UNIT 10 SOCIAL PARTICIPATION: ISSUES OF GENDER, WEAKER SECTIONS AND ENVIRONMENT

Structure

10.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

• Understand the concept of social participation

• Identify the general parameters of gender issues

• Discuss the approaches toward empowering women; and

• Examine the different ways of promoting women's control over their environment as well as ensuring their Right to political participation.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The issues of gender, weaker sections and environment are at the top of the agenda of the social scientists today. These issues have, in fact, become potential dangers for a healthy society. Mohit Bhattacharya (2001) observes that gender and environment are two narratives that are slowly finding place in the discourse and practice of public administration. Environment-related activities are now getting associated with the people at the grass roots level. There is thus a need to involve local people in resource management. As far as the gender dimension is concerned, there is a worldwide movement to reshape organisations by bringing in more and more women in them. Reasons for this kind of change could be many. Scholars and practitioners feel that the globalisation scenario and influx of information technology are responsible for a renewed and timely focus on the much-neglected issues of gender, weaker sections and environment. This Unit makes an attempt to highlight some of these. The problems attached with these issues demand urgent solutions. Social participation is, of course, one of the strongest measures to cope with these socio-economic and political issues. We will discuss this aspect at length in this Unit.

10.2 CONCEPT OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The study of social participation has long been a concern of sociologists. Initially, social participation was seen by some as a dimension of social status, that is, as an indicator of the degree to which individuals had status conferred on them by their peer participation. It has also been seen as a means of self-fulfilment. Four types of voluntary association have been talked about. Voluntary associations have been considered, a bulwark of Pluralism in mass societies, a catalyst for community integration, an agent of political socialisation, and a promoter of social change. Participation in voluntary groups has been seen to correlate with socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, self-esteem and other socio-psychological traits. The concept of participation is in many ways a central concern of sociology and social science (See: Joseph, 1970).

Social participation means mobilisation of the entire society or community for its own development. It is possible if individuals, local organisations and social institutions fully participate. Ideally, active or true participation means that the people should be aware of their problems. They should be in a position to identify their needs and to a certain extent also try to solve them. Society or people must be involved at the planning level and prioritise the needs as per available resources. Their involvement in implementation of plans is also pertinent.

Social participation is a human act, based on mutual faith built upon the attitudes and beliefs of the people. It is a process in which every individual takes part for the development of his/her own society in his/her capacity. This helps the people to understand their environment better and gives them enough motivation to handle their common issues. They become agents of their own development instead of merely being passive beneficiaries of the governmental schemes.

Social participation can be improved if the government aims to:

- Respect the community's indigenous contribution with regard to their knowledge, skills and potential

- Encourage project initiators to become facilitators and mediators of development and assist in bringing about society/community based initiatives, and challenge practices that hinder people and ideals

- Promote co-decision making in identifying needs, setting goals and formulating policies

- Avoid selective participatory proactive approach

- Inform the people about both the expected success and failure of the schemes

- Motivate participants to believe in the spirit of values viz., solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity, and collective unity

- Utilise optimally the potential of the society/community without any exploitation

- Empower the society/community to share the fruits of development equitably

There are techniques like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), that promote participation in development and management of programmes. PRA is a label given to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasise local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans. PRA uses group animation and exercises to facilitate information sharing, analyses and action among the stakeholders. The purpose of

PRA is to enable development practitioners, government officials, and local people to work together to plan context-based programmes (World Bank Source Book, 2005).

Participation facilitates the development process. At the planning and implementation levels of a development programme, the participatory process provides important information that helps to ensure development objectives and preferences. It helps in assessing the manpower resource utilisation, which reduces the cost of the project. In case any change in the development scheme takes place or mistake occurs, it would be amicably acceptable by the people, because they are involved in it. Field based studies suggest that monitoring and sustainability of the project is smoother even if the external agency or the NGO leaves the project mid-way, as by that time the people are totally involved in the management of the project. Participation teaches both the administrator and the community the necessity of cooperation. This learning process based on participation makes the community a real actor and boasts its confidence and dignity.

10.3   GENDER ISSUES: THE GENERAL PARAMETERS

Gender issues generally pertain to the qualitative and interdependent character of the position of men and women's in society. Gender division is rooted in the conditions of production and reproduction and is reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological bases prevailing in the society. In other words, sex is the province of biology, i.e. fixed and unchangeable qualities, while gender is the province of social science, i.e. qualities that are conditioned by social situation and interactions. These relations are not necessarily harmonious and non-conflicting, and may take different forms under different circumstances.

The concept of gender distinguishes the biological-sexual differences between men and women from the culturally determined differences between them, and the role assigned to or undertaken by them in a society. This means that gender differences between men and women vary across countries and regions as well as over time within countries. The culturally determined roles of men and women are workable and can be changed and influenced through education, government policy, media images and opinion leaders.

