PGPS S4 03
Exam Code: WP

Women and Politics

SEMESTER IV

POLITICAL SCIENCE

BLOCK : 2

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March, 2020

ISBN : 978-93-89955-50-7

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Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Head Office : Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781 017;

City Office : Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781 006; Website: www.kkhsou.in

The University acknowledges with thanks the financial support provided by the **Distance Education Bureau, UGC**, for the preparation of this study material.

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POLITICAL SCIENCE
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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the second block of the optional course or paper of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University's M.A. Fourth Semester Programme in Political Science. This course or paper of the MA Fourth Semester Programme in Political Science is titled "Women and Politics". The second block of this course contains even units (Units 9-15).

The Ninth Unit discusses political empowerment of women in India and in Assam.

The Tenth Unit discusses the issues associated with economic empowerment of women. This unit also examines various issues and challenges faced by women in the path of economic empowerment.

The Eleventh Unit focuses on the importance of economic empowerment and skill development of women.

The Twelveth Unit discusses the role played by the Self-Help Groups in the capacity building of women with special reference to Assam.

The Thirteenth Unit focuses on the impact of poverty on women, problems faced by the female workers.

The Fourteenth Unit discusses the impact of environmental degradation on women.

The Fifteenth Unit analyses participation of women in two important socio-political movements of Assam, those are the Assam Movement and the Bodoland Movement.

While going through the units of the block, you will find that unit is further divided into certain sections and sub-sections, wherever necessary, for your better understanding. Again, the units carry certain activities after a particular section where needed. These "ACTIVITIES" will provide you the opportunity to practically apply your own thoughts based on the knowledge gained from reading the text in a particular section. Besides, in order to give you additional information on certain relevant topics, you will find a category called "LET US KNOW" after the sections in each unit. Another category that has been included at the end of each section of a particular unit is "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS". The purpose of this category is to help you to asses for yourself as to how thoroughly you have understood a particular section. You may then match your answers with "ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" given at the end of each unit. The section "FURTHER READING" in each unit contains the names of a few books which you might want to consult if you are intereted in learning more elaborately about the concepts discussed in a particular unit. Furthermore, the category called "POSSIBLE QUESTIONS" is intended to give you a hint of the type of questions you are likely to get in the examination.

UNIT 9: POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Factors that affect Political Participation of Women

9.4 Measures Adopted in India for Political Empowerment of Women

9.5 Role and Position of Women in the Indian Parliament

9.6 Role and Position of Women in Assam Legislature

9.7 Let Us Sum Up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.10 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- examine the factors that influence political participation of women
- explain the measures adopted in India for political empowerment of women
- discuss the role and position of women in the Indian Parliament and Assam Legislative Assembly.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Political empowerment is one of the important ways through which the position of women can be uplifted in the society. Political empowerment of women can be achieved through political participation. Political participation is normally associated with the modern form of democracy. In this political system, participation of individual in political activity is considered as a virtue, a sign of political health and the best method of

ensuring one's interests. Participation gives an opportunity to express one's own point of view and secure the greatest good for the greatest number. It provides citizens a sense of dignity and value, provides a sense of their duties and responsibilities and facilitates broader political understanding. By involving people in the affairs of the state, participation promotes stability and order in the system. Political participation makes citizens politically empowered. Participation of both men and women in the political affairs of the state is very important. However, in many cases we tend to notice lower level of political participation of women in the political sphere which results in lack of political empowerment of women. In this unit, we shall discuss various aspects associated with the political empowerment of women with special reference to India and Assam.

9.3 FACTORS THAT AFFECT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Political empowerment of women can be achieved when women are involved in the political affairs of the state in the real sense. Effective political participation is very important for political empowerment of women. A number of factors influences the level of political participation of women. Some of them are mentioned in the following:

- **Poverty:** Women do not have enough resources to enable them to effectively participate in politics. Majority of them are involved in economic activities that do not generate enough resources. Very few women have the economic power to finance themselves, they have to depend on their husbands or close family relatives to sponsor them. These people in cases do not encourage them because they see politics as a waste of time and resources.
- **Religion and other Socio-cultural Factors:** Religious belief and other socio-cultural factors are also used as strategy to exclude women from politics. In many third world nations, women are excluded and not allowed to participate in any public matters. Some culture has separate roles for men and women. The sphere of women's wok

is within the home and family (private sphere) while that of men is in the public sphere which has in many ways affected the nations building. Many societies restrict women only to the household activities and women's participation in politics is regarded as a hindered by the family and domestic obligations.

- **Level of Education:** The level of education also effects political participation of women. In many societies women do not have equal educational opportunities along with their male counterparts. However, there are some women that are more talented and progressive than some men, if given the opportunity they will contribute their quarter towards nation building.
- **Lack of Interest by Women:** In many cases women lack interest to actively participate in the political process of their country. Some time, lack of interest by women in politics is borne out of their socialisation and the belief that politics and leadership are not for women.

9.4 MEASURES ADOPTED IN INDIA FOR POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

In India a number of constitutional and legislative measures have been adopted for political empowerment of women. Through these measures the Government of India has aimed to strengthen the overall processes that promote all round development of women. The Constitution of India has guaranteed equality and freedom to all citizens. Articles 325 and 326 of the Indian Constitution that guarantee political equality and equal rights to participate in political activities as well as the right to vote respectively.

The government of India has adopted a number of strategies of coordinating women's welfare and socio-economic development programs across ministries and departments. It aims to provide service for all programs run by the Government for women under the aegis of various Central Ministries implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women. The Government of India has adopted a number of schemes with the purpose

of providing educational facilities to the women. As education plays a very important role when it comes to any sort of empowerment and specially women empowerment that will help them to take part in politics as well. Apart from this the Government of India has also adopted other schemes for empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised groups and women in difficult circumstances, such as- Schemes of National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC), Integrated Child Development Scheme, Integrated Child Protection Scheme, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) etc. These schemes provide supportive institutional framework for women victims of difficult circumstances so that they could lead their life with dignity and conviction.

The Parliament of India has enacted a number of laws for making women politically empowered. The Parliament has passed the 73rd Amendment Act in 1992 which provided for reservation of 33% of seat for women in Panchayati Raj Institution. It has also passed the 74th Amendment Act in 1992 which provided reservation of 33% of seat for women in the Municipalities. Through these amendments Article 243D and 243T women are provided reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. These Acts have fostered more and more women participants and leaders at the grass root levels.

Apart from this the Indian Parliament has also enacted the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION and REDRESSAL) Act, 2013 which also contribute towards political empowerment of women indirectly. This Act provides protection against sexual harassment of women at work place and for the prevention and redressal of complaints of sexual harassment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. It is applicable and enacted whereas sexual harassment results in violation of the fundamental rights of a woman to equality under article 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India and her right to life and to live with dignity under article 21 of the Constitution and right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business which includes a right to safe environment, free from sexual harassment.

Again the Women's Reservation Bill (The Constitution 108th Amendment Bill) proposes to amend the Constitution of India to reserve one-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. The Rajya Sabha had passed the bill but the Lok Sabha has not yet voted on the bill. This will be helpful in increasing the political participation of women.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: What is the full form of MGNREGA?

.....

.....

Q.2: State the meaning of political participation.

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Q.3: Mention one provision of the 73rd Amendment Act.

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Q.4: Write briefly about any two factors that affect the political participation of women.

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9.5 ROLE AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT

A new dimension of women in politics has emerged in recent years all over the world. More and more women have now been entering into politics. In India, reform movements before and after independence has helped women to gain considerable power in politics also. After independence they have achieved an unprecedented political break-through with the reservation of seats for them in panchayats and other public bodies.

It is heartening to note that Indian women were among the earliest to get their political rights (right to vote) without any political movement like in the United States and many Western countries. Indian women have a distinction to become UNO Secretary (Vijay Laxmi Pandit), President (Pratibha Patil), Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi), Chief Minister (Sucheta Kriplani, Jayalalitha, Uma Bharati, Mayawati and Vasundhara Raje). However, it does not imply high level of political empowerment of women in India. If we take women's participation in politics as one of the measurements of their empowerment, we find at present their number is very low in comparison to men in the Parliament. It is about 11 percent only (26 women in upper house-Rajya Sabha consisting of 245 members and 59 women in lower House-Lok Sabha consisting of 543 members. There were only 8 women ministers from a total of 75 in the government of Dr Manmohan Singh). The 17th Lok Sabha has a total of 78 women members. Again the Rajya Sabha has 25 female members at present.

Many studies conducted in India and elsewhere (in so-called developed countries) revealed that though the number of women voters has increased over the years, the number of women as holder of public offices is not very encouraging. One of the reasons for this is that equal sharing of housework is still a nightmare for women. Working women find that housework and care of children is still largely considered their task, as on an average working wives/mothers are compelled to work at least 14 hours a day or even more. This prohibits many women come to participate in active politics.

9.6 ROLE AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN ASSAM LEGISLATURE

Assam has a glorious history about women's role in politics. Princesses Amritprabha and Rajyamati from ancient Assam exercised their influence in the administration and politics. Queen Sadhani took active part in politics and acted as an advisor to her husband in the Chutiya Kingdom of Sadiya. During the Ahom reign, women had a remarkable position in politics. The chief queen of the Ahom King Tao-Khamthi (1380-

89); Chao-Ching, a very accomplished consort of the Ahom King Suklenmung (1539-52) and ngbakla Gabharu, the wife of Tao-mung Bargohain played important roles in politics. Bar- raja Phuleswari, the chief consort of the Ahom King Siva Singha (1714-44) was the first queen of Assam to govern the kingdom directly. Phuleswari's successor Ambika and Sarbeswari governed the kingdom one after another. Women like Mula Gabharu, Ramani Gabharu, Jaymati, Rangili and Padumi were politically conscious women and sacrificed their lives for the cause of the kingdom.

During the British period, many prominent Assamese women leaders came forward. Women leaders like Hemanta Kumari Devi Bardoloi, poet Linibala Devi, Bijut Phookan, Sumitra Bhattacharya, Kiranmayee Agarwalla, Snehalata Devi Baruah, Chandra Prabha Saikiani, Shrijuta Rajabala Das, Swarlata Barua, Raj Kumari Mohini Gohain, Basantalata Hazarika etc., along with other Assamese women played remarkable roles in the India's struggle for freedom. Assamese women like Kanaklata Barua, Bhogeswari Phukani, Rabati Lahon, Golapi Chutiyani, etc., sacrificed their lives during the Quit India Movement. Assamese women took active participation in Assam Movement also.

