

BLOCK 4
SOCIETY AND POLITICS



BLOCK 4 INTRODUCTION

India is a diverse society consisting multiple social identities such as caste, tribe, gender, etc., and social classes - farmers and workers. They have relationship with politics. Politics is a process through which multiple identities and social groups seek to resolve their conflicts and have their issues addressed. Overall, politics is about being able to participate in making decisions about these issues through their representatives or by participating in political activities. Politics occurs within the institutions and outside them – in public spaces or even within private spaces. The identities represent society, and they interact with politics. Thus, there is relationship between society and politics. This relationship is reciprocal: the society impacts politics and vice-versa. The 3 units in this block are about such relationship. Unit 10 is about caste, class and tribe. Unit 11 discusses social and political issues in relation to gender. Unit 12 deals with the issues of farmers and workers in India, and their relationship with politics.



UNIT 10 CASTE, CLASS AND TRIBE*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Caste
- 10.3 Class
- 10.4 Tribe
 - 10.4.1 Meaning
 - 10.4.2 Characteristics
 - 10.4.3 Tribes and Political Movements
- 10.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.6 References
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10.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is about three important aspects of Indian society. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meanings and differences between caste, class and tribe;
- Understand the changes which have taken place in their features; and
- Analyse their impact on politics and vice-versa.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit is about identities. Identities denote relations among social groups. Some identities are hereditary. The nature of such identities may undergo changes, but these identities remain. Caste is such an identity. Some identities are not hereditary. They depend upon the economic conditions. Such identities are classes. Some identities are defined by certain characteristics which members of such group have. Such identities are known as tribes. Caste, class, tribe are among several other identities such as religion, language or region. As you will read in this unit, caste, class and tribe are crucial identities that impact social, economic and political aspects in India.

10.2 CASTE

Caste denotes position of a social group in a hierarchy of relations. This position is based on the birth of a person. Apart from the caste being hereditary, it is also endogamous. It means that a person can marry within his or her caste. These are the notional features of caste. Traditionally, every caste was assigned specific occupation in society. The caste-based occupations also indicated the social hierarchy in the society. Different castes were grouped into four varnas: Brahmins, Khatris, Vaishyas and Shudras. The erstwhile untouchable castes which are placed in the Scheduled Caste (SC) category in the government gazette are also

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known as Dalits. Over the years especially after Independence, these ideal features of castes have undergone significant changes. However, its two features – its hereditary nature and endogamy remain largely enduring. According to Louis Dumont, the author of *Homo Hierarchicus*, different castes in India are placed in a graded hierarchy. He argues that in power relationships among castes, Brahmins enjoy more decisive role than the Kshatriya. Dumont's notion of caste has been challenged by Nicholas Dirks and others. The Dumont's notion was criticized as it failed to explain the social change, dynamism and individualistic strivings even within the traditional Indian society. Gerald Berreman pointed out that principle of Brahmanical hierarchy was not uniformly followed by all Hindus. He also criticised the Dumontian notion that power and economic factors are distinct and epiphenomenal to caste. It has been pointed out by others that caste hierarchy is not a fixed hierarchy; rather it is context-specific and fluid and contains seeds of contestation among various castes. Nicholas Dirks cites ethnographic and textual evidence to demonstrate that Brahmins and their texts were not so central to the social fabric of Indian life. According to this view, power relations and command over men and resources were more important. Brahmins were merely ritual specialists, often subordinate to powerful ruling families. According to this view the caste-based scriptural or Brahmanical model of traditional India was an invention of the British Orientalists and ethnographers. However, caste played a very critical role in the Indian social-reformers' and nationalists' perception of caste. It was certainly not a mere product of British imagination. Disagreeing with Louis Dumont, sociologist Dipankar Gupta argues that though different castes are placed in a hierarchical order, they have emerged as discrete caste or distinct caste identities.

The policies of the state – social welfare schemes for the welfare of marginalised groups, implementation of Constitutional provisions prohibiting caste-based untouchability, reservation for the SCs in government jobs, political institutions, land reforms, etc. diluted the rigidity of caste relations. Specifically, the notion of purity and pollution do not impact the role of caste outside family as rigidly as it did earlier, in the public sphere. This phenomenon is called as secularisation of caste by political scientists such as Rajni Kothari and D.L. Sheth. Caste has played an important role in Indian democracy. Following the introduction of universal adult franchise with the commencement of Indian Constitution, as every adult citizen of India got an opportunity to participate in electoral democracy, caste became an important tool for political mobilisation. Castes formed caste associations. According to Lyod Rudolph and Sussan Rudolph caste associations have played crucial role in mobilising castes for getting their democratic rights. In the book edited by Christophe Jaffrelot and Sanjay Kumar, *Rise of the Plebians?*, several scholars have argued that participation of Dalits and OBCs (Other Backward Classes) in different states has increased, especially since the last decades of the twentieth century. This is reflection of change in nature of caste in the post-Independence period. Apart from caste associations, several parties which address the issues of specific castes or caste groups have emerged in India. These parties aim to empower specific castes. In Uttar Pradesh, the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) attempted to empower majority sections (Bahujan Samaj), mostly Dalits and Backward Classes. Similarly, in the 1970-80s, political parties led by Charan Singh, the BKD (Bharatiya Kranti Dal), BLD (Bharatiya Lok Dal) or LD (Lok Dal) mobilised the backward classes farming communities in north India. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK, AIADMK mobilised the backward classes or dravidas. Support bases of the Congress, especially till the 1980s, and that of

the BJP from the 2014 consist of multiple castes. The policies of the governments led by these parties devised policies to mobilise their support. This helped them to get support of various castes.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the features of caste and what changes have taken place in them?

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2) Discuss the role between caste in politics?

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10.3 CLASS

Class is different from the caste. Unlike caste, class is not hereditary. It is also not restricted to any religion. Class denotes economic position of a group or a person belonging to such group. Class is generally associated with the relationship of a person to economic aspect. It shows the relationship of a group with the economic resources, control of the resources and their distribution among groups or individuals. Although class is an economic category, it is not devoid of its relationship with non-economic aspects such as caste, tribe or religion. In Marxian terms, there are basically two types of classes: the haves and the have-nots. The haves own resource or means of production, and the have-nots do not own resources but have labour power. In a capitalist society, those who own means of production are called bourgeoisie. They do not work, and work in their enterprise is done by workers or the proletariat. The bourgeoisie make profit from the labour of the workers. Thus, in a capitalist society, there are basically two classes: the bourgeois or capitalists and the proletariat or the working classes. Harish Damodaran in *India's New Capitalists* explains that caste background of the capitalists became since the last few decades of the twentieth became wider than it was till a few years after the Independence. Since, in India, the industries form a smaller proportion of economy in comparison to agriculture, the industrialist and working classes form smaller part of classes. Lyod Rudolph and Sussan Rudolph in *Pursuit of Lakshmi* underline that working classes form tiny section of Indian classes. Classes can be observed in agrarian sector also. But composition and formation of classes in Indian agriculture have varied in different regions. In