Women account for 495.74 million and represent 48.3 per cent of India's total population as per the Census 2001. Therefore, the development of the country depends, to a considerable extent, on the betterment of women's socio-economic condition and status. The Indian Constitution safeguards the rights and privileges of this group, which is reflective of the national concern in this regard. Article 14 confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of sex, religion, race, caste etc. Article 15(3) empowers the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women and Article 16 provides for equality of opportunities in the matter of public appointments for all citizens. Article 51A (e) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. To transform this *de-jure* equality into a *de-facto* one, many policies and programmes have been launched from time to time for the benefit of women.

The Legal Right to Property (Parental) for women is under consideration and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill 2005 has come up for discussion in the Parliament. This is in addition to the plethora of Acts such as Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Act (1956), Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls (1956), Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1986), Commission of Sati Prevention Act (1987), the National Commission for Women Act (1990), which have already been enacted.

There is a demand for 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha. Pressure to reach a consensus in this between all political parties is mounting. The Constitutional Provisions underlined on Articles 10, 14, 15 and 16, as we just read, strive to provide equality and justice to the women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has already reserved one-third of the seats for women in the panchayats. It needs to be kept in view that "Reservation is an ineffective tool for meeting social ends unless accompanied with effective training and inculcation of self-confidence among vulnerable sections of the society (Basu, 2005)".

It has been pointed out that the unitary category of 'woman' differentiated by class, race or nationality is not an intellectually helpful in analysing the socio-political impact of women's groups. One way of dealing with the problem is to divide women's groups between those which conceptualise their chief concerns around 'political' gender interests such as economic survival and those involved in 'strategic' gender interests associated with foremost objectives (Haynes, 1997).

Since the First Five Year Plan to Fifth Plan, several steps have been taken with a distinct focus on 'welfare' of the women. It is the Sixth Plan that adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sectors of health, education and employment. In the Seventh Plan, the developmental schemes continued with an emphasis on raising their economic and social status and bringing them into mainstream of national development. To extend the direct benefits that were being given to this group, Beneficiary Oriented Schemes (BOS) were added in various developmental sectors. In order to make them participative in the programmes, the thrust has been on generation of both skilled and unskilled employment through proper education, awareness and vocational training.

The focus of the Eighth Plan was on human development that plays a very important role in the advancement of the women's cause. It ensured that no development sector bypasses the women so that they could function as equal partners and participants in the social development process. The Ninth Plan stressed on two significant strategies: (i) Empowerment of women became one of the primary objectives. The approach was to create an environment where women could freely exercise their rights both within and outside home (ii) Attempt was to converge the existing services available in both women specific and women related sectors.

To this effect, the Centre and the states, both were directed to adopt a special strategy of 'Women's Component Plan' (WCP) in which not less than 30 per cent of funds flow to women from all the general development sectors. A special provision was suggested to this effect. In 1986, a special mechanism for monitoring   all 27 Beneficiary Oriented Schemes was put into action at the instance of Prime Minister's Office. It continues to be an effective instrument till today. All women related sectors viz. health, nutrition, education, labour, rural

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development, urban development, science and technology; and women and child development have achieved its targets to a considerable extent.

During the Ninth Plan, special initiatives were taken for the employment and advancement of women like launching of 'Swashakti', 'Stree Shakti Puraskar', Gender Budgeting, National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 'Swayamsidha', and 'Swadhar'. These initiatives have helped the women through setting up of self-reliant Self-help Groups and developing linkages with the lending institutions for ensuring women's access to credit facilities; making them aware and building confidence through the process of conscientisation so that they can take their rightful place in the mainstream of the nation's socio-political scene; extending rehabilitation services in difficult situations and eliminating all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

The approach of the Tenth Plan has been a little different from the earlier plans. It stands on a strong platform for action having definite goals or targets within a time-frame, although women empowerment process that started in the Ninth Plan would continue. Recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) is being translated into action. Among other steps in this direction, it includes: i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for the development of women to enable them to realise their full potential, ii) Providing equal access to participation and decision making in socio-political spheres, health care, education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, occupational health and safety, social security; iii) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women; and iv) Building partnerships with civil society, especially women's organisations, corporate and private sectors.

10.4 'ENGENDERING' PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The issue of 'gender' has been a late entrant in public administrative studies. Though the Minnowbrook Conference in 1960s did talk of the pertinence of equity, values and social justice, the emphasis on gender issues was not specifically highlighted. In the 1980s, however, women were recognised as an empirical and theoretical area of concern in public administration.

The approaches to women's empowerment have been undergoing a substantial change. The shift in policy approaches towards women, from 'welfare' to 'equity' to 'anti-poverty', as categorised by Buvinic (1983), to two other approaches, which have been categorised as 'efficiency' and 'empowerment' has mirrored the general trends in Third World development policies. The equity approach recognises that women are active participants in the development process. This approach meets strategic gender needs and links development with equity. As such, the approaches aim at a redistribution of power (Ostergaard, 1997).