Despite having a glorious history, the participation of women in the politics of Assam today is very low. Although as voters, women of Assam showed a remarkable progress, however their participation in the active politics is negligible. Women constitute 48.82% of the entire population of the state (Census 2011), but their representation in the politics of Assam hardly reflects their percentage in population. When representation and participation of women in Assam politics itself is made a big issue, the issue of participation by Muslim women, tea garden women and tribal women are another dimension of the issue. The state with a considerable percentage of Muslim population (34.2%, Census 2011), tea garden population and tribal population has little women's representation in active politics. Today, the 33% reservation at the Panchayat level has increased Assamese women's representation in the local bodies, however due to the low political participation and representation of women in Assam in the last general elections reflects a low representation in both houses of the

Parliament and State Assembly. Though the average percentage of women's representation in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 15% in India, but it is lesser in case of Assamese women. In the present Lok Sabha, out of 14 MPs from Assam, there are only 2 female MPs (14.3%); out of seven MPs from Assam in the Rajya Sabha, there is only 1 female MP (14.3%) and out of 126 MLAs in the present State Assembly, there are only 14 female MLAs (11.1%). However, as compared to its neghbouring States, Assam is still in a good position in terms of women's representation in politics. The participation of Assamese women in the Rajya Sabha elections is also very minimal. Since its first election, only a few have received the opportunity to represent in the Rajya Sabha. In the elections of 1994 and 1996, there was only one female member in the Rajya Sabha. Assam has 126 Assembly constituencies but the participation of women in the State Assembly compared to its male counterpart is also very low. Late Usha Barthakur was the first woman MLA and woman minister of Assam, who won Assembly election in 1952. In 1980, Syeda Anwara Taimur created history by becoming the only female Chief Minister of the state from December 6, 1980 to June 30, 1981.

The lack of importance of the political parties, negative attitude of political leaders, lack of opportunity, low female literacy, low level of information, economic inequality, burden of domestic work, female insecurity, lack of confidence, lack of ability to communicate with public, lack of empowerment among women and lack of proper training barred an Assamese woman to take active part in mainstream politics despite having interest in it. Assamese women have been unable to occupy major positions in the political parties, except one or two. Most of the parties do not groom women towards taking up powerful positions and responsibilities. The space has been limited to family connections rather than convictions and commitment. Women are allowed only if there is no alternative choice. They are considered only if there is a mandatory provision like reservation. The number of successful female politicians in the State also clearly reflects that common people are not in favour of bringing women in power. Student politics is an important feature in the politics of Assam. The major student's

organisations produce about 50% of the future political leaders. Even these bodies pay little attention in women's participation in politics.

Less involvement of the Assamese women in the election process has kept them marginalised in power politics. They should be in a greater number in power politics so that they can address the issues concerning women. The Indian Constitution ensures people's right to participate in politics without any difference or distinction. The channels to enter into the Parliament or Assembly are same for both men and women. The election is instrumental for the people in a democratic country through which they can participate in the decision making process of its government. With active participation in the elections as competitors or voters, Assamese women can enter into power politics and bring fair and equal treatment towards all.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.5: The 17th Lok Sabha has a total of ..... women members. (Fill in the blank)

Q.6: Mention names of any two women Assamese leaders who took active part in the Freedom Movement of India.

.....

.....

Q.7: What are the factors responsible for lower participation of women in politics?

.....

.....

.....



9.7 LET US SUM UP

- Political empowerment is one of the important ways through which the position of women can be uplifted in the society. Political empowerment of women can be achieved through political participation.

- Political participation is normally associated with the modern form of democracy. Participation gives an opportunity to express one's own point of view and secure the greatest good for the greatest number. It provides citizens a sense of dignity and value, provides understanding of their duties and responsibilities and facilitates broader political understanding.
- Political participation makes citizens politically empowered. Participation of both men and women in the political affairs of the state is very important. However, in many cases we can notice lower level of political participation of women in the political sphere which results in lack of political empowerment of women.
- A number of factors affect political participation of women. Some of these factors are- poverty, religion and other socio-cultural factors, level of education, lack of interest by the women etc.
- In India a number of constitutional and legislative measures have been adopted for political empowerment of women.
- However despite the existence of various measures, the participation of women in active politics is very low in India and in Assam as well.



9.8 FURTHER READING

1) Carmichael, Sarah; Dilli, Selin; Rijpma, Auke. (2016). Women in the Global Economic History. in Baten, Jörg (ed.), *A History of the Global Economy: from 1500 to the Present*. Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press.

2) MacIvor, Heather. (1996). *Women's Participation in Politics*. in MacIvor, Heather (ed.), *Women and Politics in Canada: an Introductory text*, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press.

3) Tadros, Mariz. (2015). *Women in Politics: Gender, Power and Development* (ed), Canada: Zed Books.

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

Ans to Q No 2: Political participation is normally associated with the modern form of democracy. Participation gives an opportunity to express one's own point of view and secure the greatest good for the greatest number. It provides citizens a sense of dignity and value, provides understanding about their duties and responsibilities and facilitates broader political under-standing. By involving people in the affairs of the state, participation promotes stability and order in the system. Political participation makes citizens politically empowered.

Ans to Q No 3: The 73rd Amendment Act provided for reservation of 33% of seat for women in Panchayati Raj Institution.

Ans to Q No 4: (i) Poverty: Women do not have enough resources that may enable them participate effectively in politics. Majority of them are involved in economic activities that do not generate enough resources. Very few women have the economic power to finance themselves, they have to depend on their husbands or close family relatives to sponsor them. These people in cases do not encourage them because they see politics as waste of time and resources.

(ii) Religion and other socio cultural factors: Religious belief and other socio-cultural factors are also used as strategy to exclude women from politics. In many third world nations, women are excluded and not allowed to participate in any public matters. Some culture has separate roles for men and women. The sphere of women's wok is within the home and family (private sphere) while that of men is in the public sphere which has in many ways affected the nations building. Many societies restrict women only

to the household activities and women's participation in politics is regarded as a hindered by the family and domestic obligations.

Ans to Q No 5: 78

Ans to Q No 6: Kanaklata Barua, Bhogeswari Phukani.

Ans to Q No 7: The lack of importance of the political parties, negative attitude of political leaders, lack of opportunity, low female literacy, low level of information, economic inequality, burden of domestic work, female insecurity, lack of confidence, lack of ability to communicate with public, lack of empowerment among the women and lack of proper training are responsible for lower political participation of women.



9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : In which year was the 73rd Amendment Act passed by the Indian Parliament?

Q. 2 : Write briefly about the provisions incorporated in the Indian Constitution for political empowerment of women.

Q. 3 : Examine various factors that affect political participation of women.

Q. 4 : Explain the measures adopted by the Indian Parliament for political empowerment of women.

Q. 5 : Examine the role and position of women in the Indian Parliament.

Q. 6 : Discuss the role and position of women in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 10: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Empowerment of Women in India

10.4 Stridhan

10.5 Personal Law and Women

10.6 Initiative Taken by SAFP for Women Empowerment

10.7 Let Us Sum Up

10.8 Further Reading

10.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

10.10 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to --

- explain the concept of Stridhan
- discuss the various provisions of personal law related to women
- describe various initiatives taken by SAFP for women empowerment.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a continuous process of realising the goals of equality, human liberation and freedom. Women empowerment implies equality of opportunity and equality between the genders of ethnic groups, social classes and age groups, collective participation in different spheres of life etc. Women empowerment is a process through which women can effectively take part in the decision making process that has tremendous impact on their lives. In this unit, we shall discuss various aspect associated with economic empowerment of women in India.

10.3 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Empowerment as a concept was first introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1985 and was defined as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. It was a general opinion that empowered women who then became agents of their own development, able to exercise choices to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge and change their position in the society. Empowerment is self-governance, self-sufficiency and self-maintenance and above all it is economic independence through information, knowledge and necessary skills. In India, the major land mark in the field of women empowerment was bought about by 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India in the first half of the 90's in which 33% reservation to the women in the panchayats and municipalities was made mandatory.

In India, the National Policy for Empowerment of Women was adopted in 2001. The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The year 2001 was celebrated as "Women Empowerment Year". Awareness regarding this policy was widely disseminated to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Some of the objectives of this Policy are :

i) To create an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women which will enable them to realise their full potential.

ii) Enabling all women to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedom on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.

iv) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.

v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: State the meaning of empowerment.

.....

.....

Q.2: Mention any two objectives of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001.

.....

.....

10.4 STRIDHAN

Stridhan is the exclusive property of the wife and its entrustment to her in-laws amounts to the creation of a trust and they are bound to return the same when a married woman makes a demand. A criminal proceeding for its misappropriation against husband or her in-laws is maintainable. In Soma Devi Veena Kumari the Court held that "Stridhan" is covered by the expression "dowry".

Manu, the ancient Indian Philosopher, enumerates six kinds of Stridhan, such as:

i) Gifts made before the nuptial fire, explained by katyayana to mean gifts made at the time of marriage before the fire which is the witness of the nuptial.

ii) Gifts made at the bridal procession, that is, says Katyayana, while the bride is being led from residence of her parents to that of her husband.

iii) Gifts made in token of love, that is, says Katyayana, those made through affection by her father-in-law and mother-in-law (Pritidatta), and those made at the time of her making obeisance at the feet of elders (Padavandanika),

iv) Gifts made by the father

v) Gifts made by the mother

vi) Gifts made by the brothers.

Stridhan property belongs to the wife not only in the matrimonial home or even after her separation from it. The husband is mere custodian of stridhan and he cannot refuse to return it to his wife. Dishonesty or misappropriation or conversion to use stridhan property by husband would constitute offence under section 406 of the Indian Penal Code.

10.5 PERSONAL LAW AND WOMEN

The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to both sexes and does not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour and creed. The concept of social security is essentially related to high ideas of human dignity and social justice. The Act passed by the Government for the benefit and empowerment of women, her social security and welfare are numerous. Some of them are-

(a) **Personal Law :** Hindu Laws were codified after independence, which brought out radical reforms to improve condition of women. Though Hindu women occupied a high position during Vedic times, later on they were subjected to various social discrimination. Hindu women become subservient. They were never considered an equal partner in life. To uplift the position of women many Acts were passed, such as:

(i) Hindu Marriage Act, 1955: Under Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 provisions have been made to prohibit Bigamy and by this Act, divorce can be given by the wife, subject to fulfillment of certain conditions.

(ii) Hindu Marriage Act, 1956: By this Act, women have been given the right of enjoyment of property rights and other entitlements.

The 1956 Act gave absolute share to the widow as well as daughters in the self acquired property of the husband and father respectively.

(iii) The Law of Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956: This Act provides provisions for maintenance of wife, widow, minor children and poor parents. Through this Act Hindu women has the right to adopt a child. A woman who is unmarried or widow may adopt a child.

(iv) Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and Amendment Act, 1986: Among all the social evils, the dowry system is the most serious evil and to prohibit this evil, the Parliament enacted the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, which was amended in 1986 for making its provision more stringent and effective. By this Act, a new offence of "Dowry death" was included in I.P.C. and necessary amendment have been made in Cr. P.C. and Indian Evidence Act. The offence relating to dowry are now cognizable, non bailable and not compoundable. The burden of proof of innocence rests on the accused.

(v) Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989: This Act makes provision for safeguarding the women of weaker section, belonging to SC & ST classes. By this Act, assault or using force on women is punishable for not less than 6 months and upto a maximum of five years with fine.

(vi) National Commission for Women Act, 1990: The National Commission for Women Act, 1990 was enacted to facilitate redressal of grievances and for the setting up of an agency. The main function of the Commission is to look into the matters of constitutional and legal safeguard provided for women and to review the existing laws and suggest amendments, if necessary. The Commission also has executive cum judicial function to look into the complaints and take suo moto notice of cases relating to women's rights.

