the tyranny of

subordination imposed on them. Well-known peasants movements, workers movements, women's movements have been erupting in several parts of the country in recent times. The marginalised could now sense the articulation of new identities by breaking old norms, systems and traditions. The Chipko Movement, the anti-arrack (against drinking habits of men) movement took place with the overwhelming participation of women. It created new identities for women. This movement empowered the rural women to take action to restore the imbalances in the society. However, radical social movements are short lived. The arousal of new identities are short lived. The process of empowerment also tends to decline along with the decline of the intensive phase of this mobilisation.

As against this backdrop, it is pointed out that institutionalised mobilisation may emerge to be the alternative to pave the way for empowerment of the marginalised. However, it is experienced that institutionalised mobilisation has limitations of its own. For example the civil society/NGO sponsored mobilisation induces a kind of dependency of the marginalised groups on the intermediary structures. However, an alternative can be found within the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions that combines both the facets of radical mobilisation and institutionalised stability of social movements.

One of the important institutions for the mobilisation of the marginalised women in India has been that of the Panchayati Raj institutions. The Panchayati Raj which was essentially institution for development in the 1950s and 1960s as part of the Community Development Project have taken the shape of institutions for governance and political mobilisation at the grass roots in the 1990s and thereafter. As the institution of democracy, it holds the key to elect 30 lakh people's representatives in every five years, of which 10 lakh are women and over 5 lakh and 3 lakh are scheduled castes and tribes respectively. It also occupies a central place for the regular mobilisation of the rural poor on various issues, viz., implementation of land reform laws, literacy campaign, health care facilities, dowry and child marriage, anti-liquor campaign and so on. As it has got a statutory status and a permanent existence, it is capable of maintaining a continuum in the process of mobilisation of the marginalised people.

Studies conducted in several parts of the country show that (a) representation of women in the PRIs has been significantly increased (as the 33% reservation has been made mandatory), (b) women's participation in the PRI meetings have also increased inspite of resistance from conservative forces, and (c) in most of the cases women's decisions on the various affairs of the PRI institutions are influenced by the male members of their family. Over the years, the PRI has emerged to be as bureaucratic as the state bodies. The local power lobby uses all of its manipulative tactics to retain their influence. As this power lobby provides the ready base for the integration with the national and the global forces, the localised gender issues of the marginalised women remain mostly dis-integrated within these processes. Still, the new 'voices' being heard now seem to be ushering in a new era of more inclusive politics and development.

24.6 CONCLUSION

Over the last fifty years or so, the governmental structure of the State has remained the same with a considerable continuity with the colonial past. Though the various policies are formulated and reformulated for the social development and

empowerment of women, the agencies for the implementation for the same have remained unchanged. And accordingly, there have not been any qualitative changes in the status of women of these groups in the society. The marginalised groups of the society in general and the women of these groups in particular have articulated the art of their resistance against domination and dis-empowerment through various collective initiatives within these governmental structures, and at times against the state. They have faced the forces of modernity. Now they face globalisation and the danger of co-option in the integrated world. Will these processes of co-option and integration be in an equal term?

Women form the core of the marginalised groups cutting across the boundaries of caste, class ethnicity and the nation. However the position of women, especially from the marginalised groups, is very vulnerable in the context of the shift in the social development strategy. For them the process of empowerment is not a simply statutory provision, to be given from above. It is rather a process to be reactivated with the initiative from below. The process of empowerment in actual term aims to demolish the structure of subordination. It immediately looks for alteration in the pre-existing structural arrangements of the society that legitimises the structure of subordination of women and the marginalised groups. Such an alteration augmented by the process of new collective identity formation that has the potential of questioning and challenging the pre-existing order, bring an alternative one, of sustaining the process of new identity formation for a considerable period of time. Here social movements play crucial roles for the creation of new collective identity.

24.7 KEY CONCEPTS

Anti-arrack Movement

This movement began in Andhra Pradesh, and was against sale of arrack, a country liquor. This grew out of the awareness generated by the mass literacy campaigns of the National Literacy Mission. The rural women protested the high expenditure made on consumption of arrack by men, which left them with little money for meeting family needs. Local initiatives were mobilised and arrack sellers were punished, men were fined and state government which raises a lot of revenue from licensing the sale of arrack was taken to task.

Chipko Movement

Forests being a critical resource for the survival of the rural people, during the 1970s, in the Garhwal region of Uttaranchal State in India, thousands of local forest dwellers joined a movement to stop commercial loggers from the felling of trees by hugging them. Led by a Gandhian, Sundarlal Bahuguna, the movement involving a lot of women resorted to non violent protests. It had gradually spread to other parts of India, to save forests from further degradation. It promoted tree planting and community monitoring of judicious use of forests.

Social Capital

It refers to the collective value of all social networks. It describes the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values that arise from the networks. Its components include citizenship, community involvement, volunteering,

social networks, civic participation etc. Robert Putnam is the leading exponent of the concept.

24.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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24.9 ACTIVITIES

1. Based on Secondary sources such as newspaper reports, TV programmes, magazines etc., prepare a brief write up analysing the initiatives targeted at empowering women.
2. Talk to some members of marginalised sections in your vicinity and elicit their opinions on the issue of their marginalisation, and empowerment efforts.