UNIT 1   SOCIAL CHANGE: MOBILITY AND MOBILISATION

Structure

1.0   OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

* define the concept of change and its various aspects;

* describe the role of mobility in bringing about change in people's lives;

* critically examine the role of Mobilisation for empowerment of people; and

* explain the concept of Self Help Groups as an organising principle.

1.1   INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the block on **Dynamics of Change in Rural India.** In this unit we are introducing the *concept of change* and its various sources and characteristics. That done, we present an analysis of *mobility* in the Indian context, especially within the framework of caste system. To explain the phenomenon of mobility within the caste structure, we felt it necessary to briefly touch upon the concept of *sanskritisation* and *westernisation* to evaluate the possibilities and limitations of mobility as it obtains in India. Mobility is also examined in the overall contexts of how change itself was viewed by the state and policy makers and how it influenced the various programmes adopted for the uplift of marginalised groups. Mobilisation of marginal groups has largely been top down process with very little actual participation of people in it. In the next section of the unit, we examine the role of Mobilisation and the need for Mobilisation to bring about transformation of people. Finally we will talk about Self-Help Groups as an example of the successful practice of Mobilisation of rural women folk.

1.2   WHAT IS SOCIAL CHANGE?

In your own life time you must have seen so many changes. When you were younger, you probably did not see anybody using computers. Now, however, you

see them being used all around. You must have noticed also that the computer technologies have initiated widespread changes, which touch many aspects of our daily life, some far reaching and some momentary. Changes, which are fleeting are known as fads, like the cut of the dress, a hair style, some type of furnishing, etc. But computer technology is not a fad. It is a change, which affects the very pattern and structure of society.

Change can be described as "transformation in the organisation of society and in patterns of thought and behaviour over time" (Macionis, 1987: 614). To understand fully what change means to a society, let us look at some of the characteristics of changes.

1.2.1 Characteristics of Social Change

a) **Social Change is Universal**

Everything in nature is subject to laws of change. Even the seemingly unchanging things exhibit minute changes. Something as permanent and immobile as the Himalayas experience geological processes such as erosion, earth quakes and so on, which change their contours. Human society is even more susceptible to changes, since social institutions, patterns and the very making of society are made by humans.

All societies experience change, but each society experiences change at different rates and in different ways. Some societies do not experience many changes, becaue of conscious effort and/or compulsion of circumstances. For instance the hunting/ gathering society of the Kalahari Bushmen have changed very little over the last few centuries. It is only recently, through contact with outside world, that their society is experiencing changes.

The rate of change is believed to be much more rapid in societies which are technologically advanced. Each new major invention, as you might have noticed, brings in major changes.

Not all cultural elements change at the same rate. The concept of "cultural lag" developed by William Oghburn (1964) refers to the fact that material culture usually changes faster than nonmaterial culture. In our own Indian context, you must have noticed that modern technology, institutions, be it transport, means of communication or bureaucracy, did not necessarily bring changes in our culture and values.

b) **Social Changes are both Unplanned and Planned**

Changes can be unplanned. The colonisation of un-exposed world is an example of unplanned change, as the coming of the Europeans has completely changed those societies. The British rule in India has changed the social fabric of Indian society. The introduction of railways in far off villages in India altered the lives of people considerably, and it is a change that villagers did not plan. All these are instances of unplanned changes.

Some changes are deliberately sought. For instance, a government might want to change sex ratio in favour of women. For this, the state may adopt different approaches and policies. Better health facilities, literacy, legislation, etc. may be adopted to bring about social changes. Engineer a new world by planned change is a feature of modern society.

c) **Social Change and its Consequences**

Whether change is sought or unplanned, all social change involves consequences which may be positive or negative. This gives rise to controversies, especially when the change is an initiated/planned one.

The recent controversy that surrounds Narmada Dam Project is one such planned development initiative, which has raised a lot of controversies. While some section of the populace support it, some groups are vehemently opposed to it, as they believe that it would cause more damage than good. In fact, the benefits to the people, of any proposed change, are an important criteria for social planners.

These are some of the chief characteristics of change, across time and space. You must be wondering as to what causes things to change, some as we realised are planned but some are uninitiated and unplanned and these have several sources. In our next section, we will have a brief discussion on various sources of change.