the post-Independence period, the agrarian classes can be described as follows: landlords and tenants; kulaks/rich peasants/middle peasants and agricultural labourers; marginal and small farmers, and footloose labour. Landlords and tenants generally had existed before the implementation land reforms in different states in India. However, they have not completely disappeared in every state. In several parts of the country, new classes emerged abolition of zamindari following implementation of land reforms. These classes came to be known as rich farmers, kulaks or self-cultivating middle farmers. In the areas which have witnessed green revolution, these classes got involved in cash crops. These areas also seen the emergence of agricultural labourers, who work on the land of the landowning classes. Besides, there are classes who own small landholdings. These landholdings are not enough to meet their family needs. Apart from working in their land, they work in others' land or somewhere else. These are known as marginal or small farmers. Apart from these classes, there are some social groups who are not engaged in some fixed occupation. They do whatever work is available to them. They do not own land or do not have any durable means of livelihood. In his book *Footloose Labour*, Jan Breman terms these classes as footloose labour. Classes have close relationship with caste. Although all classes are found in all castes, generally the low castes – Dalits and lower section have larger share of poorer classes than the high castes. The rich farmers or middle farmers mostly belong to high castes and middle classes such as Jats, Yadavs, Marathas, Reddis, Kammas, Vokaliggas and Lingayats. The agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, footloose labour mostly belong to Dalits and lower backward classes. Besides, industry and agriculture, there are classes in service sectors which consist of multiple middle classes. Middle classes generally denote those classes who are engaged in salaried occupations in public or private sectors. They also include professionals or self-employed persons such as doctors, lawyers or journalists. Middle classes are not homogeneous groups. Depending on their economic conditions and positions in public or private jobs, middle classes can be grouped as lower, middle or upper middle classes.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What is the difference between caste and class?
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- 2) What is the composition of India's New Capitalists?
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3) What is footloose labour?

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10.4 TRIBE

10.4.1 Meaning

Tribes refers to a group of people who share some characteristics which are different from those of castes. As you have read section 10.2, caste is basically associated with Hindu communities (though there are castes among other religion such as Muslims or Sikhs) social status and caste occupations have been traditionally defined by birth into caste and by endogamy. The principal defining characteristic of a tribe is not birth into a specific religion; tribes belong to different religions – animists, Christians, Buddhists or Muslims. Some scholars regard tribals as ‘indigenous’. In Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and a section of tribals in Assam are also known as adivasis. Tribals in India have been subjected to prolonged exploitation and deprivation. Tribe as a concept was introduced by the British during the nineteenth century in India. It was used to differentiate the communities which did not fit into the definition of castes. The concept of tribe was officially defined in the Government of India Act, 1935. In India, tribals predominantly inhabit the states of northeast India (with largest numbers of tribes in India), Jharkhand (earlier – Chhotanagpur), Andaman Nicobar and some other regions in the country such as Odisha, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Nilgiris, central India, Gujarat, Rajasthan. According to Article 341 of the Constitution, the President of India may specify tribes or tribal communities, groups within certain tribes in a state for the purpose of the Constitution. In view of this notification, the Parliament may include or exclude tribes from the list of Scheduled Tribes in a State.

The constitution of India has several provisions for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in India. Article 342 provides for special administrative measures for the welfare of the ‘Scheduled Tribes’. The state shall provide special provisions for the welfare of such tribes such as reservation in public offices and in the Parliament and Vidhan Sabhas (Articles 16, 46, 335 (consideration of members of these groups in making appointment to services, etc.), 330 and 332). The constitution also ensures protection of the ‘tribal’ languages, dialects and culture (article 29). The VI Schedule provides for establishment of Autonomous District Councils in the hills inhabited by the tribes in northeast India. The V Schedule Area provides for the establishment of Tribal Advisory Councils in ‘tribal’ dominated areas of mainland India. Tribal Advisory Councils consist of members of which three quarters are to be representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the respective state. The function of the council is to advise the state government on matters pertaining to welfare and interests of the ‘tribes’ in the state. Autonomous District Councils on the other hand provide ‘tribal’ communities space for a certain legal and administrative autonomy, a form of

self-governance. Thus, a clear and strong legal framework exists, anchored in the constitution of India, within which the national state's agenda for the social, economic and political 'upliftment' (as it is locally referred to) of 'tribal' people has to be understood. The constitution of India contains many special assertions for the 'tribes.'

10.4.2 Characteristics

Tribes are generally identified by certain features. It is important to note that as tribal societies are undergoing transformation, the characteristics of tribes are getting affected by the transformation. However, we can identify certain features which are associated with tribes. These are given below:

- i) Traditionally tribes have been inhabiting hills and forests, which are generally located in areas which lack basic facilities – roads, schools, health facilities;
- ii) The agriculture in such areas mostly involve family labour. In the tribal-dominated areas, *Jhum* or shifting cultivation is practiced, and people are engaged in livestock, fishing, hunting, forestry, etc. – construction sector, mining and quarrying.
- iii) Usage of relatively traditional means of cultivation.
- iv) The tribals do not have access to developed market to sell their products.
- v) In comparison to women in the non-tribal societies women generally enjoy more equality.
- vi) Tribal chiefs or community leaders play decisive roles in the adjudication of affairs within the tribes.

During the post-Independence period, the tribal communities have witnessed changes. However, these changes have not impacted tribes all regions equally; there exist inequalities in their economic and educational standards within the same tribes and same regions. These changes have mainly occurred due to policies of the state and central governments made according to the special provisions of the Constitution. The Sixth Schedule and Fifth Schedules of the Constitutions protect the customs and economic interests, and political rights of tribes in the hills and plain areas. Policies for reservation in public employment, the elected bodies and welfare schemes have contributed to change in tribal society to a considerable extent. As a result of these changes new classes have emerged among different tribes in India. These classes are middle classes such as teachers, engineers, doctors, businessmen, politicians. Some of them are contributing to the welfare of tribal societies. Besides, the rise of new classes, intrusion of market has disrupted the tribal economy, leading to ecological degradation and depletion and extraction of natural resources. The tribal-inhabited areas have been subjected to exploitation and suffered deprivation.

10.4.3 Tribes and Political Movements

Tribes in different regions of India have been engaged in political movements against their exploitation and for their political autonomy from time to time. During the nineteenth century, the tribes were involved in a series of revolts against the colonial rule and its interference in the lives, culture and rights of tribal communities. Consequently, an administrative system for 'tribal' areas was

created which was different from the general Indian administration. The distinct legislative and executive measures were adopted which primarily aimed at protecting and safeguarding the interests and welfare of the ‘tribes.’ From 1874 onwards, ‘tribes’ or ‘tribal areas’, i.e, the areas that had a majority of ‘tribal’ population, were governed by the Scheduled District. As per this Act, the Government was required to specify what laws were to be enforced in the Scheduled Areas or Districts; these laws were from different from the ones applied elsewhere in India. These Provisions were continued in post-independent India despite their colonial roots and origins.

In post-Independence period also, the tribals have been involved in movements for ending backwardness of their regions and their political marginalisation. Through the movements, they seek political and regional autonomy by rearranging existing relations between vertical units of governance – the local self- governance institutions, state and the centre. The rearrangement of these relations range from district, regional level autonomy within a state, to creation of new state out of an existing state or even to getting a sovereign state. Some tribal groups have been involved in insurgency, which means they get popular support in their movement, which often become violent. Among the examples of different types of autonomy movements in northeast India are the movements of Nagas in the Naga-inhabited areas, of Mizos in Mizoram and of Bodo tribes in Assam.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What is a tribe? How is different from caste?

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2) What the characteristics of a tribal society?

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3) What are special constitutional provisions for the welfare of tribes?