Equal rights for women has been recognised under the Article 15 (3) of the Indian Constitution and it allows the state to take special measures for women and girls to guarantee the right to equality. Despite the different gender specific laws in place, women's status in society continues to be devalued. Gender based violence and discrimination faced by women are manifestations of the devalued status of women. In order to find a solution to the gender based violence, laws impacting women's equality rights have to be assessed and strictly implemented. The laws prohibiting the gender discrimination based in the home and in the public sphere have to be evolved and implemented. The problem of gender based violence requires immediate attention. The efforts to improve women's status through the use of laws will also be undertaken at the grassroots level.

Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, has been concerned with the legislative aspects of the following Acts :

Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986: A proposal to amend the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 was considered by the Government of India, in order to widen its scope and make its implementation more effective. It has been directed for wider consultations to be held for the Amendment Act. National Commission for Women, after holding wide ranging consultations at Regional and National levels, has recommended enactment of a comprehensive legislation to replace the existing Act.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: National Commission for Women has suggested number of amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 to make its implementation more effective. Recommendations have been considered in the Ministry and therefore, discussed by an Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) constituted for this purpose. The proposed Amendments to the Act are currently with the Ministry of Law and Justice for their views.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is a comprehensive legislation to protect women from all forms of domestic violence. This Act also covers women who have been in a relationship with the abuser and are subjected

to violence of any kind- physical, sexual, mental, verbal or emotional. This Act has come into force with effect from 26. 10. 2006.

Ministry of Women and Child Development has notified the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Rules for implementation of the Act. Both the Act and Rules have been circulated to the states/Union territories to appoint Protection Officers, register service providers, notify medical and shelter facilities and give wide publicity to the Act for creating awareness of it provisions among the public. The State Governments and Union Territory Administrations have also been advised to send quarterly reports on the implementation of the Act.

Bill for Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at Work Place: A Bill seeking to provide women the right to protection against sexual harassment at work place has been drafted in consultation with the National Commission for Women and prominent women, civil society organisations working in the area. The proposed new legislation seeks to cover women working in the unorganised, organised, formal and informal sectors and would have all essential provisions about the employers obligation to prevent and redress sexual harassment at the work place. The Indian Parliament passed the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The Act came into force from 9 December 2013. This Act ensures that all employers must form a grievance redressal mechanism for the cases for sexual harassment at the workplace.

Prevention of Trafficking of Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Trafficking in human being is an organised crime violating all basic human rights. India has emerged as a source transit and destination country. It is estimated that there are three million sex workers in India, of which 40 percent constitute children. Most often these victims are trafficked through means like duping, luring, fake marriage, abducting, kidnapping and manipulating social and economic vulnerabilities. The issue of trafficking in the country is a matter of serious concern. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has adopted a multi-pronged approach to prevent and combat trafficking which includes legislative measures for prevention of trafficking of commercial and sexual exploitation, programmes/schemes for prevention,

rescue and rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation of victims of trafficking, training capacity building and awareness generation.

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956: The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) is the premier legislation for prevention of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. Certain Amendments are being proposed to Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act, 1956 to widen its scope to make the implementation more effective by providing stringent punishment to the traffickers and other perpetrators of the crime and by preventing re-victimisation of the victims. Indian Penal Code also provides provision for prevention of crimes related to trafficking. India is also signatory to various International and Regional Conventions such as United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime with its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person specially Women and Children. Apart from this, India has ratified some of the major Conventions related to trafficking, such as- SACRC Convention of Preventing and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children in Prostitution, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 23 of the Constitution of India also prohibits trafficking in human beings and beggars.

Some other laws enacted by the Indian Parliament to protect women are- Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, 1923; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act. 1994; Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971; Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006; Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1987; Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986; Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987; Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013.

- **Violence Against Women**

The deep rooted ideologies of gender discrimination, the confinement of women to the private domestic realm, restrictions on their mobility and exclusion from the society, public, political sphere continue to discourage the majority and the entitlements and public services, which constitute the poor women 's life line, do not reach appropriately to women. Violence

against a woman affects the women's sense of self-esteem. Violence against women demolishes her self-confidence. It is often used as a potent tool of subjugation and disempowerment of women.

National Family Health Survey (2005-06) reported that one-third of women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence and approximately one in ten had been victim sexual violence. National Crime Record Bureau indicated that, there is an increasing incidence of crimes against women. Total number of crimes against women has increased by 29. 6 percent between 2006-2010. It has been observed that the conviction rate for violence against women remained low, reflecting inter alia, that many of these cases are not being prosecuted properly and inadequate proof is tendered before the courts. Child marriage is another area of concern which makes women more vulnerable to domestic violence.

The consequences of gender discrimination especially violence against women led to declining female sex ratio. The Census of India, data has revealed that the worst child sex ratio has been found and it continues to suffer from adverse sex ratio due to persisting gender discrimination. The declining child sex ratio is a salient demographic disaster which has adverse implications on women in the form of increased trafficking for sexual exploitation, honour killing, rapes, etc.

Trafficking of women and children is another gross form of human rights violation. It has deprived them from their rights and fundamental freedom. Trafficked women and children have a greater tendency to face risk with fewer opportunities to avoid abusive conditions with a marginalised access to justice and other redressal resources. Trafficking is often hidden in the view of migration and therefore the abuse of rights is very difficult to identify. The forced/bonded labour, domestic servitude are among other major consequences of trafficking. It has been estimated that during 2004 around 2. 8 million women were victims of trafficking out of which 36 percent were children.

Discrimination against women and gender based violence continue to be a pervasive feature of our society. Unequal social, political and economic status of women is an outcome of patriarchy and deeply

entrenched socio- economic, cultural stereotypes about women and it is sometimes perpetuated by laws, regulations, and policy which do not sufficiently address the sub-ordinate status of the women. Thus, it is necessary that the laws which are gender biased or gender blind are recognised and amended and wherever necessary, new legislations be enacted to protect and safeguard the rights of women. It is important that the existing laws are implemented and enforced effectively.

10.6 INITIATIVE TAKEN BY SAFP FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women are the one of the important agent of sustainable development. They are the best upholders of environmental, ecological and social balances yet a victim of man-dominated patriarchal system, neglected in their day to day life, neither considered equal to man in wage or social status. Empowerment is a process that helps and assists women realise their identity, capacity, capability, strengths and power and its application in day to day life in various spheres. It enables them to have access to resources, greater say in decision making, more ability to plan their time and family size and also free them from irrelevant customs, traditions, practice and prejudices.

Empowerment is multi-dimensional process. This enables women to realise their identity and hidden power and creates a desire to achieve and express. Generally, development is expected to generate the focus that leads to empowerment and raises the status of women. Power is not a commonly acquired priviledge which could be purchased or handed over. This has to be understood, acquired, exercised, sustained and preserved both by women themselves, their families and communities. The process of empowerment helps women to understand and realise their own unique potential, express what they desire, suffer, feel, respecting themselves and understanding own needs, explaining own distinct growth and development.

Empowerment of women can be achieved through education and training, better health care and management, higher age at marriage, control on family spacing and number, higher work participation in organised sector,

financial and service support, advancement into higher positions of power, better consciousness of rights and responsibilities. Women need support, counseling, guidance and training in order to become empowered persons. They need to be empowered through the process of realisation of capacity and potential, develop independent critical thinking and perceptions, think authentically and act with their own convictions and feeling and learn respecting themselves and their decisions.

Save A Family Plan (SAFP) is committed to the empowerment of the poor and marginalised people of India. SAFP is a Canadian-based international non-government organisation. It is founded by Monsignor Augustine Kandathil in India in 1965. SAFP is a family development programme which works for social change and justice by assisting poor families and communities in India. It recognises value and dignity of each person. SAFP uses two main programs that work to teach families how to support themselves and build a better future for their communities. Activities of SAFP is supported by a large network of volunteers in Canada and India.

SAFP has been working for the betterment of women across the country. It has done extensive work in the field of human trafficking and violence against women. It also works for the betterment of household particularly female headed household. It has particularly contributed in the process of empowerment of women by placing emphasis on education, health awareness etc. In the year 2017-18, a total number of 1,437 families received training in marketing and entrepreneurship to give them the tools required to start a small business (https://safp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SAFP-Annual-Report-2017-18-draft-4.pdf).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3: State the meaning of Stridhan.

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Q.4: Mention the names of any four Acts enacted by the Indian Parliament to protect the rights of women.

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Q.5: Write briefly about the meaning of women empowerment.

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10.7 LET US SUM UP

- Empowerment as a concept was first introduced at the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1995 and was defined as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. It was a general opinion that empowered women to become agent of their own development, enabling themselves to exercise choices, to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge and change their position in the society. Empowerment is self-governance, self-sufficiency and self-maintenance and above all it is economic independence through information, knowledge and necessary skills.
- In India, the major landmark in the field of women empowerment was bought about by 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India in the first half of the 90's in which 33% reservation to the women in the panchayats and municipalities was made mandatory.
- In India the National Policy for Empowerment of Women was adopted in 2001. The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

- Stridhan is the exclusive property of the wife and its entrustment to her in-laws amounts to the creation of a trust and they are bound to return the same when a married woman makes a demand.
- The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to both sexes and does not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour and creed. The Parliament of India has enacted a number of Acts for the protection and upliftment of women.
- Save A Family Plan (SAFP) is committed to the empowerment of the poor and marginalised people of India. SAFP is a Canadian-based international non-government organisation. It is founded by Monsignor Augustine Kandathil in India in 1965.



10.8 FURTHER READING

1) Biju, M. R. (2006). *Women's Empowerment: Politics and Policies*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication.
2) Sarkar, I. (2008). *Women in Changing Society*. New Delhi: Serials Publication.
3) Srivastav, V.P. (2005). *Handbook on Crime against Women*. Indian Publication.
4) Yadav, Hridari R. (2015). *Women Empowerment: History, Policy and Legislation Volume I*, New Delhi: Concept Publication.



10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Empowerment is self-governance, self-sufficiency and self-maintenance and above all it is economic independence through information, knowledge and necessary skill.

Ans to Q No 2: (i) Enabling all women to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedom on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

(ii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.

Ans to Q No 3: Stridhan is the exclusive property of the wife and its entrustment to her in-laws amounts to the creation of a trust and they are bound to return the same when a married woman makes a demand. A criminal proceeding for its misappropriation against husband or her in-laws is maintainable. In Soma Devi Veena Kumari the Court held that "Stridhan" is covered by the expression "dowry".

Ans to Q No 4: Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1987.

Ans to Q No 5: Empowerment is multi-dimensional process. This enables women to realise their identity and hidden power and creates a desire to achieve and express. Generally, development is expected to generate the focus that leads to empowerment and raise status of women. Power is not a commonly acquired priviledge which could be purchased or handed over. This has to be understood, acquired, exercised, sustained and preserved both by women themselves, their families and communities. Empowerment process helps women to understand and realise their own unique potential, express their desires, sufferings, feelings, respecting themselves and understanding their own distinct growth and development.



10.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : Write briefly about the meaning of empowerment.