1.2.2   Sources of Social Change

i)   **Cultural Processes**

Societies are constantly introducing new things, abandoning old ones, reinterpreting the existing ones and so on. Basically, social processes are dynamic. The several *processes of change* can be briefly summarized as the following:

a)   **Invention:** When the wheel was invented or the automobile by human ingenuity, it radically altered the conception of space. People became mobile, in turn producing consequences that touched every aspect of human life. The invention of wheel is one example. There are several devises, mechanisms, including ideas, which are invented by people, which have brought about significant changes. And inventions are being made every day, which bring further changes in the human society.

b)   **Discovery:** When people notice something for the first time, though it has always been there, and bring it into prominence as they understand it or use it in new ways, we are dealing with with the process of discovery. Discovering that there are microscopic germs, which cause diseases, has completely revolutionised medicine and the very way we look at life and death. There are countless such discoveries which have brought about major changes in the world.

c)   **Diffusion:** When things and ideas spread from one region to the other, the process is called diffusion. The decimal system in mathematics spread from India to the Arab world and from there to the Western World. The decimal system is now an integral part of mathematics and there is hardly any computation that does not use this system. Diffusion is an essential part of change. We come in contact with new ideas and inventions and some times new ideas are imported so that a positive change may be introduced.

ii)   **Social Structure**

The seeds of change sometimes lie within the very social structure—the changes arising out of tensions and conflicts. The most influential theory linking change to social structure was by Karl Marx, who claimed that social class was the basis of conflict between unequally positioned sections of the population—the rich and the poor. The rising tension between the haves and have not, he held, would lead to class struggle, in which the capitalist system, which is advantageous to the haves would be replaced by a socialist system. While Marx's predication has not necessarily come true, despite erstwhile Soviet Union's tryst with socialism, his argument of social tensions arising out of inequalities can be applied to various movements which have emerged out of inequalities of race, gender, wealth, etc.

iii)   **Value and Ideas**

Certain ideas and values that society holds and works towards bring in changes. The idea of "equality, liberty and fraternity", which ended aristocracy in France has

caught peoples' imagination all over the world. It is an idea which people aim for. Similarly, the idea of *democracy,* which is largely held to be a superior political system, finds resonance in many parts of the world. For the sociologist Max Weber ideas and beliefs also encourage social change. In his book *"Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"*, he develops a thesis indicating connection between Protestantism and its ethic of discipline, ascetism, frugality, etc. and the rise of capitalism. His basic proposition is that ideas and beliefs have a strong influence on the Action of People. The recent discourse on rights is said to have a powerful influence on many social movements – the feminist, dalit and tribal movements, to name a few.

iv) **Environment**

In recent times it is increasingly being realised that imbalances in the overall environment, especially caused as a result of human action, have serious consequences for the inhabitants of the planet including human beings. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, storms, cyclones and floods do cause unintended changes to the society. The realisation that the growth model of development, which exploits nature, is damaging has spawned new ways of looking at man's relationship with nature. In the development debates there is an increasing stress on sustainable development, which is less damaging to environment.

In the foregoing we have outlined what we mean by social change – its characteristics and the various sources. We have so far discussed *change* in a generic sense. Change, as we mentioned earlier, affects everyone, but certain changes which are general and not intentional as well as some of the intended changes, whether initiated by the state or an individual, seem to affect a community or a social pattern much more than others. For instance, the reservation policy, initiated by the state and which is laid down in the constitution has changed the lives of some tribes and some scheduled castes. They have been able to move to slightly better positions. This change in social position/status is known as social mobility. In our next section we will talk about various aspects of mobility.

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)   What do you understand by change? Explain with a suitable example.

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2)   What are some of the main sources of change?

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3) Write about any one invention of recent times, which has altered the lives of people in a significant way.

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1.3   SOCIAL MOBILTY

Simply put, mobility means movement from one place to another. Social mobility can be defined as changes in the social position of individuals within a system of social stratification. In the following sub section, let us look at social mobility in the context of our own peculiar and highly rigid social stratification system of caste.

1.3.1   Social Mobility and Caste

The caste system in India is a stratification system, which is almost entirely ascriptive: that is, a person can only be born to a certain caste and she/he cannot choose or work towards becoming a member of another caste group, which she/he is not born in to. The caste very much defines the privileges one enjoys. As you know, the higher castes enjoy certain privileges that lower castes are not allowed to. For instance the Dalit and untouchable communities, at one time and even now in some places, are not allowed to use public wells enter a temple, go to school etc. The categories of what can be accessible and what is forbidden has definitely changed in the last 50 years or so but the disadvantages and the marginalised position of the lower caste continue to this day.