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10.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have read about three identity groups – caste, class and tribe. Caste is a hereditary and endogamous category. Although nature of caste has undergone changes, it remains an enduring identity. Caste-based hierarchies exist. But different castes have emerged as discrete units. Castes have formed caste associations. They have contributed to increasing role of castes in Indian democracy. In the past few years, lower castes' participation in democratic process has increased. Class denotes relationship of a group or person with the resources and their distribution. Unlike caste, class is not a permanent category. Class of a person may change with the change in his or her relations with the resources and their distribution. There are rich farmers, kulaks, middle farmers and agricultural labourers, small or marginal farmers and footloose labour in agriculture sector; capitalists and working classes in industrial sector; and middle classes in the salaried or professional groups. Tribes are identified on the basis of some characteristics: their closeness to natural resources such as forests; relatively more equality for in comparison to women in non-tribal societies; decisive role of the tribal chiefs in affairs of the community; and relatively traditional tools in agriculture. However, these characteristics are undergoing considerable changes.

10.6 REFERENCES

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10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Caste is a social group in which position of a person is determined by birth. It is dedicatory system. A caste follows endogamy. Traditionally, castes can

be identified with specific occupations. In this post-Independence period, various state policies such as land reforms, social welfare and reservations of the SCs and OBCs in public jobs and political institutions have diluted to the rigidity of caste relations.

- 2) Introduction of universal adult franchise following the commencement of Constitution in 1950, provided all castes equal opportunities to participate in politics. They formed caste associations which helped in empowerment of castes, especially the Dalits and the OBCs. Particularly, since the 1990s of the twentieth century, the participation of the Dalits and OBCs in democratic politics has increased.

Check your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Caste is a hereditary and endogenous category. Class denotes the relationship of a group or persons with resources and their distribution.
- 2) Composition of new capitalists is different from the earlier capitalists. Unlike the latter, the composition of the new capitalists is wider.
- 3) Footloose labour consists of social groups who do not have any fixed means of livelihood. They do whatever work is available to them. They do not own land or any other means of livelihood.

Check your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Tribe is a group of people who are conscious that they share all or some of several common markers – culture, language, race, religion, history, etc. The tribes generally have some features such as distant location of their habitat from the areas which are supposed to be mainstream, relative equality of women in comparison to non-tribes, and prominence of the role of chief of tribes. Tribes are different from caste. Caste is mainly a feature of Hindu society. The identity of caste is not religion specific. Tribes belong to different religions – Muslims, Buddhists, Christians or animists.
- 2) Characteristics of tribes are undergoing change. However, their general features are as follows. Tribes have traditionally been inhabiting hills and forests. The agriculture in such areas mostly involve family labour and they use relatively traditional means of cultivation. They are engaged in livestock, fishing, hunting, forestry, etc. – construction sector, mining and quarrying. They practice *Jhum* or shifting cultivation. They do not have easy access to market.
- 3) Articles 16, 46, 335 (consideration of members of these groups in making appointment to services) 330 and 332. The constitution also ensures protection of the ‘tribal’ languages, dialects and culture (article 29). The V and VI Schedules of the constitution provide for protection of tribal culture and autonomy.

UNIT 11 GENDER*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Gender and Issues
- 11.3 Gender and Development
- 11.4 Gender and Movements
 - 11.4.1 Historical Background
 - 11.4.2 Post-Independence Period
- 11.5 LGBTQ or Transgender Persons
- 11.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.7 References
- 11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

11.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to the issue of gender in Indian society. After going through it you will be able to:

- Differentiate between sex and gender;
- Explain the position of men, women and transgenders in Indian society;
- Identify the issues relating to gender question; and
- Analyse the nature of gender-based movements in India.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

People in a society can be identified on the basis of language, religion, caste, sex, gender, tribe, etc. As this unit is about gender, it is essential to know what gender is and how it is different from a related concept, sex. Generally, many people consider that sex and gender are the same. This is not true. There is a difference between the sex and the gender. Sex denotes biological identity of a person; gender signifies the role of social, economic, political and other factors in determining the position of sex in society. It means the levels of social status, economic conditions and power positions of men, women or transgenders are determined by the social, economic and political conditions in which they are placed. As men, women and transgenders grow in different circumstances, they do not enjoy similar status in society. There exists social hierarchy, economic and political inequalities in their positions. In our society, men are placed in higher position in relation to women, men and transgenders. This is reflected in relation to their position to inherit property, choice of career opportunities, in matters of marriage or clothing or social behaviour. Men enjoy more freedom than the women or transgenders. Their unequal positions in society show their different positions in relation to gender. The society in which men enjoy superior

*This unit is mostly drawn upon material from unit 24 BPSE-212 written by Ms. Jayanti Alam and Unit 20 written by Dr. Rakesh Batabyal, MPS-003.

power than the women are known as patriarchal societies, and in the societies where women theoretically enjoy power in certain aspects of society are matriarchal societies. These are also reflected in the value system in a society. Patriarchal values do not treat women with equality. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) explains how power or patriarchy shapes gender relations. Kate Millet was influenced by feminist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex* (1949). In India, with exception of three tribes in Meghalaya – Khasis, Garos and Jaintias; Nairs in Kerala and some tribes in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, patriarchy exists. Among these tribes matrilineal system exists. However, as Tiplut Nongbri, a sociologist, underlines with reference to the Khasis, matrilineal system does not treat women equally in some respects.

11.2 GENDER AND ISSUES

Since the 1980s, the scope of women's movements at the local levels – villages and towns and at higher levels and range of issues raised by them have widened. However, these movements have not occurred with similar effectiveness everywhere. On the basis of what you have read above, we can say that gender-related issues are not the problems only of women, men or transgender. They concern all. Their solution also lies in collaborative efforts of all. However, as the genders' position is determined by unequal location of men, women and transgender in social, political and economic relations, it is women who are apparently placed in the most vulnerable position. Several problems continue to pose a challenge to their emancipation or empowerment. Many practices abetting gender-based discrimination have been legally banned, and do not get approval from every section of the society. Despite this, however, they continue to exist. They exist in families, public places and in workplaces. Some examples of gender-based discrimination are as follows: rape, domestic violence, discrimination of daughters, dowry, bride burning, sex determination tests; in the public places, cases of harassment; in society, child marriage, discrimination by some traditional caste panchayats such as *khaps*; and in the work. Besides, women are discriminated in getting wages for the work which is equal to the men's work.

11.3 GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Gender-based inequality is largely rooted in social and economic disparities, lack of representation of women and transgender in decision making institutions. It can be argued that if women become economically independent, get educated, and get political representation, their equality can be achieved. Although economic independence help in reduction of gender-based discrimination, it is not a sufficient condition. Such conditions can be supplemented by change in the patriarchal values. It means that men, women and transgenders are entitled for equal treatment as human beings. Gender-based discrimination is, thus, embedded in the level of human development. Human development means development of human beings in terms of economic independence or having viable means of livelihood, getting proper education and keeping good health and getting respect as a human being. Even as job, education and health are important factors to remove gender-based inequality. They are inadequate without being accompanied by provisions for self-respect and dignity. That is possible by change in patriarchal values that support gender-based discrimination. Amartya Sen in *Development as Freedom* (2000) argues that development in terms of developing capabilities

in human being – health and education, result in providing freedom to human beings.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the answers give at the end of the unit.

1) What is difference between sex and gender?

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2) What are the main issues of gender discrimination?

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3) What is the relationship between gender and development?