Q. 2 : Write a short note on Stridhan.

Q. 3 : Explain the goals and objectives of National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001.

Q. 4 : Discuss the role of the SAFP in the empowerment of women.

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UNIT 11: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Economic Empowerment

11.3.1 Importance of Economic Empowerment

11.4 Importance of Skill Development

11.5 Economic Issues and Challenges Experienced by Women

11.6 National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001

11.7 Let Us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.10 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain the meaning and importance of economic empowerment
- examine the importance of skill development
- discuss various economic issues and challenges faced by women
- explain objectives of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

"Empowerment of women" is the central issue pervading the development debate since the 80s. Improving their status and empowering them would go a long way in accomplishing egalitarian gender relations in the society. Women who are hitherto constrained by their social structure for their self-expression constitute the target of most of the development programmes, which aim at bringing them into the mainstream of the development. Empowerment of women is the most important way to

establish equality in the society. In this unit we shall discuss various issues associated with economic empowerment of women.

11.3 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Economic empowerment refers to ability of one person to involve in the process of decision making related to allocation of finances and resources. The fact is that women though largely absent from the formal workplace and hence from official labor statistic, are nevertheless heavily engaged in subsistence agricultural and informal sector of economy. There is a constant effort to put women's income in bracket in order to consolidate the position that women are only reproducers and not producers. This idea needs to be changed. Women's economic right is definitely an important indicator for enhancement of their status. Therefore, women labour needs to be recognised. Education, more employment avenues, political awareness etc. would all lead to women's economic emancipation.

Empowered women can play an important role in linking other women and girls to their entitlements such as access to nutritious food and supplements, equality in participation of women in government programs such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), PM Aawas Yojna (PMAY), and Crehes for women at working sites etc. They can also play an important role in bringing about a mindset change towards the value of girl child by actively associating themselves with programmes such as 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (BBBP), 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' etc.

Table : Women's Economic Empowerment

Macro Level ↓ Policy Level ↓	Macro Level ↓ Community Level ↓	Micro Level ↓ Household Level ↓
Better remuneration and job representation of women's interest in the Macro-Economic Policies at National and State Level	Ownership of assets, land, access to credit representation in Local Bodies and access to markets.	Women's control over income, relative contribution to family support access to control of family resources.

The process of empowering women is a continuous process. The need of the hour is to make women realise their potential, make them aware of the bright future that awaits them, guide them and nurture them

Women have now taken up professional roles in order to create a new space for themselves. The traditional role of a house wife has gradually changed into working women and house wife. Some of the factors are responsible for this change. These are better education, changing socio cultural values and need for supplementary income.

Early 70's marked the beginning of consciousness about the women rights in India. There is greater need to accept their role in society and economy. It aims at increasing women's power in terms of their self-reliance and internal strength to determine choices in life. There are two ways in which education and employment improve women power-

(i) By importing skill

(ii) By raising the capability through greater discipline, responsiveness to challenges and conscientiousness.

In the era of globalization, technical education is the key to empower women and use their resources for regional and national development.

Women in India are victims of a multiple socio-economic and cultural factors. Emancipation of women is a pre-requisite for nation's economic development and social upliftment. The role of women and the need to empower them are central to human development programmes, including poverty alleviation. In spite of safeguards provided in many of the poverty alleviation programmes, it was observed that women in rural areas, especially from poor families could be not benefited. The self-help group (SHG) is a viable organised setup to disburse micro-credit to the rural women for the purpose of making them enterprising and encouraging to enter into entrepreneurial activities. The formation of SHGs is not ultimately a micro-credit project but an empowerment process.

11.3.1 Importance of Economic Empowerment

Women are the key agents for development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic,

environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. However, limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face. These are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural and industrial workforce worldwide.

To achieve rightful and dignified status of women, empowerment programmes need to be initiated to provide a solid foundation to nurture the inner strength and self-esteem for women. Education is a potent tool to progress in life serving as a catalyst that has unsettled centuries of restrictions and given women the much deserved platform to set themselves free and rise as equals.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: State the name of any one scheme adopted by the Government of India with regard to girl child.

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Q.2: State the meaning of economic empowerment.

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11.4 IMPORTANCE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Skill development refers to the process of identification of skill gap and increasing and developing persons' existing skill which will enable them to achieve their goals. Skill development efforts in India needs to be accelerated and aligned with the overall development of the economy so that the country's resources are efficiently utilised in creating skills that the market demands.

India's spectacular growth performance in recent years has attracted the attention of researchers, analysts and policy makers around the globe.

It is projected that with consistently high growth rates, India would emerge as one of the largest economies of the world. While growth projections appear encouraging, the major challenge for India would be to meet the emerging human resource requirements of an expanding economy. Despite its population of more than 100 billion, India suffers from workforce deficiency, mainly due to absence of required skills among the vast majority of its workforce. This gets reflected in the fact that about 80% of the workforce in rural and urban areas do not possess any identifiable marketable skills (NSS 61st Round on Employment and Unemployment).

Vocational training plays a crucial role in transforming the unskilled people into skilled human resources and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are key components of the vocational training system in the country. Vocational training being a concurrent subject, the responsibility is shared by both Central and State Governments. Director General, Employment and Training (DGE & T), Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India formulates policies, lays down standards and conducts trade testing & certification for both public and private ITIs. The State Governments are responsible for managing the ITIs.

Though in India ITIs have grown in size, they have fallen short in fulfilling the skill requirements of the country. First, the ITIs are not able to match the realities of the employment scenario. Training offered by them mainly cater to the needs of the organised manufacturing sector, whereas over 90% of India's workforce is actually engaged in the unorganised sector. Secondly, ITIs have been slow in adapting to rapid changes in the economy, more particularly in the post reform period. As a result, the trade and the number of share in each trade are not decided on the basis of dynamic market needs, thus creating a demand-supply mismatch almost in every trade sector. Thirdly, weak institute and industry interaction lead to a gap between course curriculum and industry's requirement. Fourthly, physical infrastructure facilities in most of the ITIs are poor and their laboratories are not equipped with modern equipment and testing facilities. The competence and motivational levels of the trainers/instructors are also below par in many cases. Finally, the ITIs, more particularly the government run

institutes, lack autonomy in matters like administration, finance, academics and internal management etc. In contrast, the private institutes, though have autonomy, do not attach due importance to meet the quality standards in vocational training.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan of India proposes a mission mode approach for skill development by launching a "Skill Development Mission". In the Indian context, initiatives for skill development have been taken up at various levels, both government and private. Some of these initiatives are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Initiatives taken by the Government of India

Coordinated Action on Skill Development is the major initiative of the Government of India for achieving 11th Plan objective of inclusive growth through coordination and harmonisation of skill development initiatives of different players. The action aims at creation of a pool of skilled persons with adequate skills that meet the employment requirement across various sectors of the national economy. The institutional structure put in place for the purpose includes the PM's Council on Skill Development, the National Skill Development Coordination Board (NSDCB) chaired by Deputy Chairperson, Planning Commission and the National Skill Development Corporation under Ministry of Finance.

(i) PM's National Council on Skill Development

PM's Council on National Skill Development has Union Ministers of key ministries like Finance, Human Resource Development, Micro Small Medium Enterprises, Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation Labour. The main function of the Council are :

i. To lay down over all policy objectives, financing and governance models and strategies relating to skill development.

ii. To review the progresses of schemes, and guide on midcourse corrections, additions and closure of parts or whole of any particular programme / scheme.

iii. Coordinate Public Sector/ Private Sector Initiatives in a framework of a collaborative action.

The Council has set a target of creating 500 million skilled persons by 2022 with emphasis on inclusion so as to deal with divides of gender, rural/urban, organised/unorganised employment, traditional and contemporary work place. Some of the key governance principles it has laid down include designing of programmes under which the leaner can pay the skill provider directly; skills are fungible and bankable, individuals are enabled to convert their knowledge and skills through adequate testing and Certification into higher diplomas and degrees. The emphasis is on promoting multiple models of delivery that can respond to different situations in various states and to utilise existing available infrastructure of educational institutions for skill development after school hours without affecting formal education.

(ii) National Skill Development Coordination Board

The National Skill Development Coordination Board (NSDCB) is entrusted with the coordination and harmonisation of the Government's initiatives for skill development spread across the seventeen Central Ministries and State Governments with the initiatives of the National Skill Development Corporation. It has twelve members which include Secretaries of Central Ministries of Labour & Employment, Rural Development, and Finance, Higher Education. The main functions of the Board include :

(a) Enumerating strategies to implement the decisions of the Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development.

(b) Developing suitable operational guidelines and instructions to achieve the objectives of skill development.

(c) Initiating solutions and strategies to address the problems of regional imbalance in skill development infrastructure, socio-economic, rural-urban and gender divide; quality teachers; ensuring effective utilisation of investment; integrating varying existing regulatory institutions; involving private sector to develop skills for wage/self employment and promoting apprenticeship/

on the-job training for creation of skilled personnel to address both unemployability and unemployment.

(d) Encouraging the State governments to put in place similar institutional structures.

(e) Establishment of National Skill Inventory and National Database for Skill Deficiency Mapping on National Web Portal to facilitate exchange of Information between prospective employers and job seekers.

(f) Coordinating and facilitating the repositioning of Employment Exchange as outreach points for storing and providing information on employment and skill development.

(g) Monitoring, evaluating and analysing the outcomes of the various schemes and programmes and apprising the Apex Council.

(iii) National Skill Development Corporation :

The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a non-profit company under Section 25 of the Companies Act, has been set up under the Ministry of Finance. The Corporation has a two tier structures viz. a 15 Member Board and a National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) as a 100% government owned trust to facilitate its mandate of coordinating and stimulating private sector initiative in the area of skill development with enhanced flexibility and effectiveness. Some of its main functions are as follows :

(a) It will make periodic as well as an annual report of its plans and activities and put them in the public domain.

(b) Establishing a Trainee Placement and Tracking System for effective evaluation and future policy planning.

11.5 ECONOMIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN

In India there are various obstacles that come in the way of economic empowerment of women. Some key challenges faced by women in India include -

- **Lack of Access to Education:** One major issue faced by women in India is their low level of educational attainment. Lack of education impedes their participation in other development processes of the country. Poor knowledge on legal rights hampers the social and political empowerment of women. Illiteracy also impedes their access to skill upgradation and capacity building programs, access to credit, access to subsidies on inputs provided by government programs, access to technologies and related training modules offered by the agriculture extension system and their decision making power. For example, women are engaged in all types of farm activities and do more work as compared to male workers, but their participation in decision making related to farm and income generating activities is low. They do not enjoy autonomy in decision making in the family or matters relating to children's education in spite of their significant contribution to economic activities. Poor access to safe spaces in rural areas specifically due to lack of good roads, transport and lighting facilities at night also hampers their access to education despite the presence of schools/colleges.
- **Digital Illiteracy :** Poor access to Information Technology (IT) by many women intensifies existing inequalities between women and men and also creates new forms of inequalities in education and health. This also leads to emergence of new forms of violence against women and widen the existing gender digital divide. Digital literacy has the capacity to empower women by raising social and political awareness, improving educational and employment opportunities.
- **Poor access to technologies :** Access to women friendly technologies/implements and services by the government schemes/ agricultural extension is poor. The studies carried out so far in the field of agriculture indicate that despite the key role of women in crop husbandry, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and post-harvest technology, those in charge of formulating packages of technologies, services and public policies for rural areas often tends to neglect the productive role of women. There is inadequate development with respect to technologies particularly tailored to women-specific

occupations. Besides, involvement of women in technology development and transfer has also received poor attention from both scientific and administrative wings of the government.