Some changes have brought about a relative change in the rigid caste structure, which has brought about a relative social mobility from one generation to another generation, even if these changes have not brought any deep structural changes in the caste system, such that one could move from lower caste to upper caste.

Talking of mobility in the caste structure, M. N. Srinivas talks of two process which have been the major impetus to mobility in the Indian context of caste system. Let us briefly reflect on these two terms.

1.3.2   Mobility: Induced Changes from above — Sanskritisation and Westernisation

The introduction of these two terms, sanskritisation and westernisation, here is limited in its scope. Here we want to indicate how the two concepts are used to explain change in India, especially in the case of mobility within the caste system.

In his concept of sanskritisation, Srinivas has made an important contribution to the understanding of caste structure in a historical context, which does away with notion that caste structure is a rigid system.

By sanskritisation Srinivas means a "process by which a 'low' Hindu Caste to Tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of high, and, frequently twice born caste" (Srinivas 1966: 6)

Several instances from history have been cited to show that sanskritisation was one of the few avenues open for mobility. But the mobility through sanskritisation itself did not produce any structural changes but only positional changes. It did not alter the structures of power and dominance. Sanskritisation in any caste explains only particular process of cultural changes, hinting at one possible avenue for mobility among host of possible avenue of change in Indian society. The other concept used by Srinivas tries to look at the impact of colonialisation.

By Westernisation Srinivas means "the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels…. technology, institutions, ideology and values".

The British rule brought several changes not only at the level of cultural structure such as education, law, science and technology, new forms of politicisation, urbanisation, industrialization, transport, communication, but also introduced cultural traits such as dress, food, and changes in lifestyles.

In matters of cognition, it is believed that British rule brought the rational-legal discourse, which did add to the value orientation of many people who were influenced by it. It encouraged the values of equality, equity and universalism and not those of status and hierarchy, *communualistic* or *familialistic*.

While gradual changes did take place due to the British rule in India, challenging the traditional setup, it also reinforced the traditional tendencies. For instance, it is argued that the traditional ethnic, caste, communal cleavages are both reinforced and reflected in modern national institutions such as democracy, where elections are fought on the basis of religion, caste or some such identity. These tendencies went against the cherished long held feeling that traditional institutions and values would be replaced by modern institutions, which were considered the bulwarks of a developed India.

This notion that modern institutions and values would replace traditional values etc. was responsible for the way change was envisaged for India, specially for rural India, where traditionalism was in command. It is with this perspective and orientation that various modernisation and uplifting measures were taken by the state to address the specific problems faced by rural India. What was generally believed to be the natural consequences of the introduction of modernisation leading to a change in society did not bring in the expected change.

In our next section we will discuss how mobility or rather change was conceived in a way that was largely state induced and from the top and with a particular notion regarding how development could be achieved.

In recent times, however, especially with initiatives from the civil society and development organisations, we do find a change in the perspective and discourse of development. The shift has been from top down to bottom up approach. The development initiatives are now being sought from the grassroots, where the people concerned become part of the action. It is in this context that the concept of Mobilisation takes an added dimension.

In our next sub-section, we will take a look at the concept of Mobilisation in the context of changing perspectives on development and what it means for the marginalised groups in the Indian social structure.

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)   What do you understand by the term ascriptive?

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2) How does the concept of "sanskritisation" explain change in the caste system?

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3) Do you think "westernisation" as a process of social change has been able to remove the traditional hierarchies?

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1.4   MOBILISATION AND CHANGE

The literal meaning of Mobilisation is to organise people for a particular action. When we talk about Mobilisation in the context of disadvantaged groups, we are referring to such a way of organising of people, as would have positive impact on the lives of people, for whom the action is initiated. In that sense it is social engineering whether the organising is done by the state and its various agencies or by the civil society, bodies like NGO's or people's movements or a combination of them.

In the context of rural development in India, the Mobilisation of rural folk, especially the disadvantaged, was taken up essentially by the state bodies in the early years of independent India, but the rural development arena is interspersed with several facets of Mobilisation. Some Mobilisations, like the anti-arrack movement or the Chipko movement, rose spontaneously, though they had inspiring figures or leaders behind them. There are many development initiatives which have been organised with the help of institutions, leaders and participation from the people. There are numerous examples where Mobilisation of people found support from different quarters, be it the issue of literacy, bonded labour, dowry, right to information or education.