The empowerment approach recognises the triple role of women and views the works of women's organisations and likeminded groups as a key element of change. It champions the use of a 'bottom up' approach to raise women's consciousness so that they can challenge their status in society. It works on practical gender needs to build a support base in order to address strategic gender concerns. In order to ensure maximum women's participation in the various schemes launched by the Central and state governments, women must be

adequately empowered. Some important measures for their social empowerment are discussed in this Unit.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993 have a direct impact on the role of women as they aim at making them more participative in respect of local democracy in both rural and urban areas. This has ensured the political presence of the women in Panchayati Raj bodies and the municipal institutions. They have moved into a position of power, and this has surely enabled them to participate in local government decision making, a sphere that affects their lives the most. It has given them political administrative visibility and the opportunity to learn politics and local governance. Inherently, it has made them aware, conscious and confident. In terms of absolute numbers, (according to the Statistical Abstract, Government of India, 2003), as far as grass roots democratic institutions that is the Panchayati Raj and local bodies are concerned, these Amendments have helped to a great extent.

Out of 475 Zila Parishads, 158 are being chaired by women. At the Block level, out of 51,000 members of Block Samitis, 17,000 are women. About one third of the Mayors of the Municipalities are women. In the Panchayati Raj elections held between 1993 and 1997, women have achieved participation even beyond the mandatory level of 33 per cent of the total seats in the states like Karnataka (43.45 per cent), Kerala (36.4 per cent), and West Bengal (35.4 per cent). Female work participation rate has increased from 22.3 in 1991 to 25.7 in 2001. A slight increase has taken place in their presence in the administrative service, that is from 7.2 per cent in 1997 to 7.8 per cent in 2000. The representation of women in Parliament has also gone up from 7.2 per cent in 1998 to 8.5 per cent in the year 2001.

Health and Nutritional Status

There is a need to improve the accessibility and utilisation of services, to primary health and family welfare with a special focus on the or underprivileged sections of the population, especially the poor women and children. The other effective measures will be to focus on essential obstetric care through early registration of pregnancy and screening of all pregnant women at least thrice during this period in order to detect risk factors, identify and manage high risk mothers, ensure appropriate management of anaemia and hypertension disorders, and provide for referral care of 'at risk mothers' to ensure safe delivery. This is a part of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, which has been accepted by the Government of India.

Health and nutritional status of women are critically linked to each other. The traditional practices are biased with regard to supply of nutritional values between males and females. As a result, nutritional deprivations are seen amongst women and girls. This group faces deficiencies and diseases during the critical stages of infancy, early childhood, adolescence and motherhood. Thus, special efforts need to be made to tackle both micro and macro-nutrient deficiencies, especially amongst pregnant and lactating women. It may be supported by necessary health service like health checkups, immunisation, and health and nutrition education.

Education for Women
Hillary Clinton in her speech on 'Status of Women around the World stated that "As long as discrimination and inequities remain so common place around the world, as long as girl and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked,

underpaid, not schooled and subjected to violence in and out of their homes, the potential of human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realised" (UN 4th World Congress, 1995).

India has more than 250 universities and other institutions of higher education, but only 6 per cent of the population has an access to higher education. And this 6 per cent is predominantly the elite class. The female literacy in India is 54.14 per cent. The drop out rate of girls at the middle school is 56 per cent. The male-female literacy ratio is 21:70. One of the most effective ways of promoting women's control over their environment, and their effective right of political participation, is to promote women's literacy in the country. As per one observation, women who can seek employment outside the home have more resources in protecting their bodily integrity from assaults than within it (Nussbaum, 2001).

Education has now become a Fundamental Right. It is an important tool for the empowerment of women. National Policy on Education advocates 'Education for Women's Equality'. It intends to reduce the gaps at the secondary and higher education levels and gives attention to the identified low female literacy pockets and to the women and girl children belonging to the socially disadvantageous groups viz. SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities and disabled, as they lag behind the rest of the population.

To fulfil the promises of 'Education for All,' an enabling environment that focuses on provision of easy and equal access to free education for women and girls; removal of gender bias and stereotypes in the curricula, text books and learning material; gender sensitisation of teachers on a regular basis; appointment of more women teachers at primary level; special incentives, viz., supply of uniforms, text books, mid-day meals, scholarships, flexible school timing and attached hostels and crèches, distance learning and self-study programmes for dropped out women and girls are needed. Vocationalisation of secondary education and vocational training for women is another important aspect of women's empowerment that needs to be prioritised. The existing network between regional vocational training centres and Women's Industrial Training Institutes and Women's Wings with General Industrial Training Institutes with residential facilities must be extended to all states, districts, and blocks.