- **Poor Livelihoods opportunities outside Agriculture :** Agriculture is seen as subsistence strategy for rural women's livelihoods. With agriculture becoming a non-profitable proposition for economic sustenance of rural households, importance of non-farm activities for income generation activities is growing. Women are rarely involved in the backward and forward production linkages with agriculture. Poor linkages between the non-farm activities and farm activities further hampers opportunities for value addition & market linkages for economic empowerment/ livelihoods promotion of women. Though women's participation in agricultural production is consistently expanding, they lack access to input supplies, extension advice, credit and the most important agricultural resource-land. They continue to face constraints, which could be social, legal, and cultural in nature. Their poor access to all these resources hampers their decisions on various agricultural aspects.
- **Lack of Skills :** While a large number of women are involved in micro/small enterprises or manufacturing, most training programmes hardly have any female participation. There is often less involvement of women in opportunities related to construction, trade, transport, storage, and services due to lack of skills.
- **Vulnerability to Climate Change :** Women are affected differently and often more severely by climate change and its associated natural disasters such as floods, droughts, cyclones and storms. The effect of climate change drives women into dangerous situations/risks and vulnerabilities.

11.6 NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2001

The issue of women empowerment is a subject of serious discussion. In India a number of policies are adopted by the Government in this regard.

A National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) was drafted advocating a holistic approach for the development of women. The National Nutritional Policy, the National Policy on Education, the National Population Policy have significant component for women aimed at their empowerment. Some of the strategies of the Government to uplift the position of women are-

(a) The Government has adopted legislative measure of reservation of not less than one-third seats for women in the Parliament and in state Legislative Assemblies to ensure adequate representation of women in decision-making .

(b) The Government has adopted an integrated approach towards empowering women through effective convergence of existing services, resources, infrastructure and manpower in both women-specific and women-related sectors.

(c) It has adopted a special strategy of "Women's component Plan" to ensure that no less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits flow to women from other developmental sectors.

(d) It has organised women into self-help groups and thus mark the beginning of a major process of empowering women.

(e) The Government ensures easy and equal access to education to women and girls.

(f) The Government has equipped women with necessary skills in the modern trades which could make them economically self reliant.

(g) It has facilitated increasing access to credit through setting up of a" Development Bank for Women Entrepreneurs" in small sectors.

The year of 2001 was declared as "Women Empowerment Year" by the Government of India. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was evolved in the same year. The Policy recognises the causes of gender inequality which are related to social and economic structures. The policy underlines the need for mainstreaming gender perspective in the development process. The objectives of the National Policy for the Empowerment of women include :

(1) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realise their full potential.

(2) The de-jure and de facto enjoyment of all human rights by women on equal basis with men in all spheres - political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

(3) Equal access to anticipation and decision-making in social, political and economic life of the nation.

(4) Equal access to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment and equal remuneration.

(5) Strengthening of legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

(6) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

(7) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.

(8) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

(9) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organisations.

It was envisioned that affirmative actions such as reservations, quotas including higher legislative bodies, will be considered whenever necessary on a time-bound basis. Women-friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process. Besides empowering women to participate in decision making process, the policy also visualised the means of economic and social empowerment of women.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3: What does skill development refer to?

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Q.4: Mention any two functions of the PM's Council on National Skill Development.

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Q.5: Mention any two objectives of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001.

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Q.6: Write briefly about any two challenges faced by women in the way of economic empowerment.

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

- Economic empowerment refers to ability of one person to involve in the process of decision making related to allocation of finances and resources.
- Women are the key agents for development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural and industrial workforce worldwide.
- Skill development refers to the process of identification of skill gap and increasing and developing persons' existing skill which will enable them to achieve their goals. Skill development efforts in India needs to be accelerated and aligned with the overall development of the economy so that the country's resources are efficiently utilised in creating skills that the market demands. The Government of India has

adopted a number of measures regarding skill development process in India.

- In India, women are facing various obstacles in the way of economic empowerment. Some of these obstacles are- poor education, digital illiteracy, lack of skill, poor access to technologies, effect of climate change etc.
- The year of 2001 was declared as "Women Empowerment Year" by the Government of India. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was evolved in the same year. The Policy recognises the causes of gender inequality which are related to social and economic structures. The policy underlines the need for mainstreaming gender perspective in the development process.



11.8 FURTHER READING

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2) *Kurukshetra*, December, 2008

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4) Biju, M. R. (2006). *Women's Empowerment: Politics and Policies*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication

5) Sarkar, I. (2008). *Women in Changing Society*. New Delhi: Serials Publication.

6) Thakur, Anil Kumar and Rahman, R. (2009). *Women Entrepreneurship*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication.



11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao'

Ans to Q No 2: Economic empowerment refers to ability of one person to involve in the process of decision making related to allocation of finances and resources.

Ans to Q No 3: Skill development refers to the process of identification of skill gap and increasing and developing persons' existing skill which will enable them to achieve their goals.

Ans to Q No 4: (i) To lay down over all policy objectives, financing and governance models and strategies relating to skill development.

(ii) To review the progresses of schemes, and guide on midcourse corrections, additions and closure of parts or whole of any particular programme / scheme.

Ans to Q No 5: (1)Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realise their full potential.

(2) Equal access to anticipation and decision-making in social, political and economic life of 'the nation.

Ans to Q No 6: (i) Lack of Access to Education: One major issues faced by women in India is their low level of educational attainment. Lack of education impedes their participation in other development processes of the country. Poor knowledge on legal rights hampers the social and political empowerment of women. Illiteracy also impedes their access to skill up-gradation and capacity building programs, access to credit, access to subsidies on inputs provided by government programs, access to technologies and related training modules offered by the agriculture extension system and their decision making power.

(ii) Digital Illiteracy : Poor access to Information Technology (IT) by many women intensifies existing inequalities between women and men and also creates new forms of inequalities in education and health. This also leads to emergence of new forms of violence against women and widen the existing gender digital divide. Digital literacy has the capacity to empower women by raising social and political awareness, improving educational and employment opportunities.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : Which year was observed as the Women's Empowerment Year?

Q. 2 : Write about the importance of economic empowerment of women.

Q. 3 : What is meant by skill development?

Q. 4 : Examine the role of the Government of India in expanding skill development process in the country.

Q. 5 : Explain the objectives of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001.

Q. 6 : Discuss various challenges faced by women in the process of economic empowerment.

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UNIT 12: WOMEN AND SELF-HELP GROUPS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Development of Self Help Groups in India

12.4 Aims, Objectives and Features of Self Help Groups

12.5 Development of Self Help Groups in Assam

12.6 Role played by the Self-Help Groups in Enhancing Capacity of Women

12.7 Let Us Sum Up

12.8 Further Reading

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.10 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- explain the development of Self Help Groups in India and in Assam
- describe the aims, objectives and features of Self Help Groups
- examine the role played by the Self-Help Groups in the empowerment of Women.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

Self-Help Group or in-short SHGs is now a well-known concept. It is now more than two-decade old. It is reported that the SHGs have a role in accelerating country's economic development. SHGs have now evolved as movement. Mainly, members of the SHGs are women. Consequently, participation of women in the country's economic development is increasing. They also play an important role in elevating the economic status of their

families. This has led boost to the process of women's empowerment. SHGs are now gaining acceptance as an alternative system credit delivery for meeting the credit needs especially to the people who are the poorest of poor generally comprising small/marginal farmers and landless agricultural labours. The concept of Self Help Groups has been evolved to organise the rural poor to meet their productive and consumption needs out of their savings. In India, SHGs have provided significant contribution towards economic empowerment of women. In this unit, we shall discuss the role of the SHGs in enhancing women's capability specially in Assam.

12.3 DEVELOPMENT OF SELF HELP GROUPS IN INDIA

Self Help Groups are voluntary association of people to attain certain collective goals, both economic and social goals. Self Help Groups are normally formed by the economically weaker section of the society, coming from rural or semi-urban areas. Each group consists of 10 to 20 members of small and marginal farmers, landless agriculture labourers, rural artisans, women folk, and micro-entrepreneurs. A group could be exclusively male or female, or even mixed. However, majority Self Help Groups are female groups.

A Self Help Group is an association of the poor people specially women who belong to the same social & economic background. The SHGs are usually informal groups of a locality area, whose members have a common need and importance towards collective action. These groups normally consist of 10 to 20 members of the group meet regularly, make their share of contribution.

The SHG promotes small saving among its members, which are then kept in a bank. SHGs have been generally formed for specific issues. The main purpose of SHGs is to mobilise savings among their members and utilised resources to meet the emergent credit needs of the members of the group. SHGs generally work according to the local requirement.

The group voluntarily decide to collect a fixed amount of savings at a fixed interval of time from all of its members. This amount may range from

Rs. 10 to Rs. 200. This money is collected by the treasurer and kept partially in a Bank and partially among the group. The group opens a bank account in the nearest bank branch. The bank has to maintain only one account for the group as a single entry. The group can be thus treated as a single customer by the bank and the hassles of treating 20 micro-accounts of each member can be done away with. The group members meet once in a week or fortnight or month. They decide how to work on different accumulated savings and how to work on different socioeconomic issues that confront them. Members make small regular savings contributions over a few months until there is enough money in the group to begin lending. Funds may then be lent back to the members or to others in the village for any purpose. In India, many SHGs are 'linked' to banks for the delivery of micro-credit.

The origin of self-help group can be traced is from Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Mohamed Yunus. SGHs were started and formed in 1975. In India NABARD initiated in 1986-1987. The absence of institutional credits available in the rural area has led to the establishment of SHGs.

It can be mentioned here the microfinance sector started in India in 1970s with the emergence of informal Self-Help Groups (SHG) to provide access to much-needed savings and credit services. The sector witnessed strong growth following the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991, since private sector organisations increasingly extended credit to microfinance companies. During 2005-2010, the microfinance sector reported strong growth supported by strong demand for loans from borrowers neglected by the banking system and investors eager to invest funds in the high growth industry. However, in 2010, the sector was severely impacted by the Andhra Pradesh crisis and the State Government promulgating an ordinance to curb the activities of microfinance companies. The crisis triggered a strong response from the RBI and in the years that followed, the sector has registered a turn around and has evolved into a more mature market. Moreover, the Government as well as the RBI has tried to create a conducive policy and regulatory environment for MFIs to expand the financial inclusion agenda in India.

From 1970 to 2014 a good numbers of microfinance institutions come up throughout the country. As another move towards expanding access to financial services in rural and semi-urban areas, in the year 2015, The RBI has given license of small finance bank to ten institutions out of which eight were MFIs.

12.4 AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND FEATURES OF SELF HELP GROUPS

The objectives of SHG can be listed as bellow-

1. To inculcate the savings and banking habits among members.
2. To secure them from financial, technical and moral strengths.
3. To enable availing of loan for productive purposes.
4. To gain economic prosperity through loan/credit.
5. To gain from collective wisdom in organising and managing their own finance and distributing the benefits among themselves.
6. To sensitise women of target area for the need of SHG and its relevance in their empowerment.
7. To create a sense of group feeling among women.
8. To enhance the confidence and capabilities of women.
9. To develop collective decision making among women.
10. To encourage habit of saving amongst women and to facilitate the accumulation of their own capital resource base.
11. To motivate women taking up social responsibilities particularly related to women development.
12. To create a platform for the members to provide space and support to each other.

