
UNIT 2 EMPOWERMENT

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Essential Ingredients of Empowerment
 - 2.2.1 Social Empowerment
 - 2.2.2 Economic Empowerment
 - 2.2.3 Political Empowerment
 - 2.2.4 Cultural Empowerment
- 2.3 Empowerment: Concept and Definition
- 2.4 Economic Empowerment of the Rural Poor
- 2.5 Political Empowerment
 - 2.5.1 Salient Features of Participatory Development
 - 2.5.2 Empowerment through Self-Governance
- 2.6 Social Empowerment
- 2.7 Cultural Empowerment
- 2.8 Self Help Groups (SHGs) as a Strategy for Empowerment of Weaker Sections
- 2.9 Voluntary Organisations as Change Agents
- 2.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.11 Key Words
- 2.12 References and Suggested Readings
- 2.13 Check Your Progress – Possible Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- describe anti-poverty/developmental programmes that focus on empowering the SCs/STs and the weaker sections of the community.
- explain the role of the panchayat as a change agent – political empowerment.
- describe the role of the Self Help Group as a means for empowerment.
- outline the concepts of empowerment without being dogmatic in areas of social empowerment, political empowerment and economic empowerment.
- explain the processes of socio-political and economic empowerment.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of empowerment refers to process of bringing about a transformation in all walks of the life of every individual citizen of the country. The aim is to provide to them a sense of participation and to give them the secure feeling that their voice will be heard irrespective of their economic and social status. But to achieve such lofty ideals how would you go about in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-class society? Can we identify areas that should be addressed? Can we really overcome the inequalities caused by ‘nature’ and the man-made inequalities that have existed for centuries? If so, how to go about achieving such objectives without upsetting the social balance and/or creating social upheavals?

These are some of the questions that we will examine and will try to find answers for. You must recognize that there are no easy solutions. After all, the Indian society has, till recently, been an agrarian society governed by the “Jajmani” system based on caste, heredity and occupation. So far, social transformation, in our society governed by rights and duties, has been slow.

In the previous unit on Dynamics of Change in Rural India, you were exposed to the concept of change and the various sources and characteristics of change. In this unit we will discuss the concept, definition, essential ingredients and the various forms of empowerment. We will, therefore, be following the methods to identify the path for reaching the goal of empowerment. In doing so we will be traversing the route that guarantees equality at personal, familial, social, political and institutional levels.

2.2 ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF EMPOWERMENT

You must be aware of the term “equality”. If so, you must check it out with what we would list as areas wherein “equality” needs to be achieved. In working for equality, the aim is not to achieve parity in size and shape of human beings or leave them with equal portions of wealth. Instead we will address those areas where equal treatment can be given to all, i.e. before law, equal and inalienable rights, equal freedom or moral equality, full political equality (as equal universal suffrage), social equality (as equal status and consideration regardless of class or wealth) and equal opportunity (as equal access and equal start). These are enshrined in different Articles in the Indian Constitution which guarantees them.

But if you are a perceptive student of democracy, you would know that words enshrined in Constitution do not always translate into reality. To achieve that goal of “equality”, it is necessary that you understand the strong relationship between equality and democracy. Now, list the ingredients that you would consider essential to help a person to achieve his individual self. Having listed them, you may now compare the essential ingredients listed by you with what we consider the four essential areas that need to be addressed to achieve “equality”.

2.2.1 Social Empowerment

Social empowerment means removal of all the existing socially induced inequalities, disparities and other persisting problems besides providing easy access to basic minimum services.

Social change is a dynamic process and when a section of society, particularly the weaker sections like the SCs/STs and women, is to be conferred the right to property, literacy and equality in the political process, it results in radical transformation in social practices in a society where money has retained a “ceremonial character that is obligatory and effective”, as described by Mauss. In rural India, it would also mean breaking up of “Jajmani” system. Empowering women would challenge the ‘patriarchal’ structure of the society where conferment of property rights, particularly land title, and literacy were considered to be the domain of male members of the society.

2.2.2 Economic Empowerment

It implies the provision of training and employment-cum-income generation activities with both “forward” and “backward” linkages with the ultimate objective of making community economically independent and self reliant. It would also mean conferring, through policies, onto the economically deprived sections the strength that would alleviate their poverty, improve their living standards and help in generating assets.

2.2.3 Political Empowerment

Political empowerment means conferring the rights to decide the priorities of development best suited to the individuals, groups of people or to the society and to the people themselves. Power in such an event would flow “bottom-to-top” with weaker sections having equal say in decision making.

2.2.4 Cultural Empowerment

This is a complex area that revolves around the beliefs, values, language, art and customs which characterises the society. The cultural mores take more time to change and the “cultural lag” tends to slow down the empowerment process.

We now will examine at greater depth what is understood by the term empowerment and whether we can define it.

2.3 EMPOWERMENT: CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

Are you in a position to define the term “empower”?