While movements or collective organisations can be of different kinds, increasingly it is being felt in several quarters that Mobilisation of groups is a very important factor for bringing about change, specially the Mobilisation of those people for whom change is of dire necessity.

The role of civil society organisations is no longer restricted to influencing the government policies, it encompasses handling cultural struggles, confronting traditional power structures, religion and caste politics and gender. Among rural development practitioners, be it government institutions or civil society organisations, it is felt that organising disadvantaged groups is an important aspect of rural development. In our subsequent section, we will talk about Self Help Groups, as an example of an organisation where women have been mobilised to bring about a change, leading to a sense of empowerment and dignity in their lives. But before we start to talk about SHGs (Self Help Groups), let us briefly look at why it is important to mobilise people. To understand the need for Mobilisation let us look at the situation of women as a particular example.

The Need for Mobilisation

In this section we will try to understand why it is important to mobilise people. As we mentioned earlier, we would examine Mobilisation in the particular context of women.

In a patriarchal society women face all kinds of inherent disadvantages. The system, in fact, is geared towards keeping women in a subordinate position. There is not only the socialisation process, which equips women with a mental make up to take on the subordinated role, but also a host of institutions — education, religon, law, politics— which keep them in that position. In such a situation, for a woman to take up issues that affect her singularly is too difficult a task. Besides, if one wants social changes of long standing nature it becomes imperative that women are organised as a *collective* force. When groups of women mobilize themselves they reinforce each other and move in a concerted way. As a *collective*, they can identify their own priorities and the strategies they want to use to struggle for change, whether it is for resources or for change in gender relations.

Any kind of empowerment is a process that has to address various sources and structures of power; the process has to work both at the individual and the collective levels. This involves equal participation in the decision making process, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains.

DAWN—Development Alternatives with Women for New Era, a feminist organisation has recommended a strategy of empowerment through collective organisation that seeks for major structural changes at the policy level and also raise basic survival needs as the priority development issues. As we mentioned, it is difficult for one woman to bring major changes in society but "if whole groups of people demand change it is difficult to reject them altogether". (Batliwala, 1993:10).

The *Shramshakti Report* (Report of the National Commission on Self Employed Women) on the working women points to the fact that women get exploited because they are not organised and therefore lack the bargaining power.

It is this need for Mobilisation, which has spurned various efforts on the part of organisations and individuals to come up with ways of forming women's collectives. In our next section we will look at Self Help Groups as one such organisational effort in bringing women together.

1.5 THE SELF HELP GROUPS: A CASE IN MOBILISATION

In our earlier discussion on mobilisation, we mentioned that mobilisation is towards attaining a goal. A collectivity is one such group, which is formed with the purpose of achieving a goal. It is not a random group of people who happen to be in the same space like a group of people watching a cricket match in a stadium. A group is a collectivity only if it works for a specific purpose. The group has a conscious and voluntary member ship, the members abide by the rules and regulations of the organisation, the organisation is guided by collective articulation regarding what it wants to achieve, which may be spelt out in its constitution. The Self Help Group has been one such group.

The SHGs are small informal groups formed with the objective of enabling members to reap economic benefits and share group responsibility. The benefits include small loans out of group savings and also access to formal credit facilities, as well as pursuit of group activities. The SHGs in India have been inspired by the success of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which started for the poor in 1975. In India organising

women into small SHGs has been very popular with many NGOs in rural India. As the name indicates *self help* is the basic goal that the group tries to achieve. Some of the chief **characteristics of Self Help Groups** are as follows:

- Small size

- Identical interest/social heritage/common occupation

- Intimate knowledge of members' intrinsic strengths, needs and problems

- Flexible and responsive

- Simple documentation

- Collective leadership and mutual discussions

- Group solidarity, collective action, self help.

Owing to their nature of smallness, homogeneity and sense of collective affinity, SHGs have yielded a lot of tangible results not only in terms of economic benefits, but also have had their ripple effects on the society of the community they belong to. Some of the tangible **benefits of SHGs** are given below:

- Promotion of thrift and savings: most SHG programmes insist on regular savings— a fixed small amount. Such compulsory savings lead to accumulation of big funds.

- Improved loan recoveries: The peer pressure based on joint liability brings about a remarkable improvement in loan recoveries, leading to improved loan recycling and continued access to borrowings.

- Cost efficiency, better access to institutional credit: SHG can help rural women gaining better access to formal institutions of credit.