The salient features of SHGs are:

1. Identical Interest, Common Occupation and Identity

The people in SHG are having identical interest in terms of group functioning. Adopting common things is a highlighting features of the SHGs. Varied ideas and interest do not foster proper groups functioning.

2. Flexible and Responsible

The members have flexible thinking, decision- making and implementing the plan enables and group to have a border framework of mechanism and operation. Shared sense of responsibility in turn would promote flexibility in the group.

3. Simple Documentation

SHGs required simple documentation of the records and the registers. The documents are maintained in such a way that it can be referred and used by all the members.

4. Collective Leadership

The members in SHG believe in a collective leadership because collective leadership promotes group cohesion as it is through collective leadership that the members interact. Leadership is responsible for effective integration of goals and communication in the group in order to develop a climate of trust.

5. Mutual Decision - making

In the SHG the members take a mutual decision because group sustainability depends to a larger extent on how the members involve in mutual decision - making. Hence, collective decision - making is an important feature of SHGs.

6. Group Solidarity and Self Help

Group solidarity gives an impulse towards collective action and articulation, whereas the idea of self help provides larger scope for integrated mechanism of group functioning.

7. Awareness and Socio - Economic Empowerment

Awareness is a crucial feature of the self-help group, since women are exposed to various components of the social sphere. This feature gives a forward thrust for the effective group functioning.

8. Mutual Trust and Confidence

The successful functioning of the group for a prolonged period relies on the mutual trust and confidence of group members.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Write the meaning of SHGs.

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Q.2: Mention two objectives of SHGs.

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Q.3: Write briefly about any two features of SHGs.

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12.5 DEVELOPMENT OF SELF HELP GROUPS IN ASSAM

In some parts of Assam, the women groups in the form of vigilance committees work at village level for supervising the execution and monitoring of the rural development activities. Thus, women groups shape as social activities in implementation of different development schemes. These women groups have also involved in prohibition of elicit liquor, afforestation, creating awareness of development schemes.

A. N. Sarkar (2001) says that majority of the economically weaker section came into SHG that resulted in increase of the value of assets owned, employment, average income of the members due to the SHGs. The SHG strategy has made positive impact on the empowerment of women in terms of increasing their economic capacity. The total numbers of SHGs was 29,2071 in Assam in the year 2015. The saving amount of SHGs with bank was Rs. 9,943 lakhs in Assam in the year 2015.

12.6 ROLE PLAYED BY THE SELF HELP GROUPS IN ENHANCING CAPACITY OF WOMEN

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are usually informal groups whose members have a common perception of need and importance towards collective action. These groups promote savings among members and use the pooled resources to meet the emergent needs of their members, including the consumption needs. The number of members in SHGs is normally ranged from 10 to 20. It is expected that, within the group, there should be true democratic culture in which all the members must participate actively in the decision making process. Collective work, leadership with fixed tenure, mutual trust and cooperative philosophy are the driving forces for SHGs. The basic objective of Self-Help Groups is to develop saving capability among the poorest sections of the society, which in turn reduce dependence on financial institutions and develop self-reliance. The SHGs can play pivotal role in creating economic self-reliance of rural poor by meeting consumption and production credit needs as and when they arise. This will prevent exploitation of the poorer sections from non-institutional credit sources. SHGs also help in the development of group dynamics, building leadership quality to realise their potentiality and self-belief. SHGs also help the banks in recovery of credit by motivating members for prompt repayment of loans. These groups also contribute towards procurement of high cost inputs that could not be bought individually. These Groups are also beneficial in terms of providing training to the members regarding the use of extension services and Government support.

In the recent years the Government of India has assigned a special role to SHG in the implementation of its poverty alleviation programmes and on the whole rural development. SHGs as a strategy for implementing poverty alleviation programmes, the focus is on Rural Development. Credit is important in the lives of the rural poor in a developing economy. As the distribution of land in the countryside remains skewed, the majority of the rural population is left with an inadequate resource base for production. Faced with a weak social security system to fall back upon, this section of landless or near landless rural population is forced to depend upon credit for its livelihood. It

was this understanding that led various developing countries to make credit an integral part of their poverty alleviation programmes. The conception and implementation of such programmes were often based on the broad principles of social banking in several developing countries including India. SHGs/ Micro-finance (i.e. Credit, Saving and Insurance) programs can help smooth consumption of poor households during an adverse shock. Providing affordable credit to the rural population has long been a prime component of development strategy. Governments and donors have sponsored and supported supply-led rural finance institutions both to improve growth and equity and to neutralise or mitigate urban-based macro-economic policies. However, only to because of high risks, heavy transaction costs, and mounting loan losses, many of the programs have drained state resources to little purpose, reaching only a small part of the rural population and making little progress toward self-sustainability.

The Self Help Groups have been playing a very important role in the process of empowerment of women. Empowerment of women covers three aspects - economic empowerment, capacity building and social empowerment. Economic empowerment means greatest access to financial resources, reducing vulnerability of poor women in crisis situation like flood, death and accidents in the family and significant increase in women's own income. Economic empowerment gives women the power to retain income and use it at her discretion. The success of women development however, depends on capacity building. The capacity building depends on better condition of health, education, environment, communication skills and better leadership skills. Women empowerment is incomplete without social empowerment. Social empowerment means equal status, participation and power of decision-making at the household level and also at the community level. Social empowerment enables women to participate in the decision making process in democratic institutions.

The Self Help Group programme mainly focuses on empowerment of rural women and making them financially, socially and politically capable. One of the major objectives of initiating SHGs for women, especially the poor women is to help them to take up and manage on their own productive activities which could supplement their household employment and income

leading to improved living standards. These income generating activities are also expected to serve as instruments which could bring about economic awareness and empowerment among the women members. SHGs have the power to create a socio-economic revolution in the rural areas of our country. SHGs have not only produced tangible assets and improved living conditions of the members, but also helped in changing much of their social outlook and attitudes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4: Write the meaning of economic empowerment of women.

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Q.5: Write briefly about the role of SHGs in the empowerment of women.

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12.7 LET US SUM UP

- Self Help Groups are voluntary association of people to attain certain collective goals, both economic and social goals. Self Help Groups are normally formed by the economically weaker section of the society, coming from rural or semi-urban areas. Each group consists of 10 to 20 members of small and marginal farmers, landless agriculture labourers, rural artisans, women folk, and micro-entrepreneurs. A group could be exclusively male or female, or even mixed. However, majority Self Help Groups are female groups.
- A Self Help Group is an association of the poor people specially women who belong to the same social and economic background. The SHGs

are usually informal groups of a locality area, whose members have a common need and importance towards collective action.

- The SHG promotes small saving among its members, which are then kept with a bank. SHGs have been generally formed for specific issues. The main purpose of SHGs is to mobilise savings among their members and used resources to meet the emergent credit needs of the members of the group. SHGs generally work according to the local requirement.
- Some of the objectives of SHGs are- to inculcate the savings and banking habits among members, to secure them from financial, technical and moral strengths, to enable availing of loan for productive purposes, to gain economic prosperity through loan/credit, to gain from collective wisdom in organising and managing their own finance and distributing the benefits among themselves, to sensitise women of target area for the need of SHG and its relevance in their empowerment, to enhance the confidence and capabilities of women, to encourage habit of saving among women and facilitate the accumulation of their own capital resource base etc.
- Some salient features of Self Help Groups are- identical interest, common occupation and identity; flexible and responsible; simple documentation; collective leadership; mutual decision - making; group solidarity and self help; awareness and socio - economic empowerment; mutual trust and confidence.
- The Self Help Group programme mainly focuses on empowerment of rural women and making them financially, socially and politically capable. One of the major objectives of initiating SHGs for women, especially the poor women is to help them to take up and manage on their own productive activities which could supplement their household employment and income leading to improved living standards. These income generating activities are also expected to serve as instruments which could bring about economic awareness and empowerment among the women members. SHGs have the power to create a socio-economic revolution in the rural areas of our country.



12.8 FURTHER READING

1) Biju, M. R.(2006). *Women's Empowerment : Politics and Policies*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication,

2) Rengaraja, Dr. V. (2013). *Microfinance-Principles and Approaches*. Notion Press.

3) Thakur, Anil Kumar. & Rahman, R. (2009). *Women Entrepreneurship*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication.



12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Self Help Groups are voluntary association of people to attain certain collective goals, both economic and social goals. Self Help Group are normally formed by the economically weaker section of the society, coming from rural or semi-urban areas. Each group consists of 10 to 20 members of small and marginal farmers, landless agriculture labourers, rural artisans, women folk, and micro-entrepreneurs. A group could be exclusively male or female, or even mixed. However, majority Self Help Groups are female groups. A Self Help Group is an association of the poor people specially women who belong to the same social and economic background. The SHGs are usually informal groups of a locality area, whose members have a common need and importance towards collective action.

Ans to Q No 2: (i) To inculcate the savings and banking habits among members.

(ii) To enable availing of loan for productive purposes.

Ans to Q No 3: (i) **Identical Interest, Common Occupation and Identity:** The people in SHG have or share identical interest in terms of group functioning. Adopting common things is a highlighting features of the SHGs. Varied ideas and interest do not foster

proper groups functioning.

(ii) **Flexible and Responsible:** The members have flexible thinking, decision- making and implementing the plan enables and group to have a border framework of mechanism and operation. Shared sense of responsibility in turn would promote flexibility in the group.

Ans to Q No 4: Economic empowerment means greatest access to financial resources, reducing vulnerability of poor women in crisis situation like flood, death and accidents in the family and significant increase in women's own income. Economic empowerment gives women the power to retain income and use it at her discretion.

Ans to Q No 5: The Self Help Group programme mainly focuses on empowerment of rural women and making them financially, socially and politically capable. One of the major objectives of initiating SHGs for women, especially the poor women, is to help them to take up and manage on their own productive activities which could supplement their household employment and income leading to improved living standards. These income generating activities are also expected to serve as instruments which could bring about economic awareness and empowerment among the women members. SHGs have the power to create a socio-economic revolution in the rural areas of our country. SHGs have not only produced tangible assets and improved living conditions of the members, but also helped in changing much of their social outlook and attitudes.



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : State the meaning of Self Help Groups.

Q. 2 : Write about the development of Self Help Groups in India.

Q. 3 : Explain the objectives and salient features of Self Help Groups.

Q. 4 : Examine the role of the Self Help Groups in the empowerment and capacity building of women.

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UNIT 13: WOMEN AND POVERTY

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Problems of Women Workers

13.4 Suggestions for Solving the Problems of Women Workers

13.5 Impact of Poverty on Women in India

13.6 Let Us Sum Up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers To Check Your Progress

13.9 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- explain the problem of women workers
- provide suggestions for solving the power of women workers
- discuss the impact of poverty on women.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

"Women question", the term can be understood by using the word "Feminism" which specifically seeks to highlight women's oppression in relation to men, preventing such subjugation, amidst all other unequal relationship existing in society. Thus, feminism is sometimes confined to women's struggle against oppressive gender relationships. In practice, however, women's action both now and in the past, often have been against inter- connecting relation of inequality and have involved many aspects of resistance, around daily life and culture that are not simply about gender itself.