The 'Swadhar' scheme, an innovative intervention for women in difficult circumstances focuses on the rehabilitation of sex workers, women/girls offered to temples, women/girls in social and moral danger, destitute/young/ elderly widows, single women in difficult circumstances, displaced women and women affected by natural calamities etc. Media is another powerful instrument for change. It can be used for extending support for programmes on mass awareness, and producing quality information and knowledge material related to women. Empowerment and information go hand in hand. Without information, no development can take firm roots. Media must be used to portray positive images of women that are consistent with human dignity and respect. Media can play a better role in sensitising people on gender issues by preventing derogatory, demeaning and degrading portrayals of women in the media.

Economic Empowerment

A substantial percentage (about 70 per cent) of the women population of the world is under poverty line. Most of them are living in situation of extreme poverty (UN 4th World Conference, *op.cit.*). If poverty is to be reduced, it is

fundamental to change unequal gender relations in order to increase women's ownership and control of assets as well as their participation in community management; expand the capabilities of the poor and vulnerable through greater access to self-help, local accumulation of capital, new skills and technologies; and build the individual and collective capability to gain access to economic opportunities, basic social services and infrastructure in order to address the unequal power relations that contribute to impoverished conditions (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2003). The ongoing government schemes like 'Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna' (SGSY) and 'Swayamsidha' should be implemented in such a manner that the beneficiaries get maximum benefits. All programmes meant for women need to merge at block levels as action units in order to draw maximum gains.

Economic empowerment of women requires organising them into Self-help Groups under various poverty alleviation programmes namely Swarnjayanti Shahri Rojgar Yojna (SJSRY), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Support for Training and Employment Programme (STEP), Training cum Production Centres for Women etc. They also need necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities and earning capacities with an objective of making them economically independent.

The women who are engaged in informal sector contribute more than 90 per cent towards the total work output. These women need special attention with regard to improved working conditions, minimum wages, sufficient leave, etc. The benefits of training and extension in agriculture and its allied activities of horticulture, small animal husbandry and poultry, fisheries must reach the women in proportion to their numbers. The State should ensure that employers fulfil their obligations towards women workers extending child care facilities, special leave, and protection from occupational hazards, maternity benefits and legal aid. Those who have been displaced from traditional sectors due to advancement of technology need special care, training, upgradation of skills, expanded area of employment, formation of appropriate policies and progress so that they could get employment in the areas of Khadi and Village Industries, handicrafts, handlooms, sericulture and small-scale industries. The credit facilities for women entrepreneurs should be available either through micro-credit mechanisms or macro-financial industries to enable them to be financially sound.

Status of Girl Child

India's child population in the age group of 0-14 years accounted for 347.54 million i.e., 33.8 per cent of the total population in the year 2001. Of these 171.50 million (49.3 per cent) are female. In the Indian Constitution, there are provisions for their safeguards, which ensure their right to survival, protection and development. Articles 14 and 15(3) guarantee that the State shall not deny any person equality before law and empower the State to make any special provisions in favour of children respectively. Article 23 prohibits trafficking in human beings, abolishes forced labour and treats any contravention to this provision as a punishable offence. Similarly, Article 24 prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or in any other hazardous occupation.

Article 39 says that the tender age of children should not be abused or forced to enter into a vocation unsuited to their age. It gives opportunities and facilities to let them develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity so that childhood is protected against exploitation and against moral and material

abandonment. Article 45 provides for compulsory education up to the age of 14 years. The child (0-6 years) sex ratio, according to the Census of India, 2001 is 927, while in 1991 it was 945. This is a matter of serious concern for not only the demographers but also the policy-makers. Reasons put forth for this are neglect of girl child resulting in high female infanticide, child mortality and maternal mortality rates, sex-selective abortions (female foeticide) and female infanticide leading to an imbalance in the male-female sex ratio. A survey on the 'decline in the sex ratio' in the year 1993 revealed that while the practice of female foeticide is a common feature in urban areas, the problem of female infanticide is a localised phenomenon and limited   to certain communities in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Children are the most crucial societal investment for any country's future and every child has the right to achieve his/ her full development potential. Therefore, their survival, protection and development must be ensured. Community and institution based intervention could help in survival, growth and development of young children, adolescent girls and women across the communities, rural as well as urban. The children belonging to the below poverty line families can be saved through a change in the feeding practices and intra-family food distribution. For a smooth implementation of the various governmental schemes, the involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions, Self-help Groups, civil society organisations as well as, corporate and public sectors needs to be ensured.

Women and Weaker Sections

Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are very important segments of the society. They account (projected on the basis of Census 1991) for 179.7 million representing 17.9 per cent and 67.76 million representing 8.8 per cent respectively. They are Constitutionally safeguarded. Article 46 empowers the State to promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of SCs. It also promises to protect them from social injustice, and all forms of exploitation. Article 275 (1) promises grant-in-aid for the promotion and welfare of STs.

The governments have launched various programmes/schemes for their upliftment. Among others, Special Central Assistance and Institutional Finance for their infrastructural facilities have been extended. Under this scheme, National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) has been set up to extend loans-cum subsidies and involve them in income generation activities. During the Sixth Plan, a higher degree of devolution of funds was sought to ensure that at least 50 per cent tribal families come out of poverty line.