The Oxford Dictionary defines ‘empower’ as ‘authorize, license (person to do), give power to, make able (person to do).’ It is only when you understand the basic meaning of this term that you will be able to appreciate the thoughts on “empowerment”.

This would mean that the term refers to the power that can be bestowed by one person or the society or the Government on another person or a group of persons (may be Class Group, Caste Group, Religious Group or Gender based Group) as the case may be. The assumption is that a group (men, elite, rich or the propertied class) has ‘power’ over another group (the landless, labour class, ethnic minority or women) and the former are able to exercise control in some way on the actions or options of the latter. Such a control can be overt through coercion, physical control of economic assets and use of force or it could be hidden and subtle through psychological processes influencing the groups in such a way as to restrict the range of options perceived by them or to enable them to perceive the offered options as their own desire. Thus, this group of people is denied power and influence in the dominant society. This, over a period of time, internalizes the message that the dominant group gives out, as their own option for their survival. When control becomes internalised, over a period of time, overt exercise of power does not remain a necessity any longer.

This mechanism has been related to the Bentham’s Panopticon Prison Model: “there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and what turns out to be minimal cost.” (Gordon, 1980). Does this example ring a bell to you? Does it sound familiar? This is the common form of control exercised in the feudal setup in many parts of the country even now.

Most writers in the area of power would like to see the making over of power (empowerment) as not just act of relinquishing the power by a section of people. This is because if a section could bestow power on others, it would mean that it could just easily withdraw the same. In this situation, the transfer of “The Power Over” becomes illusory and would just remain an instrumentalist notion or rhetorical devise and not an active tool to achieve change with justice. The deprived groups will only become a means to an end to achieved growth and development. For example, when we talk

of women's empowerment the emphasis is not just on empowering women per se, but mainstreaming them to participate in the economic activities and contribute to development. Here, the empowerment aims are narrow and the transfer would appear illusory. Therefore, a section of thinkers in the area of empowerment would like to focus beyond *power over* on the 'process' of empowerment by including "power to" "power with" and "power from within". In what Hardsock calls the *energy definition* of power, in contrast with *obedience definition* of power, it is generative in nature through leadership, which wishes to see a group achieve what it is capable of with no conflict of interest and the group setting its own agenda. This is "the power some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale" (Hardsock, 1985). An aspect of this power "is to generate a leadership from within the group to achieve what it is capable of, setting its own agenda".

A seminal work in the area of empowerment was by Foucault (1982) for whom the power was not a finite entry that can be located; power was relational not a substance and was constituted in a network of social relationship among people who would be free to act to at least a minimal extent. He sees power as a "mode of action upon action". There was an element of resistance as a form of power and hence where there was power there was resistance. This was particularly true for him in micro-policies and the local exercise of power that rooted in the systems of social network. This takes us to the analysts who identify power with "in addition to 'power over' and 'power to' – which involves a sense of the whole being, greater than the sum of the individuals; for example, groups taking problems together (William et al, 1995). Groups of people working together have greater chance of provoking a change than an individual working alone. Finally, there is also power from within, the spiritual strength that emanates in human beings, based on self-acceptance and self-respect that leads to accepting others as equals and lead to empowerment once such an awakening occurs "Empowerment, then, is not restricted to the achievement of the 'power over' form of power but can also involve the development of power to, with and from within" (Rowlands, 1998).

This interplay of power would lead to physical, social and economic empowerment. Thus, the term empowerment is not just a rhetorical device but also an active tool to achieve change with justice. Empowerment is thus not only about opening up access to decision making but must also include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy the decision making space (Rowland, 1995). Though some envisage empowerment of an individual as conferring the individual with rights in decision making and achieving self-reliance, it also connotes collective empowerment of marginalised groups.

The various interpretations of the term *power* embedded in the concept of empowerment in different approaches to empowerment are given in the Table 2.1 (Oxal and Boden, 1997).

Table 2.1: Definitions of Power and Empowerment in Practice

Interpretation of Power	Implications in Practice
Power over	Conflict and direct confrontation between powerful and powerless interest groups through movements and legislation.
Power to	Capacity building, supporting individual decision making, leadership, etc.
Power with	Social Mobilisation, building alliances and coalitions.
Power within	Increasing self-esteem, awareness or consciousness raising, confidence building, bringing out power already embedded with marginalised groups.

To sum up, empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process. With coherent policies and programmes, devised carefully without confronting the power-over target groups, the objective is to enable people to empower themselves, assess their own situation and create and shape a transformation in society.

Now that you have gained reasonable understanding of the concept of empowerment, let us examine in depth the socio-political and economic empowerment of the rural poor.

Check Your Progress I

Note: i) Write your answer in the space provided.

ii) Check your answer with the possible answer provided at the end of the unit.

1) In your view, what may be the four essential ingredients of empowerment?

2) Can you give an example of how control over masses is achieved without the use of force?