Besides these credit related benefits there are other benefits, which help the larger society. They can be summarised in brief as follows:

- SHGs, being people centered organisations, can take up various development activities in the area of education, water supply, environment, sanitation, road access, electric power and so on.

- As most SHGs are women centered, they can help ensure gender equality. The women's empowerment through SHGs would lead to benefits not only for the women but also for the family and the larger community.

- SHGs can help implement income generation programmes by collectively addressing entrepreneurial problems such as providing inputs, improving production and marketing facilities, and in obtaining better terms through their collective bargaining strength etc. (Women's Empowerment and Development, IGNOU, 2004)

Here is a case from *Ichikottai* which will help you understand the very simple functioning of SHG as well as its impact on the larger society.

Ichikottai Self Help Group

In Ichikottai, an SHG was initiated over an informal meeting between development workers and the villagers. To start with 20 women joined the SHG and pooled together Rs. 200 each. In 6 months time, three such groups were organised in the same village. On seeing these SHGs, the men organized a fourth one. Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) an organisation organised 20 other groups and introduced them to Indian Bank, Thenipatti-Pudipatti. The members now deposit their savings with the bank regularly. This has created a linkage between the bank and the women's groups.

In April 1997 the village mobilised nearly Rs. 50, 000 and the SHGs contributed to the development of the village by undertaking development activities like road construction, tank deepening, village sanitation, mosquito eradication, availing of government services and linking with nationalised banks among other things.

It is felt that being local and grass root based, the SHGs can address a host of issues that deal with every day problems of development, such as the isseu of water facility, opening a new school, forest management or addressing gender issues, besides generating credit among themselves and being credit worthy in the eyes of banking institutions.

Now, in India Self Help Groups have become an effective way of mobilising people to bring about transformation in rural structures and up lift the lot of disadvantaged groups. We are sure in your subsequent reading in rural development literature you will come across many efforts and organizations, which have been responsible for development of rural India.

1.6   LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we tried to explain the various factors and process involved in change as our starting point. We also tried to understand the avenues of change in the traditional Indian set up. Towards this end, we examined the concepts of sanskritisation and Westernisation as means of mobility in the Indian caste system. Then we looked at Mobilisation in the context of rural India and how our policies towards rural development have been top down and how they could bring about the desired amount of change. We tried to look at the latest efforts to mobilise groups. We attempted this by examining Self Help Groups as one process of collective Mobilisation.

1.7   KEY WORDS

Mobilisation	:	An act of organising collectivities of people towards achieving set goals.
Social mobility	:	A term used to explain change in one's social position or hierarchy of an individual or group.
Social Structure	:	Refers to a patterned networks or relationships among people and institutions, which are enduring and available over time.

1.8   REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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William Ogburn, 1964, *On Culture and Social Change*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, USA.

1.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress I

1) Whenever we talk about social change we are talking of changes which have far reaching consequences. In that sense social change is much more than a mere change which is fleeting. Change can be described as "transformation in organisation of society and in patterns of thought and behavour over time" (Maeionis 1987: 614).

   Industrial revolution is a good example of social change. Industrial revolution bought in far reaching changes in the very structure of society, not only in England where it appeared first, but also in the entire world.

2) The following are some of main sources of social change:

   Cultural process: Societies are constantly discovering and inventing things and ideas, some of which are diffused across culturals. These ideas take root and the culture or society gets transformed.

3) Electricity was a part of nature best exhibited during a thunder storm with lighting flashing across the sky, but it took an ingenious mind to tap it, find ways of providing it, storing it and distributing it for practically all modern day needs.

Check Your Progress II

1) *Ascriptive* means to possess a quality or a feature right from one's birth. Ascription has nothing to do with one's own effort, it is something one inherits or one is born into, like for instance the caste.

2) The term sanskritisation was coined by M.N. Srinivas to explain social mobility in the caste system. According to M.N. Srinivas, lower caste emulated the ways – rituals, dress, habits, food, etc.— of upper castes, which led to their eventual claim to the castes they imitated.

3) Westernisation means, the ways and aspects of Western Culture (British) which have had their impact in Indian. To a great extent, Westernisation disturbed the traditional caste structure by opening the social possibilities for lower castes. For instance, lower classes could abandon their tradition, lowly caste occupation and pick up other occupations in cities, etc. They could also access education and become socially mobile.

   However, Westernisation has not been able to eliminate caste hierarchies completely.