Education is the most powerful instrument for empowering the socially disadvantaged groups. The 61 per cent of learners of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) are females, while 23 per cent belong to the SCs and 13 per cent to the STs. 'Janshala', a community based primary education programme aims to make primary education more accessible, and effective for girls and children of deprived communities, marginalised groups, SCs and STs. It is a block-based programme with special emphasis on community and

decentralisation. This is the first ever programme in the world where five United Nations agencies have collaborated and pooled resources to make success of this effort.

To enable the SC/ST students' for instance. from Kendriya Vidyalayas to have access to the higher education levels like Central Government's institutions, Indian Institute of Technology, Indian Institute of Management and Regional Engineering Colleges, provision of reservations have been made for them. Out of 43,000 scholarships at the secondary stage for talented children from rural areas, 13,000 have been reserved exclusively for SC and ST students. Greater emphasis has been laid in the Ninth Plan and Tenth Plan for educational development of SCs and STs. For informing the educational standards of this group, all infrastructure support like hostels, crèches, free books, free uniforms, transport facilities, compensation to families that being given need is to be suitably monitored by the concerned authorities.

The National Health Policy extends health services to those residing in the backward rural areas where SCs are concentrated. It gives emphasis on endemic diseases. Under the Special Component Programme (SCP), National Malaria Eradication Programme including Falaria, Kala Azar, Japanese Encephalitis Control have been implemented by States/UTs with 50 per cent central assistance in the areas of SC concentration. Other health-related programmes are also being implemented for SC and ST concentrated areas and several steps have been taken to empower these groups like creating an enabling environment that helps them to exercise their rights freely, enjoy their privileges and lead a life of self-confidence and dignity.

The Scheduled Castes Development Corporation (SCDC), National Safai Karmcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC), National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) and National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC), are apex financial institutions working for the economic improvement of the socially disadvantaged groups. These institutions are working as catalytic agents, extending both backward and forward linkages of credit and marketing facilities to improve the economic status of these groups. Unfortunately, instead of being self-reliant, these institutions are heavily dependent upon the government. A study conducted by the Planning Commission, has suggested necessary reforms so that they could become effective and financially reliable.

In order to empower the SC/ST groups, some essential steps need to be taken like enhancing their traditional skills through proper support of credit, knowledge, training, equipment and technology; ensuring payment of minimum wages and equal wages without gender discrimination, especially in the informal sectors; modernising of technologies and upgrading of skills in traditional arts and crafts such as handlooms, handicrafts, lace making, glass work etc. so that their value added products could compete in the markets, earmarking of funds under the schemes like SCP in proportion to their population; and motivating the private and corporate sectors to invest in the schemes for the welfare of weaker sections.

10.5   APPLIED ASPECTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Let us now discuss some of the social ills and inhuman practices that are still rampant despite constant efforts by the government to combat them. In order to

remove untouchability and control the incidence of crimes and atrocities against (SCs/STs), an effective implementation of the PCR (Protection of Civil Rights) Act 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes POA (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 is needed. There are 36 special courts under the PCR Act and 113 special courts under the POA Act, yet the situation has not improved much. It is a social crime for any civilised society to carry night soil on head. Despite several measures, it has not been eliminated totally. Reasons are many like tardy and slow progress in the identification of scavengers and their rehabilitation, failure to convert dry latrines into wet ones and lack of coordination among various agencies involved in this endeavour. So far, out of 6.53 lakh scavengers identified, only 3.84 lakh have been rehabilitated and 1.47 lakh trained. Efforts are on to eradicate this social evil as early as possible.

Making the general people aware about the problems of this group through the use of media and other social means, 'conscientisation' of this vulnerable group towards their rights and privileges and sensitisation of the concerned officials by imparting specialised training can be of a great help in this direction. Voluntary organisations can play an important role in the upliftment of the weaker sections, especially the SC and ST communities. Some NGOs have already established their credentials as important agents for social change. The working style of the NGOs, their specialised nature of work, direct linkages with the target groups, and their participative method of functioning make them supportive instruments in fighting against social evils such as untouchability, atrocities against SCs and STs and economic exploitation.

A glimmer of hope is being witnessed in the new kind of professional and administrative elite in the urban areas. Although small in number, it is quite aware of its prestige and social placement. The group is politically conscious, educated and assertive towards the hierarchy of caste and class and has contributed a lot in strengthening the process of socio-political change. It believes that the real improvement in the lives of Dalits can take place only through a discourse that focuses on political power and organisation necessary for their social advancement. Its agenda includes a synthesis of economic and political issues and also cultural recognition. The issue is whether it is important to change the State policy outcome or the process that produces it. Dalit politics indicates that the acquisition of power to change the State outcome is being focussed more rather than the change in the social structure.