3) Indicate which of the following statements is true or false:

	True	False
a) Empowerment means taking away the power enjoyed by one group to give it to another.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Weaker sections have no desire to power, hence have remained weak.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The 'Jajmani' system meant that only a few moneyed people and landlords had control over decision making in society.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Economic empowerment alone cannot provide the impetus for the development of weaker sections.		

4) Can you recapitulate as to what you have understood by "power over", "power to" and "power within".

a)

b)

c)

d)

2.4 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF THE RURAL POOR

What have you heard about Land Reforms since Independence? You may like to jot down what you already know about these reforms. Land reforms have been on the National Agenda of Rural Reconstruction since independence, as giving greater access to the landless rural poor was considered an important component of efforts aimed at poverty alleviation and economic empowerment. It was so, because in a predominantly agrarian economy, the entire village economy revolved around land and its ownership. Much of the past angst of rural communities could be attributed to unjust distribution of land and the tautological approach to the process of rural development, which resulted in poor performance of rural programmes. Agrarian reform thus becomes the core issue for bringing about rural development.

Are you aware that some of the changes made and the proposals under consideration within the government include:

- Conferment of ownership rights to tenant cultivators. Till the year 2001, 124.22 lakh tenants have been given protection. About 53.7 acres of land declared surplus under the Land Acquisition Act, has been distributed to 55.84 beneficiaries including Scheduled Castes (36%) and Scheduled Tribes (15%). Similarly, Bhoodan lands and wastelands have also been distributed to the landless.
- The National Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) set up in 1989 finances state agencies working for the development of SCs/STs. It has started financing Land Purchase Scheme to secure land for SC/ST tillers through NGOs and gives land rights solely to women or jointly with their husbands. This experiment in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, done with the participation of local Governments' financial agency, has had far reaching social impact as it targets weaker sections of the society.
- Rural housing under "Housing for All" programme, now adopted as National Housing and Habitat Policy 1998, aims to provide shelter to an estimated 3.1 million households without shelter (Census of India, 1991) by the end of the 12th Plan period. Schemes under this include Indira Awaas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana, Samagra Awaas Yojana, etc.
- It has to be recognised that the available land for distribution continues to shrink with rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. A recent Government study shows that most families own less than one hectore of land making further sub-division and fragmentation non viable. Hence, to provide economic sustenance to the landless poor, various employment schemes are in place, like Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (earlier known as JRY), Employment Insurance Scheme (EIS) for drought prone areas and Food for Work Programme (FWP). The Sampurna Gram Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) introduced in 2001 merges JGSY, EIS and FWP under one umbrella.
- Programmes for self-employment have been, from time to time, implemented through government initiatives. At present Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) is a major programme for self-employment, which has brought under its umbrella all the earlier schemes such as TRYSEM, DWACRA, SITRA and GKY. The programme aims to establish a large number of micro-enterprises in rural areas. Also, it aims at providing subsidy, channeling credit through banks, playing an effective role in development plans for the rural poor and preparing projects and helping in marketing the produce. It targets not only SHGs, but also individual 'Swarozgaris' including SC/ST women. Till 2002 over 4,80,000 Swarozgaris have been covered. Besides, 14,000 SHGs have been assisted and beneficiaries include 2,14,302 SC/ST and 2,18,302 women Swarozgaris.

Box 1 Public Cooperation and Social Engineering

The Public Cooperation Scheme of Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) focuses on income and employment generation for the weaker section, specially for the disadvantaged strata like SCs/STs, OBCs and women, through Public Cooperation (PC) and covers a wide variety of projects in areas such as agriculture, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, post harvest processes, fisheries, horticulture, etc. The PC schemes are meant to promote social engineering and mobilise skills of the voluntary sector and unleash the collective energies of rural community. Its activities are linked to one another and their completion should result in holistic development

of a village community. For example, the Health and Sanitation Project for a given area (Village/Cluster of Villages) could involve provision for safe drinking water, management of environment, sanitation in the area, health care management in all its aspects (preventive, curative and promotive) and work for asset creation to ensure sustainability. The weaker sections of the community are involved in the entire planning and implementation of the Project which not only empowered them but also benefited the society at large.

- The SGSY aims to replace various attempts at cooperative movements for self-employment, which were experimented successfully in some parts of the country from 1930s to 1960s, but had gradually lost their sheen. Nevertheless, cooperatives continue to play an important role in financing the agriculture sector through State Cooperative Banks, Central Cooperative Banks and Land Development Banks. The contribution of these cooperatives is highly significant in rural development. Particularly so with the advent of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which besides providing financial assistance to different sectors of the rural economy, also undertakes promotional activities to improve marketing of products. Cooperative institutions have to a great extent relieved the farmers from the clutches of moneylenders, and the weavers from the clutches of master weavers.
- In order to deliver the finances to the deprived groups the Government has, besides NSFDC mentioned earlier, set up four other agencies namely, National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation, National Safai Karamchari Finance and Development Corporation, National Minorities Finance and Development Corporation and National Backward Classes Finance Corporation to assist the beneficiaries in undertaking self-employment ventures. These corporations also fund micro-finances for Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for micro-enterprises.