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11.4 GENDER AND MOVEMENTS

11.4.1 Historical Background

The trajectory of women’s movement in India can be traced to pre-Independence period. These movements addressed almost all kinds of issues concerning women. Some of these remain focus of contemporary women’s movement in India. Some social reformers played leading role in combatting some practices which undermined women’s rights and dignity. Contemporary movements in India to end gender-based discrimination can be traced to the pre-Independence period. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Ram Mohan Roy and Bidyalankar fought against the practice of Sati. In 1817, Pandit Mrityunjay Bidyalankar declared that sati had no “Shastric” sanction. Similarly, in the 1850s Pandit Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar argued that the Shastras were not opposed to the re-marriage of a widow. One year later Governor William Bentinck prohibited Sati in his province, viz. Bengal. It took 11 years for this prohibition to get extended

to other parts of India as the Sati Prohibition Act of 1929. Against the prohibition of widow remarriage, a Widow Remarriage Association was established in Madras in 1871. In 1878, Virasalingam started the Rajamundri Social Reform Association, focusing mainly on widow re-marriage. Jyotirao Phule founded Satya Sodhak Samaj to end social evils associated with castes, which negatively affected women also. Swami Dayanand started Arya Samaj movement to initiate reforms within Hindus. He interpreted the Shastra to argue that men and women were equals. He opposed polygamy and child marriage. He supported compulsory education for boys and girls both and suggested that equal stress on tradition and modernity through the compulsory learning of Sanskrit and English. He raised the age of marriage for girls and boys to 16 and 25, respectively. Due to the influence of the social reformers the British government made laws which banned custom of sati and child marriage, permitted women to remarry, etc. Women leaders supported by the Congress demanded equal voting right and representation for women in legislative bodies. All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was set up in the 1920s to spread education among women.

11.4.2 The Post-Independence Period

Gender-based discrimination and inequality became a focus of studies in social sciences during the 1975-85, which was known as the International Women's decade. Gender studies became priority agenda of research of the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR) and the University Grant Commission (UGC). In several universities centres for women's studies were established. Some scholars argue that the women's movement in India is influenced by women's movement in west. But some scholars disagree with this view and argue (Seemanthini Niranjana) that feminist movement is rooted in culture and national history of India (Shah 2004).

Patriarchal values impact the attitude of the state institutions and society towards gender-based inequality and discrimination. A large number of persons in society are not averse to the gender-based discrimination. They support practices and customs which endorse gender-based discrimination, which include Sati, ban of entry of women in certain religious institutions, etc. These values are shared by some persons who run public institutions. These institutions symbolise the state. Thus, we can see a section of society and the state share common patriarchal values. However, along with the presence of patriarchal and misogynist elements in the society and the state, there are several organizations, activists, scholars, intellectuals and leaders who attempt to end gender-based discrimination and inequality. They strive to end male dominance and seek equality for all genders – men, women and transgenders. Indeed, opposition to gender-based discrimination and search for gender equality has assumed the form of women's and LGBTQ movement. These movements address gender-based issues, have leaderships, organizations, and patterns of mobilization.

On the basis of ideological orientations, Gail Omvedt categorises women's movements into two types: women's equality movements and women's liberation movements. The former have a specific goal, i.e., to abolish patriarchal inequality. They do not directly target the existing family, social and economic structure. The movement for women's liberation directly challenges feudal hierarchy and sexual division of labour. Women's movements adopt different ways such as demonstrations, dharnas, mass petitions, social media, etc. to underline their

demands and pressurise the government to accept them. These ways also help to generate consciousness and sensitise people about gender discrimination and gender inequality. The most recent case of gender-based infringement of human right included the Nirbhaya case that took place in Delhi in December 2012. One student nick-named as Nirbhaya died because she was gangraped and tortured by six men while she was travelling in a bus. One of the culprits was the driver of the bus. This is an example of how patriarchal and misogynist values can endanger the life and honour of women. The incident provoked massive public protest in Delhi and other cities. The court sentenced four culprits to be hanged till death: one of the culprits committed suicide and one was sent to juvenile home. The government also set up Justice Verma Committee to suggest as to how gender-based discrimination can be ended. The Justice Verma Committee made recommendations for ending gender-based discrimination.

Gender discrimination and inequalities are intertwined with caste hierarchy and economic inequality. While women and transgenders from all castes, religions, tribes or economic strata face gender-based discrimination, those from low castes and economically poor classes face multiple forms of discrimination. A Dalit or tribal woman agricultural labourer is more vulnerable to gender, caste and class-based discrimination. However, organisations such as Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA), Working Women's Forum and Annapuran Mahila Mandal empower women by carrying out economic activities. Leadership in women's movements generally belong to educated upper castes and middle classes.

11.5 LGBTQ OR TRANSGENDER PERSONS

Gender-based movements are part of new social movements. The new social movements refer to those social movements or collective action which are different from the movements which occurred prior to the 1980s in the following ways. They are movements of those social groups or social classes which were not visibly involved in collective mobilization; they address new kinds of issues and they claim to be politically apolitical or they are not affiliated to any political party. Among such groups are included transgender groups. They are also known as LGBTQ (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender and Queers). According to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, a transgender person is "one who is—(a) neither wholly female or male; (b) a combination of female and male; or (c) neither female nor male. Such a person's gender does not match the gender assigned at birth, and includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers". Transgenders faced discrimination due to the status of their gender. They face social stigma, discrimination in getting employment in public or private institutions, and within their families. The LGBTQ groups in India have been mobilising themselves to influence the law makers to make laws to end their multiple discrimination and provide them dignity and self-respect. Right to self-Identification is among their main demands.

In response to their movement, Truchi Siva placed a Private Members Bill in Rajya Sabha on December 12, 2014. In Rajya Sabha, the Bill was passed unanimously on 24 April, 2015. On 6 September 2018 the Supreme Court legalised homosexuality in India. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 was passed by the Lok Sabha on August 5, 2019. The Bill prohibits discrimination against transgender persons including denial of service or unfair treatment in relation to education, employment, healthcare, access to, or enjoyment

of goods, facilities, opportunities available to the public, right to movement, right to reside, rent, own or otherwise occupy property, opportunity to hold public or private office, and access to a government or private establishment in whose care or custody a transgender person is. It also sought to provide right to self-identification to transgenders. It will be left to a transgender person whether she/he wants to be identified a man, women or transgender. The Bill also suggested that the government should introduce some welfare measures for the transgender persons.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What is the significance of the International Women's decade?

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2) What is difference between women's equality movements and women's liberation movements?

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3) What has been the impact of gender-based movements?

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11.6 LET US SUM UP

Gender is one of the markers of identity of an individual. It is different from sex. Sex indicates biological status of a person. Gender shows how the status of a man, woman or transgender is shaped by the social, economic and political circumstances. There are three kinds of gender: men, women and transgender or LGBTQ (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgenders and Queers). In most of India, patriarchy defines the relationship between men and women. Men enjoy more rights than women and are generally considered superior to women. Women

face multiple types of discrimination and inequalities in society. However, among some tribes of India such as Khasis, Garos and Jaintias, and among Nairs in Kerala and some tribes in Andaman and Nicobar, matrilineal system defines the position of men and women in society. In such system, women have more rights than the men in a patriarchal system. Gender-based inequalities and discrimination occur because of the domination of patriarchal values and lack of economic independence to women or transgenders. Provisions that ensure participation of women and transgenders in the decision-making bodies can help in eliminating gender-based discrimination and inequalities. Since the 1980s, growth of consciousness about such discrimination has resulted in women's and transgenders' movements. Consequently, laws against practice of sati, dowry, domestic violence, etc, and laws protecting the rights to transgender have been passed.