Participation of weaker sections in administration and other decision making bodies are important means to bring them into the mainstream of development. Their representation in the Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service and other categories reflect their growing participation. Although their representation in these services is not satisfactory, their number is steadily increasing. The participation (Tenth Five Year Plan, Government of India) of STs in Group 'A' Services increased from mere 0.46 per cent in 1974 to 3.39 per cent in 1999. This reflects the immense impact of affirmative actions being taken to bring them into the mainstream.

The ST participation in the state legislative assemblies during 2000 was 530 (13 per cent of the total number), whereas in the Lok Sabha (in 1999), it was a mere 41 (7.5 per cent of the total number). Weaker sections of the society have more often shown their consistent participation in the rural decision making bodies, i.e., Panchayati Raj and local bodies. According to the Statistical Abstract, Government of India, 2003, the number of SCs, STs and women in Panchayats is

3,46,002, 2,33,765, and 8,38,227 respectively. The number of SCs, STs and women again at the intermediate level of PRIs is 22,333, 8,219, and 47,455 respectively. Likewise, at the district level, it is 2,201, 1,322, and 4,923, respectively.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 1993 have paved the way for a larger participation of the weaker sections of the society in the running of democracy at the grass roots levels. The 73rd Amendment has been extended to the scheduled areas under the Panchayats (Extension of the Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996. This is a landmark Act that has made the weaker sections more participative in their own areas. But unfortunately, it is not being enforced in the right spirit by the state governments. There is an immediate need to translate it into reality so that tribals could also take part in managing their own affairs.

A unique problem that the tribals are facing pertains to their inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their integration into the socio-cultural and political mainstream. The development mechanism has brought out a situation of conflict between tribal rights and development process. Many of the tribal institutions and practices that have been traditionally helpful in tribal welfare have gone out of use in the absence of proper appreciation of their role even today. The influx of resourceful and influential into the tribal domain has also made their sustenance uneasy. In this unfortunate situation, a mere existence of government schemes would not be sufficient. The civil society and NGOs would also have to be invited to play their role in these areas. Special care needs to be taken for the development of more than 5,000 forest villages and the 2.5 lakh tribal families living therein having no link with the process of tribal development.

The ongoing process of liberalisation may harm the tribals. To protect them from its adverse effects, their habitat, resource base, and intellectual property rights, especially of medicinal plants, methods of cultivation, traditional knowledge, conservation, collection, utilisation and processing techniques as well as the skills acquired through the generations need to be taken into cognisance. The globalisation scenario and the changes that have been ushered in as a result will intensify the vulnerability of the weaker sections. The impact of urbanisation, modernisation and industrialisation in India could affect these vulnerable sections adversely, and this has to be kept in view in order to address this problem in the right perspective.

As far as people with special needs are concerned, four types of disabilities such as visual, loco-motor, hearing and speech; and mental have been recognised. The estimate figure (including the mentally disabled), according to the National Sample Survey Organisation for 2001 is 20.54 million. It represents almost 2 per cent of the country's total population. This group has been safeguarded by the Indian Constitution. Article 14, entry 9 in the list II of Seventh Schedule, as well as Articles 41 and 47 of the Constitution show concern for these types of disabilities. They are also being supported by the institutions like Central Social Welfare Board, National Institute of Social Defence and the various schemes run by the government. In order to empower the disabled with equal opportunities and ensure protection of rights and full participation in the country's development process, a landmark legislation, called the Persons with Disability, Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation (PWD) Act came into action in 1995. The Government in 1996 added value to it by amending the Act.

It now includes multi-collaborative approach, affirmative action, social security and a barrier-free environment for empowering the disabled, who are appropriately called 'differently-abled' as per the contemporary terminology.

A multi-pronged strategy is needed to assimilate this group into the mainstream. It includes people's awareness, officials' sensitisation, involvement of the NGOs and support of the government through various schemes and monetary help. A consistent effort is needed to rehabilitate the group with full support of the community. NGOs can help in a big way in motivating and encouraging the differently abled to organise themselves into Self-help Groups. The 'Viklang Sangams' are working for the provision of necessary support to this group. . This process of transformation enhances the participation of both the disabled and the community as a whole in the relevant policy-making.

10.6 ENVIRONMENT AND CITIZENS' CONCERNS

There is a worldwide recognition now that in order to survive on the planet Earth, it is very important that the delicate balance between the human being and their natural habitat i.e., the environment should not be disturbed. Unfortunately, the modern human being is trying hard to be the master of the natural world. As a result, we have invited a host of problems like ecological imbalance, environmental degradation, depletion of flora and fauna and deteriorating human health. The environment includes water, air and land, human beings, other living creatures, plants, microorganisms and property (Environment Protection Act, 1986). There is a need to choose appropriate methods and development technologies to reduce or eliminate environmental imbalances and adopt an alternative and sustainable development path to achieve this objective. This interdependence is a fundamental development and it is essential to recognise it as an integral one to the desired transformation of the society.