Are you aware that women constitute about 48.2% of the population and that 80% of women live in rural India? Yes, it is true. It is also true that their literacy is low, they are mostly employed in the unorganised sector or unpaid employments. Any assessment of the need to empower weaker sections cannot ignore the weakest and yet the largest component of the group—women. The Female Economic Activity Rate (FEAR) as accounted in the System of National Accounts (SNA) is 45%. According to the Human Development Report (1995), female/male ratio of work participation in India is 50%. Yet their participation in economic decision-making in the society has been abysmally low. The reservation of 33% seats in Panchayat at the level of members and Pradhans gives them necessary interface in deciding development issues including economic issues of rural communities.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001, includes many steps to confer economic empowerment on them. The two most important measures being a) gender budgeting which envisages a Women Component Plan of not less than 30% of funds/benefits to be earmarked specifically for women in any programme of development that involves women, and b) the expansion of the scope of the concept of holistic development through SHGs at the national level through Swayamsidha (a women's empowerment programme) covering all states. The two measures are now part of the plan process and find place in the Tenth Plan.

The Nodal Departments dealing with women and children have launched several programmes to empower women through employment and income generation—welfare and support services, awareness generation, gender sensitisation and other development enabling measures. Swayamsidha women empowerment programme launched in 2001 aims to generate awareness among and help women achieve economic strength through micro-level income generation activities. The main focus of the programme

is to converge various sectoral services such as literacy, health, non-formal education, rural development, water supply, entrepreneurship, etc. Another empowerment intervention is Swashakti Project which aims holistically empower women through a blend of empowerment and development activities in order to have a broader impact on the lives of poor women. This project has already brought in a change in the lives of the poor and weaker sections of women by enhancing their awareness levels, literacy, disseminating information on health, nutrition, legal rights, on-farm and off-farm enterprise activities besides facilitating women's access to credit.

The programme of hostels for working women aims to promote mobility among women in the employment market by providing safe and cheap accommodation to working women belonging to the lower income strata.

Box 2 Maa Bamleshwari Samooh (MBS) — A Success Story

A group of illiterate and impoverished women in the remote backward district of Rajnandgoan in Chhattisgarh State brought themselves together to start a micro-enterprise group called Maa Bamleshwari Samooh (MBS). Encouraged by the district administration, they undertook stone quarry contract where they themselves had laboured earlier for pittance as wages. Winning the contract in the face of a stiff competition from the same exploitative contractors was perhaps a defining moment of empowerment, a moment that came through micro-credit and bank linkage. The group has prospered to small savings of Rs. 1.75 crores and won contracts to make milestones and floor tiles. The group has taken land on lease to cultivate pulses and have also got into fisheries, goat breeding and setting up a cycle shop. The last of the activities owes its birth to the need for mobility – because now the members of the group cycle their way to the banks and Samooh meetings!

To sum-up the economic empowerment of the rural poor and those living below poverty line is an uphill task, but achievable.

2.5 POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

One lesson that the long years of freedom struggle taught was that to achieve a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society like India, it is necessary that people from all sections have a sense of participation in decision making. It is for this reason that even while adopting the Westminster Model of Parliament (parliamentary system of democracy as it functions in Britain), India opted to be a Republic with a Constitution that conferred fundamental rights, that were inalienable, on her citizens. She gave herself a strong judiciary as a vanguard of her citizen's rights, universal franchise irrespective of caste, creed, race, gender or level of literacy and the principle of one-man one vote.

In the first two decades of independent India, the Government adopted a 'top down' approach to development by putting in place a centrally planned economy where all developmental decisions up to grassroots were taken in the Planning Commission. In the initial years of planning, it worked out well and many infrastructural industries like steel plants, dams and rural development programme were put in place. But with development the aspiration of local communities, diverse that they are, also went up. There was a general awakening both at the decision making level and at the grassroots that it was essential to involve people in decision making if plans were to succeed.

Economic empowerment by itself cannot ensure sustained development and growth of the weaker sections and the deprived people. Development today is recognised as a people centered participatory process geared to bring about qualitative change

in all aspects of human life. Development in the modern context has to be a participatory process of social change which brings about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) to majority of its people by conferring on them greater control of their environment.

2.5.1 Salient Features of Participatory Development

Can you list some of the salient features that you consider important for participatory development? Check your answers with the following points:

The process of participatory development would include:

- Active participation of people at grassroots in designing development projects to suit their needs.
- Use labour efficient and cost effective technology appropriate to the needs of the rural community (bio-gas, energy, hand-pumps, solar-cooker, Sulab Souchalay).
- Create viable institutional structures at grassroots to plan and implement development programmes.
- Monitor and evaluate programme objectives and implementation independently or with the help of bureaucracy or NGOs.
- Harness (by the members of the community themselves) the collective energy of rural community to achieve social engineering and create social assets with concomitant capacity building in the community.