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11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The difference between sex and gender is as follows. Sex is a biological category on the basis which a person can be identified as man, woman or transgender. The position of such person in power relations, social hierarchy or economic opportunities denote the gender. Gender is determined by the social, economic, political, etc. of a person.
- 2) The principal examples of gender-based discrimination include rape, domestic violence, discrimination in workplaces and in the families, dowry, bride-burning, sex determination tests, humiliation, child marriage, customary practices such as *sati*, etc.
- 3) Gender and development are interrelated. Since the gender is determined by social, political and economic circumstances, development of capabilities of a person can help in improving conditions which are related to the gender. If a woman or transgender gets proper education, nutrition and health care this can contribute to her empowerment.

- 1) Significance of the International Women's Decade (1975-85) lies in the fact during this period gender-based discrimination became a focus of research. The ICSSR and the UGC gave priority to gender-related research.
- 2) The goal of women's equality movements is to end patriarchal inequalities. The goal of women's liberation movements is wider i.e. to directly challenge feudal hierarchy and sexual division of labour.
- 3) The gender-based movements have generated consciousness about gender-based discrimination and need to end it. Due to their impact, several rules seeking to end gender-based discrimination and inequalities have been passed by the government. However, gender discrimination continues to exist in different forms.



UNIT 12 WORKERS AND PEASANTS*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Workers Movements
 - 12.2.1 Workers' Movements in the colonial period
 - 12.2.2 The Issues and the Types of Collective Actions
 - 12.2.2 Workers' Movements in the Post-colonial Period
- 12.3 Peasant Movements
 - 12.3.1 Small and Poor Peasants' Movements
 - 12.3.2 Rich Peasants' and Farmers' Movements
- 12.4 Impact of Liberalisation on the Workers' and Peasant Movements
- 12.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.6 References
- 12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

Workers and peasants in India have been involved in the collective actions in order to fight for their demands. Their collective actions like those of other social group can be included in the social and political movements. After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Explain the nature of the movements of the workers and peasants;
- Understand their demands, problems and leaderships;
- Define patterns of mobilisation in the collective actions;
- Analyse the influence of these movements on the state; and
- Analyse the impact of the liberalisation on the workers and peasants.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Workers and the peasants together form the largest groups of the Indian society. While the workers largely belong to the exploited section, the peasants consist of both the poor and the rich sections. These groups have been involved in the collective actions or the social and political movements to get their demand fulfilled. The nature of the issues raised by them or their leadership depends on the place they occupy in the economy or society. It also depends on the fact whether the workers are engaged in the organised, unorganised, agrarian or the industrial sectors or whether a peasant is a poor peasant or the rich peasant operating in the mechanised capitalist economy or in the backward –feudal economy. In this unit, we shall discuss important features of the workers and peasants movements in India.

*Adopted from BPSE-212, Unit 28, Dr. Rabindra Narayan Mishra, Dept.of Political Science S.G.T.B., Khalsa College, University of Delhi

12.2 WORKERS' MOVEMENTS

The workers movement in India can be divided in two phases – the pre-Independence period and the post-Independence period.

12.2.1 Workers' Movements in the Colonial Period

The modern working class made its appearance in India in the second half of the 19th century with the growth of modern industries, railways, post and telegraph network, plantation and mining. But the labour movement started in an organised way only after the Second World War. The organised workers' unions are known as the trade unions. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in 1920. Its objective was to coordinate activities of all organisations in all the provinces of India to further the interests of the Indian labour in economic, social and political matters. In the second half of the 1920s there was a consolidation of left ideological forces in the country. In 1928 the left wing including the communists succeeded in acquiring dominant position inside the AITUC. The moderates started a new organisation known as All India Trade Union Federation (AITUF). The 1930s was not a favourable period for the growth of trade union movement of India. The communists were implicated in the Meerut Conspiracy case and the Bombay Textiles strike of 1929 had failed. A lull marked the activities on the trade union front. The serious economic depression of this period added to the woes of the workers further. It led to large-scale retrenchment. The main focus of the trade union movements during this period was maintaining wages and preventing retrenchment.

The Second World War divided the trade union leaders. The communists argued that with the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 the character of the war had changed from imperialist war to people's war. The communists were following the line of the Russian Communist Party and thought that in the changed circumstances it was the duty of the workers to support British war efforts. But the nationalist leaders wanted to strengthen the national movement to overthrow the British rule from India. The ideological rift led to another split in the trade union movement. The mounting cost of living made the workers to realise the need of an organised effort to secure relief. In spite of the government resorting to Defence of India Rules, which prohibited strikes and lockouts, there was a perceptible increase in number of both unions and organised workers.

12.2.2 The Issues and the Types of Collective Actions

The main issues which caused the workers strikes included: wages, bonus, personnel, leave and hours of work, violence and indiscipline, industrial and labour policies, etc. The workers take recourse to various types of collective actions for getting their problems redressed. These are – strikes, satyagrah, hunger strikes, *bandhs* and *hartals*, *gharaos*, demonstrations, mass casual leaves, work to rule, cutting of supply of electricity, etc. The most common form of workers' collective action is the strike. There are examples of the railway, jute, plantation, mine and textiles workers strikes in the pre-Independence period. The centres of the strikes were Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Madras, Howrah and Calcutta. In 1920 Gandhi intervened in the strike of the textile workers of Ahmedabad and provided leadership to the workers.

12.2.3 Workers' Movements in the Post-Colonial Period

i) The National Level

The high hopes of workers were shattered after independence. There was hardly any improvement on the fronts of better wages and other service conditions. Three central trade union organisations were borne. The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) started by the Congress party was born in 1947. The Praja Socialist Party started the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) in 1948. The workers had to struggle hard even to retain what they had achieved earlier. A series of strikes stirred the country. There were highest number of strikes in 1947, i.e., 1811 strikes which involved 1840 thousand workers. The number of strikes and man-days lost had surpassed all the previous records. This declined in the 1950s, but number of strikes and lock-outs increased again in the 1960s-1970s. Some radicalists had formed the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) in 1949. After 1964 when there was a division in the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) was borne, this led to a split in Communist controlled AITUC as well. And in 1970 Centre for Indian Trade Union (CITU) was borne. They are affiliated to the CPI and CPI (M).

According to the provisional figures released by the Chief Labour Commissioner in 1994 Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) which is an affiliate of BJP acquired a total membership of 31.17 lakh workers securing it the top position. The INTUC a Congress affiliated body with a total membership of 27.06 lakh is on the second position. The third position is enjoyed by CITU affiliated to CPSM with a total membership of 17.98 lakh. The fourth position is enjoyed by HMS.

ii) The Provincial Levels

Another remarkable development of the 1960s was the birth of trade unions of the regional parties like the DMK and AIDMK in Madras. The Shiv Sena was born in Bombay in 1967. It soon set up its labour wing called Bharatiya Kamgar Sena. It was generally believed that the Shiv Sena had the backing of the industrial houses in the Bombay -Pune belt to counter the strong influence of the Communists and Socialists in labour unions. It succeeded in achieving this objective and its trade union established its supremacy in the Bombay region by the mid -1970s. The predominance of the Sena -led union was successfully challenged by Datta Samant, an eminent INTUC leader. When emergency was imposed in 1975 he refused to tone down his militancy. He was arrested and sent to jail. Then he was a Congress MLA. After coming out of jail when the emergency was lifted in 1977 he became even more popular. By the end of the 1970s he became the most powerful trade union leader in the Bombay -Pune belt. In the year 1978 he left both congress and the INTUC to set up an independent union named the Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU). He remained one of the most influential trade union leader in Bombay till he was murdered.