The problem of poverty has adverse impact in the lives of women. Poverty refers to a state of scarcity or lack of resources required for basic

survival or to maintain a minimum standard of living of a person. Infact we can say poverty results in deprivation of a particular individual or a group of individuals. Both men and women are adversely affected by poverty, but due to existence of patriarchal structure of the society women are worst victims of poverty. The factors responsible for greater risk of poverty faced by women are- unequal pay for men and women, domination of men in the formal work sphere, pregnancy and child bearing, domestic and sexual violence against women.

The phenomenon of "feminisation of labour" denotes increasing participation of women in low wage industrial and service jobs. Against the scenario of feminisation of industrial labour it is important to analyse the increasing participation of rural women in agriculture and national rural employment also it is important to examine the phenomenon of "feminisation of rural labour" in India.

Feminism is a proposal for social transformation as well as a movement that strives to end the oppression of women. According to its ideology, feminism has always existed as a part of the historical societies in which it has developed, it has been influenced by the specific social, economic and political traits of its society. As a movement, feminism has a long history of rebellion, more or less organised but always in opposition to the social institutions that has for long oppressed women. Charles Fourier, the French socialist argued that it is the degree of women's freedom that decided the extent of social progress. Women's emancipation was thus linked to the idea of progressive social reform and historical change.

The women workers account for about one-third of total workers in India. There are 123 million women workers out of 397 million total workers. Women workers are concentrated in the lower-income segments working in several activities or a casual wage workers or home workers. The women workers contribute 31 per cent to the total workers of India. The share of women workers amongst poor workers is 36 per cent. There are 19 per cent women agricultural workers. The annual income of the female

headed household workers has been lower compared to the male headed households. A large proportion (44%) of female headed households is poor with low income and falling below the poverty line. The participation of women workers has been 29.9 percent in the rural areas. Most of the women are employed in agriculture and work in own household farms or as tenant, contacted by their families or as wage workers. The most important trend as far as women's employment is concerned is that it needs to be highlighted is the considerable increase in the share of tertiary sector over the last decade. Women are found largely in the trading and retailing activities or in the appropriate income category which do not offer much in terms of remuneration or skill endowment. Self-employed category constitutes largest proportion of women workforce. The number of casual workers show distinct signs of casualisation of the women workers.

13.3 PROBLEMS OF WOMEN WORKERS

Working women constitute a major portion of the society. Their presence, aspirations and problems cannot be ignored. It is imperative that they are looked upon as individuals engaged in gainful employment. They should be given the due respect and status in society.

Though, development policies and performances have created a positive impact in the position of women in the society they face many problems and difficulties at home and working place. Some major issues and problems indicate women status, which are as follows:

(i) Women are powerless in comparison to their male counterpart.

(ii) They have no choice regarding their job.

(iii) Most women do not have a principal occupation.

(iv) Women workers perform dual role in the society relating to production and reproduction and therefore they are over burdened.

(v) Women's contribution to the family economy and national economy remains largely invisible and undervalued.

(vi) Female worker do not have right to spend money themselves. Their earning is mostly controlled by the male members or senior members of the society.

(vii) Working for a longer time in unhygienic conditions affecting working women's health. They face serious threat regarding health security.

(viii) Women have a low nutrition status. Generally women consume after all members of the family take their meal. This results in the lack of nutritious food for women.

(ix) Though women workers earn money, they have a low level of participation in the decision making process.

(x) In many cases, women face discrimination with regard to wages. Equal pay for equal work is still not been achieved by many women.

(xi) The existing communication channels are not adequate and do not reach to poor women.

(xii) There is lack of intimated approach in the macro policies in tackling women issues.

(xiii) Sexual harassment at the workplace is another problem faced by working women.

The Constitution of India has granted equality for both men and women in all spheres of life. The Directive Principles of State Policy, incorporated in Part IV of the Constitution, have urged the Government to adopt measures to ensure equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Accordingly, the Indian Parliament has also enacted a number of laws to ensure equality between men and women at the workplace. However, in practice there exists a huge gap between men and women in this regard. More particularly, poor women have been largely left outside the scope or arena of development. They receive low income and have a lower status. Policies and programmes and seminars cannot change women's status. There is a greater need for change in approaches and attitudes of the society towards working women. It should acknowledge and recognise their creativity and entrepreneurship, instead of being

treated as passive and defenseless poor women which has been ignored since 72 years of independence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: What does the phenomenon of "feminisation of labour" denote?

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Q.2: Write briefly about any four problems faced by women workers.

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13.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF WOMEN WORKERS

The problems of women workers in India are multifarious and multi-dimensional. They face problems at family, community and societal levels. The problems faced by women can be solved by changing the attitude of family, society and nation towards women. Some of the suggestions to solve these problems are discussed below -

- The need of the hour is to change the attitude and mindset of the society. Women must be considered as individuals with their own capabilities and potentialities. Women should also change their attitude about themselves. They should be self confident in their approach.
- Educational opportunities should be made available to all women without any kind of discrimination. When women are educated, they can manage her responsibility efficiently.

- Women should be given adequate skill development and vocational training so that their efficiency increases. They should be trained to develop their capabilities of decision taking and individual thinking.
- Women should be made aware of their constitutional and legal rights both in their work and in the social sphere.
- The attitude of the husband and family members should be changed towards working women. Household responsibilities should be shared on equal basis between both male and female members of the family.
- In many cases we can see that though working women earn money, they do not enjoy financial autonomy or freedom. Resources are controlled by the men. To solve this problem, women should be given financial freedom.
- Baby care centre or crèche facilities should be opened at the work place where women can leave their child during their working period.
- Maternity benefit schemes should be implemented in the private sectors too.
- Wage gaps between men and women should be eliminated. Better medical facilities and congenial atmosphere should be provided to them.
- Another suggestion is to increase part time job for women in various organisations, which will provide a sense of dignity and identity to women.
- More seminars, conferences and workshops on women should be organised. They should be encouraged to participate in them and express their views.

Working women are major part of labour market of India. Their problems cannot be ignored. They are engaged in gainful employment and in contributing to the domestic and national economy. They should be given their due respect and status which they deserve in the society. In the changing socio- cultural environment of India, women are entering in a new era. However, they are still over burdened.

13.5 IMPACT OF POVERTY ON WOMEN IN INDIA

The majority of the poor are living in rural India mostly comprising women. Such poverty has taken the shape of feminisation of poverty in the country. With this awareness, the Planning Commission of India had focused on woman empowerment issues in the Ninth and Tenth Five Year plans. The Government has introduced 'Self-Help Group' Programme as an innovative and dynamic anti-poverty programme. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is the main initiator of the 'Self Help Group (SHG) movement that started from 1986-87 in India.

The Self-Help Group programme is the right approach to create self employment opportunities so as to supplement the income and assets of the rural poor. The SHG programme provides the rural poor woman an access to micro-credit. It encourages rural woman entrepreneurship and rural woman empowerment.

Majority of rural woman suffer not only from economic poverty but also from 'information poverty'. Rural woman are vital and productive workers in India's national economy. There is statistical bias in underestimating the role of rural woman in development. Although woman work for longer hours than men and contribute substantially to family income, yet they are not perceived as productive workers.

The micro-finance mainly focuses on poor women which provide independent sources of income outside the home and expose new sets of ideas, values and social support. Women thus become more assertive and confident in creating their own assets and play a stronger and strengthening role in the decision-making process towards family development. Many research studies have found that "having cash in hand and greater control over it can lead to empowerment of women". 82 percent of microfinance clients are women whose decision making role increased and repaid at a rate averaging 97 percent. Therefore, giving women access to micro credit loan, can generate a multiple effect that increase the activities of microfinance institutions benefiting multiple

generations." Microfinance is both financial access and tool of poverty alleviation of rural poor and shall help in improving the quality of life in rural India.

Rural Development is the current range among planning experts and policy makers as a solution to the problems of poverty in developing countries. The basic approach to rural development is based on an understanding of the causes of poverty and measures through which it can be alleviated.

The Government of India has assigned a special role to SHG in the implementation of its poverty alleviation programmes and on the whole rural development. SHGs as a strategy for implementing poverty alleviation programmes also focuses on rural development. Credit is important in the lives of the rural poor in a developing economy. As the distribution of land in the countryside remains skewed, majority of the rural population is left with an inadequate resource base for production. Faced with a weak social security system to fall back upon, this section of landless or near landless rural population is forced to depend upon credit for its livelihood. It was this understanding that led various developing countries to make credit an integral part of their poverty alleviation programmes. The conception and implementation of such programmes were often based on the broad principles of social banking in several developing countries including India.

SHGs or micro-finance i.e. credit, saving and insurance programmes can help poor households in smooth consumption during an adverse situation. Providing affordable credit to the rural population has long been a prime component of development strategy. Governments and donors have sponsored and supported supply-led rural finance institute both to improve growth and equity and to neutralise or mitigate urban-based macroeconomic policies. However, owing to high risks, heavy transaction costs and mounting loan losses, many of the programmes have drained state resources to little purpose, reaching only a small part of the rural population and making little progress in self-sustainability.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3: Suggest any four solutions to solve the problems faced by women workers.

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Q.4: What is the full form of NABARD?

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Q.5: Write briefly about the role of the Self-Help Groups in rural development.

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13.6 LET US SUM UP

- The phenomenon of "feminisation of labour" denoting increasing participation of women in law wage industrial and service jobs. Against the scenario of feminisation of industrial labour to analyse the increasing participation of rural women in agriculture and national rural employment it is important to examine the phenomenon of "feminisation of rural labour" in India.
- The women workers account for about one-third of total workers in India. There are 123 million women workers out of 397 million total workers. The women workers contribute 31 per cent to the total workers of India. The share of women workers amongst poor workers is 36 per cent. There are 19 per cent women agricultural workers. The annual income of the female headed household workers has been lower

compared to the male headed households. The participation of women workers has been 29.9 per cent in the rural areas.

- The women are found largely in the trading and retailing activities or in the appropriate income categories which do not offer much in terms of remuneration or skill endowment. Self-employed constitute largest proportion of women workforce. The number of casual workers show distinct signs of casualisation of the women workers.
- In India, though the development policies and performances have created a positive impact in women position in the society they are facing many problems and difficulties at home and working place. Some major issues and problems are- women are powerless in comparison to male counterpart, they have no choice regarding their job, women worker perform dual role in the society relating to production and reproduction and therefore they are over burdened, women's contribution to the family economy and national economy remains largely invisible and undervalued, working for a longer time in unhygienic conditions affecting working women's health, equal pay for equal work has still not been achieved by many women, sexual harassment at the workplace etc.
- The problems faced by women workers can be solved by changing the attitude of family, society and nation towards women. The need of the hour is to change the attitude and mindset of the society. Women must be considered as individuals full of capabilities and potentialities. Educational opportunities should be made available to all women without any kind of discrimination. Women should be given adequate skill development and vocational training so that their efficiency increases. Women should be made aware of their constitutional and legal rights both in their work and in the social sphere. Baby care centre should be opened at the work place where women can leave their child during their working period. Maternity benefit schemes should be implemented in the private sectors too. Wage gaps between men and women should be eliminated. Better medical facilities and congenial atmosphere should be provided to them.