2.5.2 Empowerment Through Self-Governance

Historically, in India there always existed in some form a Panchayat or a local self-government in villages. Charles Metcalf admiringly called them 'Little Republics'. As early as 1909, in the 24th session of the Congress Party at Lahore, a resolution was adopted to take steps to put in place elected local bodies for villages.

The Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 provided for a scheme of diarchy with local representatives to look after village affairs and development. But as most Panchayat representatives wrested power on the basis of their financial or land holding strength, the exercise was not truly democratic.

Mahatma Gandhi's vision of 'Gram Swaraj' with full powers underwent vicissitudes before it gained currency and took the shape of Panchayat Raj. Various recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee (1977), G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985) and L.M. Singhvi Committee (1996) along with Sarkaria Commission Report of 1978 were all considered by the Consultative Committee under the chairmanship of Shri P.K. Thungam (1988) and by V.N. Gadgil Committee (1989).

The outcome of this exercise, undertaken between 1985 to 1995, were the decisions to (a) accord Constitutional recognition to a Panchayat, (b) have a three tier system of Zilla Parishad, Gram Sabha and Panchayat, (c) give Panchayat a fixed term of five years, and (d) provide reservation for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and not less than 33% reservation for women.

The shape of Panchayat Raj was given through the Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992. This Act was brought in to force by a notification with effect from April 24, 1993.

Democracy at the grassroots has thus become a part of the right conferred by the Constitution of India to her citizens.

The Constitutional Amendment of 1992, in Article 245-I, provides for setting up a State Finance Commission each in every State. These commissions are to review the issue of devolution of funds on Panchayats and make recommendations to the Governors.

Panchayats would now plan and execute economic development programmes and social justice and implement schemes listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes would now rest with the Panchayats.

There are now 2.5 lakh (approx.) Panchayats, 5906 intermediate Panchayats and 500 district Panchayats spread through out the country and are manned by 29.2 lakh elected representatives at all levels.

Article 243-G of the Constitution enables states to endow such power and authority as may be needed for Panchayats to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. Article 243-H enables states to give grants-in-aid and such funds as are necessary and also allow Panchayats to levy appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

In 1996, the Provisions of Panchayats (extension to the scheduled areas) Act came into force to cover tribal areas in states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan. The Act enables tribals' societies to assume control over their own destiny and to preserve and conserve their traditional rights over natural resources.

The grant of adult franchise to every citizen of the country above the age of 18 years without discrimination of caste, creed, economic status or gender discrimination also contributes to the political empowerment.

Box 3 Resistances to Empowerment — A case of a Panchayat

Empowerment does not necessarily follow the legislation. Weaker sections do not find easy acceptance in communities that are still mired in caste and gender inequality. In Haleru Gram Panchayat near Malgudi, the Panchayat with eight members (four women, 2 SCs and 1 ST) had the ST women as Gram Pradhan (reserved post). Other members could not accept her as she was a woman, only 4th class pass and ST. Despite support from Zila Parishad and a favourable decision from Court, she had to carry on with the support of 2 SC members. Even Gram Panchayat Secretary quit at frequent intervals. The Panchayati Raj implementation is replete with such stories of active and passive resistance to empowering weaker sections. This example shows that it would be sometime before communities learn to take reservation for weaker sections in its stride. Legislation is only the first step.

Check Your Progress II

Note: i) Write your answer in the space provided.

ii) Check your answer with the possible answer provided at the end of the unit.

1) Recall any two of the important steps that have been taken to empower the rural poor through agrarian reforms.

.....
.....
.....

2) List the salient features of participatory development.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3) Panchayati Raj confers the following power on weaker sections. (True or False, tick mark).

	True	False
i) Now it will be the weaker sections and the women who will decide all development issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii) It gives 50% representation to women.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii) Any resident of the village community qualifies to contest for membership.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv) The SC/ST reservation provided is the same as in legislatures and parliament.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
v) States have been empowered to set up Finance Commissions under the Constitution to decide on devolution of funds.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
vi) Panchayats have power to levy and collect taxes, fees, toll, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
vii) Panchayats are totally autonomous with no checks on them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.6 SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Unlike political and economic empowerment, which can be introduced using a ‘top down’ approach, the social empowerment of the weaker sections and women cannot be thrust down but will have to evolve and emerge from within. Constitution of India guarantees the following:

- Article 14 : Equality before Law
- Article 15(4) : Enjoins States to make special provisions for advancement of socially and educationally backward classes or for SCs.
- Article 16(4) : Appointment of backward classes.
- Article 46 : Enjoins the State to protect them from all forms of exploitation.
- Article 330 : Reservation of seats in democratic institutions.
- Article 335 : Reservation of seats in services.

There have been further amendments to the Constitution to strengthen the above provisions, including universalisation of primary education to make it a fundamental right applicable to all children.

The provisions of Constitution are supported by sizable legislation introduced over five decades. Several social legislation(s) have been enacted to protect and support the interests of weaker sections, women and children.