The participatory approach to development should include women as equal stakeholders with the men. Rural women have to bear the burnt of drudgery as they are generally more dependent on forest resources. They have to meet many responsibilities like collecting and processing of the fuel wood, fodder, food, water etc. These women thus have vested interests in conservation and improvement of the forest resources. If drought occurs, it is the women who face the consequences as a result of non-availability of drinking water, fodder, fuel wood, and local employment opportunities more adversely than men who migrate into other towns and cities in search of livelihood.

The National Forest Policy, 1998 emphasises on the creation of people's movement for conservation and development of forest resources, maintenance of environmental balance, fulfilment of the local people's needs, such as, fuel wood, fodder and small timber etc. The government has issued directives to all the states and UTs for its implementation. In pursuance of the directives, 18 state governments have issued enabling resolutions and more than 15,000 village level institutions have been formed by different names in different states. These committees are given responsibilities to protect the natural resources from illegal cutting of trees, grazing, fire, and encroachment. These committees have to also prepare village-level plans. This shows that the decentralisation of powers has led to increased people's participation in the development efforts. However, satisfactory implementation of the Act through various bodies and committees still remains tardy.

Social participation in managing forestland resource or Joint Forest Management (JFM) has drawn the attention of multilateral donor agencies. The World Bank's forestry projects that are providing substantial support include the important component of social participation. The major features of these projects are:

- Equal representation of women in decision making

- Equity in representation of all sections of the society and a special provision for the underprivileged

- Demarcation of JFM area

- Legal status to the social groups and the powers delegated to them

- Equal distribution of user rights amongst all the sections

Protected areas all over the world, especially in the developing countries are facing problems, viz., increasing population, changes in the lifestyle and preferences, imperatives of economic growth, inadequate access to national resources globally and within countries etc. The immediate threats to the protected areas are projects related to development and infrastructure, commercial and urban exploitation, and changes in land use to meet the basic needs.

Literature available on the subject suggests that the traditional communities have always been aware of these problems. There is a popular belief that members of traditional society have had the wisdom to recognise the various sites and species that need to be protected and conserved for the benefit of humanity. The wise or elderly persons of the community have associated environmental protection with the divine imperatives so that human beings could be forced to conserve what needed to be conserved.

In most ecosystems with limited productivity, especially in the desert and mountain areas, it has been seen that the traditional societies have always adopted nomadism as a way of life for their survival. This suggests that they have always been aware of the need for sustainable development; they know how to exploit the nature in a sustainable manner. Most nomadic cycles have also been in harmony with natural cycles using ecosystem at the time when it is least vulnerable. Since the nomadic communities have always been on the move, the ecosystem has always had sufficient time to regenerate itself. Many non-nomadic communities also practice a similar approach. The areas being used for agriculture or grazing have been changed from time to time so that no particular area is overused and degraded beyond recovery. A good example of this is the shifting cultivation or 'Jhum Cultivation'. However, 'jhuming' too, if done in quick succession, could lead to soil erosion and land infertility.

One can find recorded instances where village communities have protected forest patches or sub-catchments only because these are critical to their survival. The elders in village communities still feel that the blocking or contamination of water is among the greatest sins. In our country, it has been pointed out by many, a variety of plants and animal species have been considered sacred by one or more communities and therefore are never destroyed. The most widely protected of such organism is the *peepal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*), which is mentioned on the *Mohanjodaro* seal of around 2000 BC. Other species of the genus *Ficus* are also considered sacred and no Hindu destroys it. It is notable that *Ficus* is now considered a genus of particular significance in the overall maintenance of the

tropical biological diversity. In particular, its preservation may have helped to maintain high levels of populations of highly edible frugivorous birds, especially pigeons and doves.

The Bishnoi community in Rajasthan regards it a sin to kill animals. According to Madhav Gadgil (1985): In a similar fashion, no cobra is killed near certain temples and it is believed that no snakebite will ever be fatal in the same locality. These taboos may help to remove the fear in the people of these very dangerous animals and may have survival value, for example, many deaths from a snake bite are due to fear of death rather than from the poison. Another observation could be cited from Ladakh, where aquatic resources were also conserved out of fear of the Gods. Ladabhu community lives in a water scarce land and have to be very careful about the use of water. They not only conserve the source of water but also worship it. Even aquatic life forms are protected. They also never kill or eat fish. Their Gods for springs and other water resources are separate. Thus, they observe some water related taboos and their violation is supposed to invite divine retribution.

If the agencies concerned to implement the environmental laws fail in doing so, citizens have the right to sue against the polluter in the form of three civil remedies:

- A common law tort action against the polluter

- A writ petition to compel the agency to enforce the law

- A citizens' suit to enforce statutory compliance (Rosencranz, 1992)

It may be recalled that even the introduction of Article 51 to the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act 1976, could not give the citizens any power to prosecute the polluter. It was Section 19 of the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 and subsequent amendments to Water and Air (Pollution Control) Acts that brought about a significant change. Now, a citizen may prosecute a polluter by a complaint to the Magistrate. However, to enable the agencies to take appropriate action against them, a citizen must give 60 days' intimation notice, says the provision in the Acts.

Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has opened a new era in judicial administration. Through PIL, even citizens who are not directly affected by pollution can launch litigation in the public interest. In this regard, the role of the higher judiciary i.e. the High Court and the Supreme Court has undergone a radical and creative transformation. The Supreme Court, in this process has interpreted the Right to Life and Personal Liberty to include the Right to a Wholesome Environment. The apex court has even gone to the extent of appointing expert committees, and based on their findings, has given direction for closure of the polluting industries.

10.7   CONCLUSION

The inclusion of issues pertaining to 'gender', 'environment' and human rights is a recent development in the discipline and field of public administration. The literature in the area has now started taking strong note of issues on 'engendering' administration and protecting the 'rights' of the disadvantaged sections in administration. The women, weaker sections and environment are certainly very crucial aspects of a development process. Various measures have been taken till

now to improve their lot. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have had a direct impact on making the women more participative in the issues of rural governance. As a result, women have become more aware, conscious and confident.

However, to bring the women on an equal footing with men, among other measures, there is a need to create an enabling environment through positive economic and social policies, providing them equal access to participation and decision making in socio-political spheres, health care, education, social security; changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women in policy making; and building partnerships with civil society, especially women's organisations, corporate and private sectors. The issue of weaker sections needs to be addressed by making the general people aware about their problems. The proper use of media and other social means, conscientisation of the vulnerable groups towards their rights and privileges, and sensitisation of the concerned officials through specialised training can be of a great help in this direction.

The issue of environment is also pertinent. A concern has already been voiced from several quarters that the impact of the economic measures would adversely affect the state of environment. Fears are that in opening up of the economy to foreign investment, there could occur a migration of polluting industries and material from the developed to the developing countries. This could get aggravated by certain policy decisions where economic growth rates and foreign exchange earnings receive higher priority than implementation the environmental laws.

The environment as a vital issue is a national resource too. It is not only an important constituent but also the basis of national development. India lags far behind on this front. It has to bear the negative consequences of unsustainable development in the form of low per capita income, poor nutrition, health and quality of life in general. At the same time, denuded forests, diminishing wild life and extremely polluted rivers have made things worse. Unless the people of this country are convinced that by protecting the environment, their health and property can be safeguarded, all legislative, administrative and judicial measures would remain futile. Environmental management must include public awareness, public participation, involvement of media and environmental justice. This Unit discussed the need to sustain the delicate balance between development policies and weaker sections; governance strategies and participation; and human beings and natural environment.

10.8   KEY CONCEPTS

Jhum Cultivation

It is a slash and burn technology of agriculture practiced mainly by the people of pre-plough age. In India, Jhum is still practiced in Chittagong Hill tracks. 'Jhuming' is practiced on sloppy hills outside reserve forests. The intensity of 'jhuming' varies with changing conditions of rainfall, topography, accessibility and density of population. In 'jhuming', seeds are sown after the first rain in April. Crops are harvested in succession as they ripe between July and December. 'Jhuming' enhances soil erosion and depletes fertility. It is thus important to find alternatives to 'jhuming' banglapedia.search.com.bd/ht/j-0111.htm.

Joint Forest Management (JFM)

It is a concept of developing partnership between fringe forest user groups and the Forest Department on the basis of mutual trust and jointly defined roles and responsibilities with regard to forest protection and development. In JFM, the user local communities and the government manage the resources and share the costs equally. JFM is slowly emerging into a form of sustainable forestry.

envfor.nic.in/divisions/forprt/teriyfm.htm.

Land Use

The range of uses of Earth surface made by humans. Uses are classified as urban, rural, agricultural, forested etc. with more specific sub-classification. It means the way the land is developed and used in terms of the kinds of activities allowed and the size of buildings and structures permitted in agricultural, residential and industrial areas.

www.wasd.k12.pa.us/district/curriculum/geography/geography-glossary.htm, and www.abag.ca.gov/bayarea/sfep/reports/soe/soegloss.htm

Process of Conscientisation

It is an ongoing process by which a learner moves towards critical consciousness. It means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness-in particular, awareness of oppression, being an 'object' in a world where only 'subjects' have power. It involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming a 'subject' with other oppressed subjects.

www.trenti.ca'nahvestudies/courses/nast305/keyterms.htm

Sustainable Development

Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: i) The concept of 'needs' in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, and ii) The idea of 'limitations' imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet the present and the future needs.

(Brundtland Commission, 1987), and
www.adrc.or.jp/publications/terminology/top.htm

10.9 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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10.10 ACTIVITIES

1. Pen down your observations on any write-up/article/book/TV Programme on differently abled people in India. Give your opinions on the Government policy towards them.

2. Go through any newspaper piece or magazine on an environment issue. Make a note of the government's as well as people's role in the protection of environment.