(iii) The Trade Unions without Political Affiliations

The 1960s also witnessed the emergence of independent or “apolitical” unions. They were independent in the sense that they were not affiliated to

any political party or federation. These kinds of “apolitical” trade unions emerged out of the dissatisfaction of the workers with the existing trade unions which were affiliated to the political parties. The leadership of these unions has largely come from the educated middle classes. Engineering Mazdoor Sabha led by R J Mehta was one of the earliest unions of these type-covering workers in engineering, chemicals, printing and allied industries. Datta Samant started a number of unions like Association of Engineering workers, Mumbai General Kamgar Union, Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union. Shankar Guha Neyogi and A.K.Roy also came into limelight as leaders of independent unions. Neyogi concentrated on mobilising contract workers in the iron –ore mines of Dalli Rajhara near Bhilai in Madhya Pradesh. While AITUC and INTUC were concerned with the problems of permanent and better paid workers of the Bhilai Steel Plant, Neyogi concentrated on casual workers employed in small and medium-scale industries in the region. Neyogi was murdered in 1990. Another example of this type is A.K.Roy who organised coal mine workers in the Dhanbad - Jharia belt of Bihar. Roy’s support base was also among contract and casual labour in the coalmines. Roy also received support from a large number of local tribal mine workers because the trade unions operating in these areas did not satisfy them. Another important example of this type was the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) formed by Ela Bhat. She founded SEWA because she felt that unions in the organised sectors were not sensitive to the problems encountered by female workers.

One of the most important examples of the movement launched by the union which was not affiliated to the political parties was the textile workers’ strike of 1982 in Mumbai. Dissatisfied with the Rastriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS), affiliated to the INTUC the workers of the textile industry in Mumbai, rallied behind the MGKU-led by Datta Samant.

The workers of the textile workers of Mumbai went on indefinite strike on January 18, 1982. The demands of the workers included higher wages, making the *badli* (temporary) workers permanent, allowances for leave and travel and payment for house rent. The workers of other sectors than the textile also rallied behind Datta Samant. The Industrialists adopted intransigent attitude towards the strike.

The strike had its repercussion on the rural areas to which the workers belonged. The textile workers also were the poor peasants or small farmers having links both in the cities as well the villages. Datta Samant was able to link the rural issues like the wages of agricultural labourer with those of the textile workers. The strike, however, did not succeed in getting the original demands of the workers accepted. But it helped Datta Samant to emerge as the most influential trade union leader in Bombay.

iv) Limitations of the Trade Union Movement in India

The Trade Union Movement in India is faced with many limitations. Only a small fraction of the working class is organised. Even in the organised sector a sizable chunk of workers do not participate in Trade Union Movement Indian economy is largely agriculture based. Small peasants and agricultural labour encounter the problems of seasonal unemployment and low income. They are forced to go to cities in search of employment. Most of these workers

are illiterate and ignorant and under the grip of superstitions and they have a migratory character. A large section of the workers do not show much interest in trade union movement because city life for them is a temporary condition. So they do not realise the importance of unity among workers. Another major weakness of trade union is poor finance. This is a fact that working class in India is a very small part of the population but the main problem is the multiplicity of trade unions. The subscription rate of membership by Indian workers is small in comparison to their numbers. This makes the trade unions dependent on external finance and influence. Another weakness of the trade union movement has been the dominance of the leadership from outside. The main reason for this has been lack of education among the workers. Mostly leadership is provided by professional politicians. It is being increasingly felt that the working class movement should be led by persons from the ranks of the workers who are aware of the problems and difficulties encountered by the working class.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.

ii) Check Your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Identify the main issue of the workers’ movement in India.

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2) What were the reasons for the rise of “apolitical” trade Unions?

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3) Mention the limitations of the trade union movement in India.

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12.3 PEASANT MOVEMENTS

Peasants are those agrarian classes which are related to agriculture as the tenants or owners of land, and participate in the farming activities. They are a differentiated group. In the backward and feudal agriculture they cultivate land as the tenants of the landlords. In the more advanced agriculture, where the tenants have become the landowners following the implementation of the land reforms, they are the owners of the land. The peasants whose resources in the land are not enough to meet their basic needs, and who also work as labourers for others apart from working on their fields are poor and small peasants. The peasants who do not work for wages, but have enough resources relating to agriculture are rich and middle peasants or the farmers. They either mainly depend on the family labour to work on the land or they may combine it with the hired labour from outside the family. In this section you will be studying the movements of the small and poor peasants as well those of the rich peasants or the farmers.

12.3.1 Small and Poor Peasant Movements

There were several peasant movements both in the pre-Independence and post-Independence periods. Some examples of the former are – Oudh movement (UP) in 1920, Kheda and Bardoli (Gujarat) and Champaran (Bihar) movements and Moplah rebellions. The main examples of the of the post-Independence period are – Telangana (Andhra pradesh), and Tibhaga and Naxalite (West Bengal) movements.

The peasants during the pre-Independence period were living in the miserable social and economic conditions. They were exploited by a group of classes, e.g., landlords and their agents, moneylenders and the officials of the colonial state. The landlords increased the rents on the peasants continuously, took forced gifts and extracted *begar* from them. The inability of the peasants to pay these multiplied due to the frequent famines and draught which affected them adversely. They were heavily indebted to the moneylenders in order to pay the rent and meet the needs of their subsistence. When the peasants could not pay the rent, services or the *begar*, they were evicted form their land. They were also physically tortured. Commercialisation of crops, and introduction of new land rules further worsened their conditions.

The peasants reacted to by revolting against the landlords, moneylenders and agents of the colonial state. Leadership in the peasant movements was provided either by the rural intelligentsia or urban intelligentsia. Baba Ram Chand , the leader of the Oudh peasant movement belonged to the former.

The peasants had been mobilised by some organisation. In case there was no organisation, some kind of informal networking of the peasants and their leaders had worked as orgnisation. This was true especially for the localised revolts. The informal networking or the organisational structure worked in mobilisation, communication of the messages and in planning strategies and programmes.

From the beginning of the twentieth century different political parties mobilised the peasants in the revolts. The Congress started mobilising the peasants from the 1920s with the purpose to broaden its support base. This enabled peasant movements which were localised and running parallel to the national movement to merge with the latter. The Bardoli Sataygrah of 1928, no- rent campaign were

examples of such merger. But the Congress did not encourage the conflict between the landlords and the peasants to get sharpened. The Congress had been more interested in forging an alliance between the landlords, peasants and other classes.

After the Civil Disobedience Movement radical nationalists and many leaders of peasant movement started sharing the impression that the Congress was sympathetic towards the capitalists and Zamindars. The need to evolve independent class organisations and leadership to safeguard the interest of the peasants was being felt by them. This was under these circumstances that the first all India peasant organisation the All India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936 in Lucknow under the presidentship of Swami Sahjanand Saraswati, the founder of Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha. N.G.Ranga the pioneer of Kisan movement in Andhra became its first General Secretary. The birth of an all India organization with a programme of common demands and expressing the aspirations of the peasants all over the country was an event of great historical significance. Very soon the branches of the All India Kisan Sabha were established in many districts.

The formation of Congress Ministries in a majority of the provinces in early 1937 marked the beginning of a new phase in the growth of peasant movements. The Congress had promised radical improvement in the conditions of the peasants on the eve of elections. There was definite increase in civil liberties, which provided better opportunities for the mobilization of peasantry. Different Congress Ministries introduced agrarian legislations for debt relief, restoration of lands lost during depression, for security of tenure etc. But these measures did not affect the conditions of the peasants of lower strata. The dissatisfaction of peasants found expression in a number of protest meetings, conferences and demonstrations. They criticised number of anti-peasant measures taken by the government like arrest of peasant leaders and banning peasant meetings. The outbreak of the World War II brought the resignation of the Congress Ministries and launching of severe repression against Kisan Sabha leaders. In the year 1939 the national convention of the All India Kisan Sabha was presided over by Acharya Narendra Dev. In his Presidential address he emphasised the need of separation of Kisan Sabha from Congress. According to him a separate Kisan Sabha was necessary in order to put pressure on the Congress.