Box 4 Important Social Legislation(s)

- Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- Dowry Prevention Act (1961).
- Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1981).
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act (1987).
- Eradication of female feticide and female infanticide through Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act (1994).
- Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act (2000)).
- The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986).
- Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989).

There are also high powered commissions, such as National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Minorities and National Commission for Women, which go into issues of injustices and review laws to make them more effective.

Despite all these measures, the Tenth Plan document (2002-03) recognizes the fact that in reality the Government and Law have not succeeded in eradicating social prejudices completely. As wet latrines could not be provided everywhere and alternative employment has not been available easily, manual scavenging continues even today resulting in continued practice of social segregation and *untouchability*. Scheduled Castes dwelling in rural areas continue to remain outside the main settlement, with attendant infrastructure problems. Migration of SC workforce to urban areas from rural areas and their settling down in SCs slums have created room for social tensions and the associated problems. Though OBCs do not suffer the social disability of SCs, their social and economic backwardness is of nearly the same nature. These not only incapacitate them to enhance their production and productive capabilities in qualitative and quantitative terms, but also restrict their economic betterment. (Tenth plan document).

2.7 CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT

To a large extent, cultural practices owe their origin to social setup and time. With changes in the economic and social framework, the cultural milieu is also likely to undergo changes. But to avoid a cultural shock that destabilizes the people who are used to certain practices over centuries, the change has to be brought about gradually. This slows down the dynamic process of the reforms. This is called the 'cultural lag' that acts as a drag. But this has to be accepted if we are to avoid social tension and resistance from the people sought to be helped. The tribals are a good example of the people who need to be protected from exploitation and be allowed to assimilate themselves in the mainstream of economic and political activities even while retaining their cultural practices, their art and craft. This is because it is recognised that many of the tribal societies practice little gender or caste related discrimination; their women have equal say in household and decision-making and they have better control over

ecology, particularly in forest areas, and that nurturing the positive gains of tribal culture can benefit the society as a whole.

2.8 SELF HELP GROUPS (SHGS) AS A STRATEGY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WEAKER SECTIONS

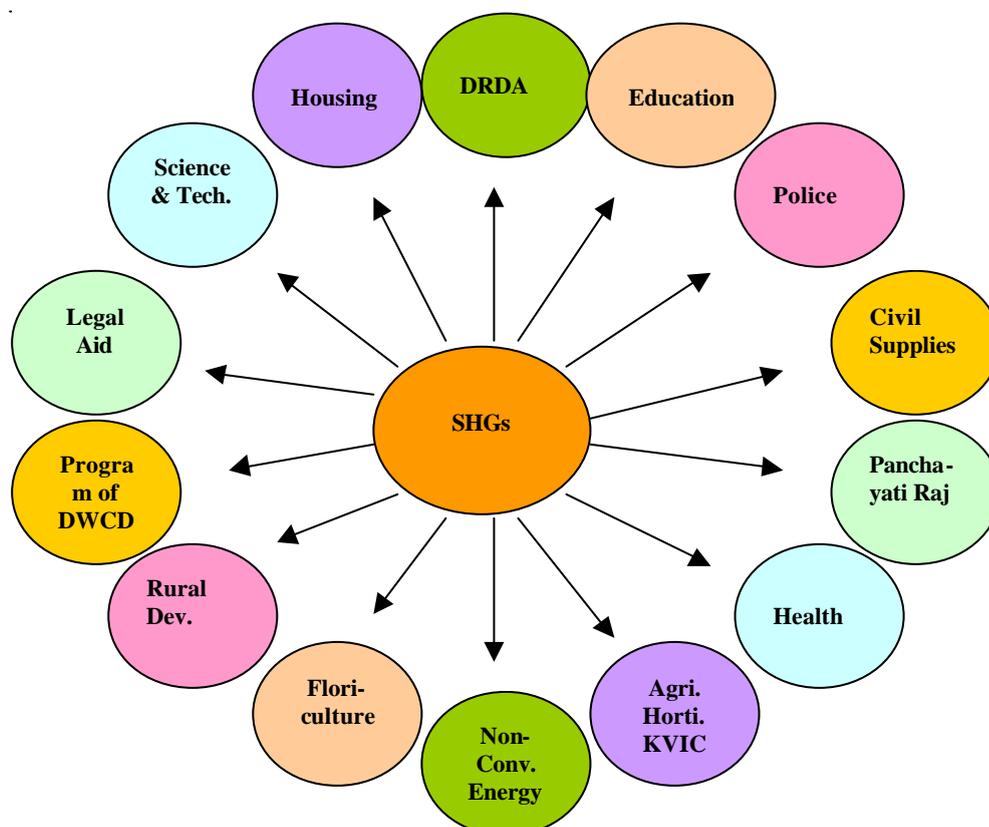
The empowerment through SHGs is a new area of study that requires serious attention of the students of empowerment. The reasons are three fold:

- They involve people of all weaker sections - economic, social and political.
- They break social and gender barriers by allowing the formation of mixed groups based on economic consideration.
- Since the members of the group chart their own course with benign help from Government and NGOs, they gain self-confidence to determine their own future.