The end of the war, followed by the negotiation for the transfer of power and the anticipation of freedom marked a new stage in the history of peasant movements. Approaching freedom had filled the peasant movements with new spirit to assert their rights. The analysis of some of these movements gives us sufficient insight into the nature, social basis, achievements and limitations of the peasant movements in India.

The Tebhaga Movement of Bengal was one of such movements. The provincial Kisan Sabha of Bengal launched this Movement in 1946. Gradually the influence of the left in general and the communists in particular increased in the Kisan Sabha. In 1947 the leadership of the All India Kisan Sabha went into the hands of the communists. The communists led the provincial Kisan Sabha of Bengal also. This Movement soon took the form of a clash between the bargardars (share-croppers) and the jotedars, the employers. The share-croppers began to assert that they would no longer pay a half share of their crop to their jotedars but only one-third. They also insisted that before division the crop would be stored in their khamars (godowns) and not in that of the jotedars. Poor peasants, middle peasants and also some sons of jotedars led the movement. The middle peasants

provided the bulk of the leaders and they supported the movement up to the end. They hoped that it would culminate in total attack on landlordism. When the government resorted to severe repression in 1947 the movement came to an end.

Another such movement was the Telangna Movement. It was launched in 1946 in the princely state of Hyderabad ruled by the Nizam. This movement developed in the context of the post-war economic crisis. This movement started as a protest against collection of excessive revenue using force by jagirdars. In the beginning the leadership was in the hands of the rich peasants and the movement was directed against the big absentee landlords allied to the Nizamsahi. But very soon the initiative passed into the hands of poor peasants and agricultural labour that started occupying lands of landlords, and wastelands and started distributing it among them. By 1947 this movement organized a Guerilla Army mobilizing poor peasantry and agricultural labour many of which were tribal and untouchables. This army snatched large quantity of arms from the zamindars and subdued the local government officials. They established their control over an area of 15,000 square miles with a population of 40,000. The administrations in these areas were run by peasant soviets. The army of independent India succeeded in crushing the Telangna Movement in 1951.

In 1967 there started a peasant protest at a place called Naxalbari in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. After two decades of independence and Congress rule there was disenchantment among people on a large scale, which found expression in the defeat of the Congress election in eight states. But the communists had done well in both Kerala and West Bengal. The per capita income was on decline and unemployment was on the rise a group of young communists. Due to theoretical disputes within CPI and CPIM's policy of participation in 1967 election. They joined the Naxalite movement and emphasised the need of armed struggle with peasantry as the leading element. The peasant organisation of the CPIM in Darjeeling district was in the hands of such communist leaders. The land reform policy of the government had not succeeded in taking lands from zamindars and big farmers and distributing among poor peasants and landless labour in any significant way. There existed discontent among peasants. In such situation the leaders of peasant organization gave a call for establishing the government of peasant committees, organizing armed struggle to end the ownership of the jotedars on land and distribute it among poor peasants and landless labour. They drew inspiration from the Telangna Movement. The Naxalbari movement reached its zenith by the third week of May 1967. There was violence on a large scale. Naxalbari got enormous publicity largely because it was fighting a state government wherein C.P.I.M. was a major coalition partner and also because China believed that the Naxalites were following the correct line.

It lasted for fifty-two days only. In July 1967 police and battalions of paramilitary forces sent by Ajoy Mukherjee then the Chief Minister of the state, combed the whole area and the rebellion was suppressed. Naxalbari was a minor event in terms of its durations, intensity of resistance, area controlled or number of casualties suffered or inflicted on the other side. Naxalbari movement had its reverberations in several parts of the country. After this the revolutionaries who became active in U.P., Bihar, Punjab, Kashmir, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh came to be known as Naxalites. It emerged as a more powerful force in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. The emergence of Naxalism led to the formation of C.P.I.

(Marxist Leninist) the third Communist party. This party believed that the goal of socialism could be achieved through armed struggle, justified use of violence for capturing lands of Zamindars and distributing them among poor peasants. The Naxalite Movement became a reference point for those poor peasants and landless labour that got nothing from the government except promises and whose condition showed no signs of improvement and were suffering oppressions at the hands of rural dominant sections. They found a ray of hope in this militant philosophy. This philosophy continues to inspire that segment of rural population who has lived at the receiving end. At many places they are fighting for security of employment, minimum wages, rights over a share of produce and against sexual abuse of their women. There are instances of violence when they exercise their right to vote.

The second phase of land reforms known as the Land Ceiling Act started from 1961 onwards with the stated objective of distributing land among the landless. After the Naxalbari Movement of 1967 and the Land Grab Movements launched in different states of 1970 the need to impose rigorous land ceiling was realized. As early as in 1969 the Home Minister had warned that if steps were not taken to lessen agrarian tension both by the state and central government things would go beyond control. Land Reforms was essential part of the twenty Point Programme of Mrs Indira Gandhi during Emergency period. But in spite of all this by 1977 only 4.04 million acres were declared surplus, out of this 2.10 million were taken over by the government and merely 1.29 million acres were actually distributed. The much acclaimed Green Revolution did not make much of difference in their condition. The percentage of households below poverty line in the rural areas has gone up from 38.11% in 1960-61 to 48% in 1977-78. Agricultural labour continues to be their main income and most of the studies suggest that there has been a marked decline in both real wages and the days of work. Naxalite outfits are active in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh Jharkhand and Chatisgarh. Many times they indulge in mindless militancy but they continue to inspire the underdogs of rural society because mostly they take up the problems faced by these sections. They take up the problems of the agricultural labourers, poor peasants, contract labourers whether dalits, tribals. They struggle for wages, land, and against oppression of different types. Their movements are weak and divided.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note:** i) Use the space below for your answers.
ii) Check Your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) In which way were the peasants exploited during the colonial period?
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2) What is the Telengana Movement?

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3) Comment on the Naxalite movement?

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12.3.2 Rich Peasants' and Farmers' Movements

The last quarter of the twentieth century has seen the movements of a very important social group in the rural areas known as rich peasants, farmers, kulaks or the capitalist farmers in several regions of India. They rallied behind the farmers' organisations in their respective regions. These organisations are - two Bharatiya Kisan Unions (the BKUs) of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, Shetkari Sangathan of Maharashtra, Khadyut Samaj of Gujarat, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha of Karnataka and Vivasayigal of Tamil Nadu. The most prominent leaders of these unions were Bhupendra Singh Mann in Punjab, Mahendra Singh Tikait in UP, Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra and Nandunjappa Swami in Karnataka. These farmers are the most influential and resourceful sections of rural society in their respective regions. They largely belong to the intermediate castes. They have benefited most from the state policies especially the land reforms and the green revolution. They cultivate land with the family labour supported by the hired-labour. They control the maximum resources in the rural society – land, water resources, animals, modern technology like tractors, etc.

The movements of rich farmers unlike the movements of poor peasants are not directed against any rural exploiters. In fact, a large group of them belong to the latter. These are directed against the state and unequal terms of trade.

Their main demands have been – remunerative prices, subsidised inputs, writing off loans, lowering of electricity bills, substantial reduction in water canal charges, representation of the farmers in the Agricultural Price Commission. With the exception of the Maharashtra, these movement did not raise the problems of the small producers. Rather, Tikait has demanded scrapping of land ceiling laws and of the Minimum wages Act.