The concept of Self Help Groups (SHGs), which evolved in Latin America and South Asia in the 1970s and the 1980s, took concrete shape in India in early 1990s through TRYSEM, DWACRA, STEP, etc. There were parallel NGO movements like SEWA in Gujarat, MYRADA in Karnataka, KALANJAM in Tamil Nadu, etc.

SHGs, as effective tools to combat poverty and effect social Mobilisation, have now been accorded recognition by the planners who have formulated Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) and Swayamsidha (for women). While the former has been conceived as a holistic programme for self-employment, the latter has a wider canvass of bringing about all round development of women. Both the programmes seek active involvement of NGOs in the formation of SHGs, capacity building, training and assistance to deal with on-line departments, banks and project monitoring.

Convergence with Schemes of Line Departments



DRDA – District Rural Development Agencies

Since SGSY is mainly to promote self-employment, it assists individual “Swarozgaris” and Swarozgari groups including SCs/STs and women. Swayamsidha and Mahila Samakhya, empowerment programmes for women on the other hand assist only women’s groups and provide them with continuous capacity building opportunities through legal literacy, education, skill development training, participation in decision making, counseling, help in income generation activities and convergence.

SHGs have become a focal point of convergence for various sectoral programmes of Government Departments.

Box 5 Social Engineering by SHGs

In a small hamlet in Omalur in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu, a group of SHG members, calling themselves Kurinji Magalir Iyakkam, have a very focused objective – prevent female foeticide and female infanticide. Their vigil includes monitoring health and nutritional status of pregnant women in the area, speak to and counsel the families on the rights of child and arrange for adoption if the family is adamant about not having the girl child. Any resistance beyond the soft approach invites threat of police action. This social activism of SHGs in a sensitive area like curbing female foeticide is making a difference to the girls whose lives have been saved.

(*Source:* The Hindu December 7, 2003)

Box 6 Fruits of Collective Effort

In Madhya Pradesh, members of SHGs promoted by Swashakti have replicated the mythology of Bhagirath harnessing the river – they have brought water to every house in Ranipur Village in Betul district and to 60 farms in Dodramohan Village in Shahpur Block. Women themselves did the digging and networking of pipes and fitted the taps. Within weeks, every lane and by-lanes had pipes running. The Self Help Groups got into the act when they found that resource crunch was stalling the tap water project

2.9 VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AS CHANGE AGENTS

Voluntary organisations have been playing a pivotal role for the welfare and development of the socially disadvantaged groups. They bring forth the desired social change by virtue of their direct contact and linkages with the target groups living in the remotest areas. They have established their credentials by moulding public perception/opinion about themselves. Their committed work in reducing the social evils like *untouchability*, and curbing crimes/atrocities against and social/economic exploitation of women and weaker sections are well known. NGOs have gone in a big way to promote SHGs and empower the weaker sections. Their contributions in implementing government programmes and policies for socially disadvantaged groups for improving their living standards needs to be understood in the correct perspective.

Check Your Progress III

Note: i) Write your answer in the space provided.

ii) Check your answer with the possible answer provided at the end of the unit.

1) Can you recall at least four important Articles of the Constitution that empower weaker sections and SCs/STs?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What is the role of social legislation in empowering weaker sections, particularly women?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3) Distinguish between what you understand to be the roles of the two schemes, SGSY and Swayamsidha.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4) Write a brief note on the importance of the role of NGOs in empowerment.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have gained insights into *empowerment*, the process of which is still evolving. The question whether the empowerment of a section of people necessarily involves deprivation of the existing power of another section/class of people was examined. It was seen that the thinkers in the area of empowerment recognise that such a narrow approach was fraught with the danger of generating social discontent and resistance to change. Hence, a broader and more acceptable approach of allowing ‘power to’ percolate or ‘power with’ people to emanate on its own and the ‘power from within’ to regenerate the weaker and deprived section of people is being advocated.

In this unit, *Empowerment* in India has been presented in this background, viz. as a concept evolving through political, economic and social engineering even while preserving cultural entities. In order to allow the ‘power from within’ to evolve, recognizing the need to respect self-esteem of people, the emerging scenario of empowerment through self help has been captured. In understanding the changing phases of empowerment, we have seen the importance of Constitutional guarantees,

the role of domestic institutions such as Panchayat Raj and the social legislations that protect and promote welfare of the weaker sections of the society. Ultimately, all these efforts can succeed only if people's aspirations to satisfy their basic needs of food, housing and education are met. Hence, the importance of economic empowerment in achieving the overall objective of giving power to weaker sections and need to extend help to them to help themselves and at the same time retain their self-esteem by forming self help groups (SHGs) and giving the groups access to economic resources.