The most common mode of mobilisation in the farmers' or the rich peasants' movements include rallies, *satyagrah*, road blockades, *gaon bandi* (banning the entry of outsiders into the villages) and attack on the public property. Some times these result in violence. Their "apolitical" nature, which means their not being attached to the political parties has been the most effective method of mobilisation, especially in the in the initial phase of the movements.

While the farmers' movements in India shared several common characteristics, e.g., they raised the market-oriented demands, their "apolitical" nature, their direction against the state, patterns of mobilisation, the BKU movement of UP was distinct in terms of leadership and involvement of the traditional institution. Mahendra Singh Tikait, the chief of the Uttar Pradesh BKU was also the hereditary head of the traditional caste organisation known as the *Sarva Khap* of the farming Jats. His social position enabled him to become the leader of the BKU at a time when the farmers of the UP did not have a leader of that stature in the wake of the death of Charan Singh in 1987. Tikait was able to involve the traditional leaderships or *Khaps* -chiefs of several farming castes under the banner of the BKU. Besides, the BKU also took up the social issues like dowry in the initial phase of its movement.

The Bharatiya Kissan Union of Mahendra Singh Tikait speaks a language that invokes elements of Charan Singh's discourse on agriculture. Charan Singh used to argue that there was an urban bias in Indian planning and held it accountable for diversion of resources from agriculture. It, however, does not go to the extent of treating industrial and urban India against the rural India unlike the Shetkari Sangathan of Sharad Joshi. The rich peasant organisations do not admit any contradiction between the interests of rich peasants and the poor agrarian classes. They argue that unremunerative prices affect both the rich and the poor peasants. While the Shetkari Sangathan maintains a façade of India and Bharat divide to hide the class divide in agriculture, the BKU conceals it under the cover of existing *Bhaichara* (brotherhood) and peasant- proprietorship in the western U.P.

The movement of rich peasant has become an important fact of the present day Indian reality. No political party can afford to displease them. The government's decision to enhance electricity rates for farmers, raising fertilizer prices are met with stiff resistance. Many times they resort to stoppage of the supply of commodities like onion sugar or milk to get their demands conceded. One thing has become obvious that there has been a tremendous increase in the power of this class. They not only exploit the labour power and control majority of land they also control levers of power like gram panchayat, zila parishad co-operatives and educational institutions and banks to get maximum benefit from these institution. They also to maintain its dominant position in the rural area.

The rich farmers are diversifying their sources of income. Some of their income comes from outside the agrarian sector like employment in cities, rent trade, money lending or transport. They also invest in small industries like sugar and rice mills as well as in food processing.

12.4 IMPACT OF LIBERALISATION ON THE WORKERS' AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS

The economic reforms in the country that came to be known as liberalisation can be said to be mainly the 1990 development. The era of reforms started with the government of P.V. Narsimha Rao. Since then successive governments have continued with liberalisation agenda. The government of Atal Behari Vajpayee also committed to this agenda. Among the main planks of this New Economic policy were closure of sick and loss making public enterprises, disinvestments from and privatisation of the public sector enterprises. There had been a marked decline in the growth rate of total employment in the organised sector in the 1990's as compared to 1980's. In fact this period is known as a period of jobless growth. Labour laws relating to job security were changed. Many workers had been pushed out of jobs under the voluntary retirement scheme. A practice of using contract and casual labour in place of regular employees became widespread. There were strikes by Trade Unions to protect the interests of workers in State Electricity Boards, ITDC hotels, banks, etc. A National Renewal Fund was created as early as in 1992 to provide a social safety net to the labour force rendered jobless.

In 1994 the government of India signed the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) at Maracas [Morocco] and became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This step of the government could be seen as part of the New Economic policy. As per conditions of the GATT, developing countries including India were under obligation to introduce subsidies-discipline. They were being asked to keep subsidies to the farmers up to 10% of their value of output. But cutting down on subsidies was a difficult proposition because no government wanted to displease the rich farmers. They continued to get things like irrigation waters and electricity either free or at throwaway prices. Another GATT related problem faced by the farmers was introduction of patenting in agriculture. The farmer was not automatically permitted to use farm-saved-seeds of protected varieties to sow the next crop. He had either to pay compensation for the use of seeds saved by him or obtain the approval of the breeder. As most of the Plant Breeders are the Multi National Corporations (MNCs), their primary intention is maximisation of profit. This leaves the farmers no option but to buy the seeds again. Farmers in Karnataka attacked the farm of Cargill Seeds to register their anger. There were protests against Terminator-Seeds of cotton in Maharashtra and Gujarat. The response of the rich farmers' movements to new developments like the New Economic Policy, India joining WTO has not been undifferentiated. While Sharad Joshi in the western part of the country had supported the new developments. Mahendra Singh Tikait in the north and Nanjundaswamy in the south were critical of it.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.

ii) Check Your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Identify the main farmers' organisations along with their main leaders and the regions of their operation.

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12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The main issues in the workers' movements included - wages, bonus, personnel, leave and hours of work, violence and indiscipline, industrial and labour policies, etc.
- 2) The "apolitical" trade union emerged because the workers were dissatisfied with the existing trade unions which were affiliated to the political parties.
- 3) The trade unions have the following limitations: the organised working class is small section of the working population in India; poor finance; dominance of the outside leadership; factionalism, etc.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) They were exploited by a group of classes, e.g., landlords and their agents, moneylenders and the officials of the colonial state. The landlords increased the rents on the peasants continuously, took gifts forcibly and extracted *begar* from them. They were heavily indebted to the moneylenders in order to pay the rent and meet the needs of their subsistence. When the peasants could not pay the rent, services or the *begar*, they were evicted from their land. They were also physically tortured.
- 2) Telangna Movement was launched in 1946 in the princely state of Hyderabad ruled by the Nizam. This movement started as a protest against collection of excessive revenue using force by jagirdars. In the beginning the leadership was in the hands of the rich peasants and the movement was directed against the big absentee landlords allied to the Nizamshahi. But very soon the initiative passed into the hands of poor peasants and agricultural labour that started occupying lands of landlords, and wastelands and started distributing it among them. By 1947 this movement organized a Guerilla Army mobilizing poor peasantry and agricultural labour many of which were tribal and untouchables. This army snatched large quantity of arms from the zamindars and subdued the local government officials. They established their control over an area of 15,000 square miles with a population of 40,000. The administration in these areas was run by peasant soviets. The army of independent India succeeded in crushing the Telangna Movement in 1951.
- 3) The Naxalite movement originated in the Nazxalbari area of North Bengal. It was directed against the landlords and the state agencies. The movement was based on the principles of violence. It had spread into other states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) These are - two Bharatiya Kisan Unions (the BKUs) in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, led by Bhupender Singh Mann and Mahendra Singh Tikait respectively; Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra led by Sharad Joshi, Karnataka Rjya Raitha Sangha in Karnataka led Prof. Nanjundappa Swami; Khadyut Samaj in Gujarat, and Vivsayingal Sangam in Tamil Nadu.
- 2) Their main demands have been – remunerative prices, subsidised inputs, writing off loans, lowering of electricity bills, substantial reduction in water canal charges, representation of the farmers in the Agricultural Price Commission. With the exception of the Maharashtra, these movements did not raise the problems of the small producers. Rather, Tikait has demanded scrapping of land ceiling laws and of the Minimum wages Act.
- 3) The impact of the New Economic Policy on the workers is reflected in the following way: deterioration in their material conditions, privatisation, retrenchment and the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, etc.