2.11 KEY WORDS

Angst	: Anxiety, feeling of guilt or remorse.
Tautological	: Saying the same thing twice over in different words, statement necessarily true but repetitive.
Interior(ising)	: From interior, inner situation, within, existing in mind or soul.
Coercion	: Controlling others' voluntary action by force.
Rhetorical	: Expressed with a view to be persuasive or impressive,,or extravagant in language.
Embedded	: Fixed firmly in a surrounding mass.
Conferment	: Grant or bestow.
Abysmal	: Bottomless, extremely bad (e.g. abysmal ignorance).
Concomitant	: Going together, arranging things.
Vicissitude	: Change of circumstances especially of fortune, regular change, alternation.

2.12 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

References

Foucault, M. (1982): 'The Subjects and Power', Afterward in H.L. Dreytus, P. Rabinav and Michel Foucault: *Beyond Structuralism*, Harvester Press, Brighton.

Gordon, C (ed.), (1980): *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Harvester Press, Brighton.

Hardsock, (1985): *Money, Sex and Power: Toward Feminist Historical Materialism*, Northeastern University Press, Boston.

MAUSS; *The Gift, The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (in English) Routledge Classics.

Rowlands, Jo (1998): A word of the Times, What Does it Mean, Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development in, 'Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World, Ed by Halech Afsar, Macmillan Press Ltd.

UN, (1995): *Report of Fourth Conference on Women*, Beijing, China.

UNDP, (1995): *Human Development Report (1995)*, Oxford University Press, New York

Williams, S, with Seed, J and Mwan, A (1995) *The Oxfam Gender Training Manual*, Oxford; Oxfam.

Suggested Readings

Oxaal, Zoe and Boden, (1997): *Gender and Empowerment: Definition, approaches and Implications for Policy, Report No. 40, BRIDGE (Development – gender)*, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, U.K.

Planning Commission, (2002): *Tenth Five Year Plan, Vol. II*, Planning Commission, New Delhi.

Rowland, Jo., (1995): “Empowerment Examined” in *Development in Practice* 5(2), Oxfam, Oxford.

Rowland, Jo., (1998): “Award of the Times, but What does it mean? Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development” in Halel Afsa (ed.) *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from Third World*, Macmillan Press Ltd.,

2.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) For achieving equality, it would be essential to ensure that an individual is given the economic strength, social status, right to decide what is good for him/her and the community and is allowed to retain his/her cultural entity, if he/she chooses to, without his/her right of choice affecting his/her empowerment. Thus, the four ingredients necessary are the social, the political, the economic and the cultural empowerment.
- 2) The status of a prisoner in a prison is an example of control over an individual through no overt exercise of power. The prisoner knows that he is being watched and if he does not conform to discipline that is dictated by the system, the punishment would be swift. This knowledge keeps the prisoner in check with little cost to the system.
- 3)
 - a) False.
 - b) False.
 - c) True.
 - d) True.
- 4)
 - a) “Power over” means a group of powerful people exercising power over the powerless interest groups using force, if necessary.
 - b) “Power to” means conferring power through capacity building, legislation and supporting individual decision.
 - c) “Power with” would require social Mobilisation and building alliances.
 - d) “Power within” would mean promoting self-esteem and self-confidence among weaker sections of people and allowing their leadership to emerge through moral boosting acts.

Check Your Progress II

- 1)
 - a) Land reforms to correct the unjust distribution of land by prescribing land holding ceilings and distributing the surplus land to cultivators and confer them with ownership rights.

- b) Financing the Land Purchase scheme to secure land for SCs/STs through NGOs and giving land rights solely to women or jointly with their husbands.
- 2) The participatory development involves social change, which would bring about social and material advancement, including equality, freedom and greater control over one's environment. It would thus include participation of people at grass roots in designing development projects, use cost effective technology appropriate to their needs, create institutions and monitor their development.
- 3)
 - i) False.
 - ii) False.
 - iii) True.
 - iv) True.
 - v) True.
 - vi) True.
 - vii) False.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) Four important Articles of the Constitution:
 - Article 14 : Equality before Law
 - Article 15(4) : Special provisions for advancement of SCs/STs.
 - Article 330 : Reservation of seats in democratic institutions.
 - Article 335 : Reservation of seats for SCs/STs in services.
- 2) Important social legislations empowering weaker sections would besides various amendments to Indian Penal Code, include the following:
 - i) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
 - ii) Dowry Prevention Act 1961.
 - iii) The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986.
 - iv) Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989.
- 3) The three important distinctions that separate SGSY and Swayamsidha are:
 - a) The SGSY scheme is open to all individuals and groups for starting self-employment projects, whereas Swayamsidha is exclusively meant for women's empowerment.
 - b) The SGSY aims at providing self-employment (swarozgari), whereas Swayamsidha aims at the holistic development of women including the provision of social and literacy components.
 - c) The SGSY promotes individual swarozgaris also, whereas Swayamsidha targets only women who have formed groups.
- 4) Voluntary agencies, also called the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in promoting development. They act as bridges that link the government departments, linked agencies such as banks and the socially disadvantaged group.