- Majority of the poor are living in rural India comprising mostly women. The poverty has taken the shape of feminization of poverty in the country. With this awareness, the Planning Commission of India had focused on woman empowerment issues in the Ninth and Tenth Five Year plans. The Government has introduced 'Self-Help Group' Programme as an innovative and dynamic anti poverty programme. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is the main initiator of 'Self Help Group (SHG) movement started from 1986-87 in India.



13.7 FURTHER READING

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13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The phenomenon of "feminisation of labour" denoting increasing participation of women in law wage industrial and service jobs.

Ans to Q No 2: (i) Women workers have to perform dual role in the society relating to production and reproduction and therefore they are over burdened.

(ii) Women's contribution to the family economy and national economy remains largely invisible and undervalued.

(iii) Working for a longer time in unhygienic conditions affecting working women's health. They face serious threat regarding health security.

(iv) In many cases, women face discrimination in regarding wages. Equal pay for equal work has still not been achieved by many women.

Ans to Q No 3: (i) The need of the hour is to change the attitude and mindset of the society. Women must be considered as individuals full with capabilities and potentialities. Women also should change their attitude about themselves. They should be self-confident in their approach.

(ii) Educational opportunities should be made available to all women without any kind of discrimination. When women are educated, they can manage their responsibility efficiently.

(iii) Women should be given adequate skill development and vocational training so that their efficiency increases. They should be trained to develop their capabilities of decision taking and individual thinking.

(iv) Women should be made aware of their constitutional and legal rights both in their work and in the social sphere.

Ans to Q No 4: National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development

Ans to Q No 5: The Government of India has introduced 'Self-Help Group' Programme as an innovative and dynamic anti-poverty programme. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is the main initiator of 'Self Help Group (SHG) movement started from 1986-87 in India. Self-Help Group programme is the right approach to create self

employment opportunities so as to supplement the income and assets of the rural poor. The SHG programme provides the rural poor woman the access to micro-credit. It encourages rural woman entrepreneurship and rural woman empowerment. The Government of India has assigned a special role to SHG in the implementation of its poverty alleviation programmes and on the whole rural development. SHGs as a strategy for implementing poverty alleviation programmes focuses on rural development. Credit is important in the lives of the rural poor in a developing economy. SHGs or micro-finance i.e. credit, saving and insurance programmes can help poor households in smooth consumption during an adverse situation. Providing affordable credit to the rural population has long been a prime component of development strategy. Governments and donors have sponsored and supported supply-led rural finance institute both to improve growth and equity and to neutralise or mitigate urban- biased macroeconomic policies.



13.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : Write briefly about the phenomenon of 'feminisation of labour'.

Q. 2 : Explain the problems faced by women workers in India.

Q. 3 : Provide suggestions to solve the problems faced by women workers in India.

Q. 4 : Explain impact of poverty on women.

Q. 5 : Examine the role of the Self Help Groups in eradicating rural poverty.

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UNIT 14: ENVIRONMENT AND WOMEN

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Impact of Environmental Issues on Women

14.3.1 Suggestions to Mitigate the Impact of Environmental Degradation on Women

14.4 Let Us Sum Up

14.5 Further Reading

14.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.7 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the relationship women and environment
- discuss the impact of environmental issues on women.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between environment and human being is interlinked. Human society does not exist in vacuum, but it exists within the environment only. So any major or minor change in the environment, will definitely affect human beings. Accordingly, the relationship between the environment and the women is very close. Women play a critical role in managing natural resources on family and community levels and are most affected by environmental degradation. In communities around the world, women manage water, sources for fuel, and food, as well as both forests and agricultural terrain. The relationship women and environment is also recognised by various international documents and conferences. The problem of environmental degradation has now begun to pose threats to women in various ways. In this unit, we shall discuss the impact of environmental degradation on women.

14.3 IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ON WOMEN

Environment has profound impact on the lives of women. In the early 1960s, an interest in women and their connection with the environment was sparked, largely by a book written by Ester Boserup entitled "*Woman's Role in Economic Development*". Starting in the 1980s, policy makers and governments became more mindful of the connection between the environment and gender issues. Changes began to be made regarding natural resources and environmental management with the specific role of women in mind. According to the World Bank in 1991, "Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy...and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them". Whereas women were previously neglected or ignored, there was increasing attention paid to the impact of women on the natural environment and, in return, the effects the environment has on the health and well-being of women". The gender-environment relations have valuable ramifications with regard to the understanding of nature between men and women, the management and distribution of resources, responsibilities and day-to-day life as well as the well being of people.

Globally, women provide livelihood for their families and simultaneously manage the environment. However, due to gender power relations, their knowledge is often overlooked and they are not counted as agents of change. Therefore, a gender analysis of environmental management is necessary, looking at gender aspects of the use of natural resources (water, forests, land, etc), consumption of services and goods (transport, food, etc) and experiences of environmental degradation (pollution, chemicals, loss of biodiversity, etc). Women and men should be agents in environmental management, including equal participation in decision making and the policy implementation processes.

When addressing gender in the context of the environment, it is important to recognise that women and men are not homogenous categories. Where women and men live, their age, social class, ethnicity,

religion, sexual orientation and other variables, interact in shaping the links between gender and the environment. This complexity must be accounted for participation and it requires analysis and programme design. The impact of environmental degradation on women can be discussed as follows:

- **Chemicals and pollution**: Women exposures to toxic chemicals depend on the division of labour in the private and public arenas. For example, women are disproportionately exposed to pesticides used in non-waged agricultural activities. Women's responsibilities in household work mean that they are more exposed to toxic chemicals found in products used for cleaning, personal care, and pest control, and to pesticides and house building materials stored at home. Another risk is pesticide containers recycled for other uses, which may have severe health consequences. In rural areas indoor pollution affects women more than men, as they are more exposed to smoke from burning fuels. In urban areas, risk factors include exposures to chemicals and indoor air pollution from household solid fuel. These hazards play a role in more than 80 per cent of the diseases regularly reported by the WHO. Inefficient burning of biomass in unventilated homes releases high levels of black carbon, causing approximately 2 million deaths per year, mainly amongst women and children in the poorest communities.
- **Water**: Both women and girls play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of freshwater as a natural resource, and they are often responsible for sanitation and for maintaining a hygienic home. Water is also a prerequisite for gardening, raising livestock and agriculture. Women and girls bear disproportionate burden of deteriorating water quality and availability in rural and urban areas. A gender analysis is relevant in the management of water as a natural resource, in the planning and design of sustainable water technologies and their application to local conditions. Today, 2.8 billion people - approximately 40 percent of the world's population - live in river basins impacted by water scarcity. Lack of access to water decreases women's contributions to agricultural production and their business opportunities. Droughts also bring health hazards

through lack of water for drinking, cooking and hygiene, as well as food insecurity. Other health consequences are nutritional deficiencies and burdens associated with travelling to collect water and this adversely affects women.

- **Energy**: Rural societies in developing countries rely predominantly on natural resources, such as wood, charcoal and agricultural wastes as primary energy sources. The use of these is seldom sustainable and often has negative impacts on the environment. In many countries women bear the main responsibility for providing energy to the household, and often lack technologies like efficient stoves, grinders and pumps that could ease their burdens. Women are affected by the lack of access to modern energy services also when growing food, maintaining the household, and in opportunities for education and employment. In the male dominated energy sector a challenge lies in raising awareness and promoting gender policies in institutions and organisations.
- **Livelihoods, Agriculture and Fishing**: Women and girl's responsibilities as food growers, fuel gatherers and caregivers connect them closely to the surrounding environment and natural resources, and equip them with distinct knowledge, such as crop varieties suitable for different soils and weather conditions. However, women have less access to land than men and are therefore noticeably less productive than men. In coastal areas, men work predominantly with fishing and fish farming, while up to 90% of secondary sector workers are women. Women are also heavily involved in the small-scale fishery sector. Increasing the productivity of women farming and fishing is crucial for women's economic empowerment. However, producing more is not enough – and may harm the environment. Women's empowerment can be increased through productivity combined with the conservation and improvement of natural resources.
- **Forestry:** The gender division of labour in forest management differs and depends on many aspects. Men often collect firewood by felling

and processing trees, while women use fallen branches and thus have a less damaging impact on the environment. To a larger extent than men, women use products such as berries, herbs and honey. Yet, women have less land rights and access to forests, and participate less in forest management.

- **Waste Management**: The global environmental consequences of waste disposal are alarming. This is particularly true in the developing world's urban areas, where for example dumpsites have severe environmental and health effects. Women and men have different ways of handling wastes, in private and public. Household waste management is often the unpaid work of women, but when it is mechanised - for example by the use of carts or delivery tricycles - and at the same time paid for, men often take over this work. In other words, in large proportion of waste management works women are involved yet men gain the benefits not women.

Moreover, environmental effects have an impact on female fertility, from nutrition, weight and physical health to psychological stress and use of medications. One key influence that women increasingly need to take into account is the environment in which they live. In short, environmental factors have been strongly linked to women's ability and their day to day life.

14.3.1 Suggestions to Mitigate the Impact of Environmental Degradation on Women

To mitigate the impact of environmental degradation on women some measures should be taken on an urgent basis. Some of the suggested measures in this regard are-

a. There is an urgent need of development of gender action plans in all environmental organisations and ensure that gender action plans are used in dialogue with other donors.

b. Inclusion of women in decision making processes at all levels is very important.

c. Use of targeted approaches, that address women and girls' specific interests, vulnerabilities and needs, will also be fruitful in this context.

d. Information should be spread about financing women for doing environmental work. This will encourage more and more women to come forward and engage themselves in environmental issues.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Who was the author of the book entitled "Woman's Role in *Economic Development*"?

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Q.2: Write briefly about any two environmental issues that have profound impact on women.

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Q.3: Mention any two suggestions to mitigate the impact of environmental degradation on women.

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14.4 LET US SUM UP

- The relationship between the environment and the women is very close and interlinked. Women play a critical role in managing natural resources at the family and community levels and are most affected by environmental degradation. In communities around the world, women manage water, sources for fuel, food, as well as both forests and agricultural terrain. The relationship women and environment is also recognised by various international documents and conferences.
- The environment has profound impact in the lives of women. In the early 1960s, an interest in women and their connection with the environment was sparked, largely by a book written by Ester Boserup entitled *"Woman's Role in Economic Development*". Changes

began to be made regarding natural resource and environmental management with the specific role of women in mind. The World Bank has also recognised the important role of women in resource management.

- Globally, women provide a livelihood for their families and simultaneously manage the environment. However, due to gender power relations, their knowledge is often overlooked and they are not counted as agents of change. Therefore, a gender analysis of environmental management is necessary, looking at gender aspects of the use of natural resources. Women and men should be agents in environmental management, including equal participation in decision making and policy implementation processes.
- Various environmental problems have a negative impact in the lives of women. Environmental problems have an impact on female fertility, from nutrition, weight and physical health to psychological stress and use of medications.
- To mitigate the impact of environmental degradation on women, some measures should be taken on an urgent basis. Some of the suggested measures in this regard are- there is an urgent need of development of gender action plans in all environmental organisations and to ensure that gender action plans are used in dialogue with other donors. Also inclusion of women in decision making processes at all levels is very important. The use of targeted approaches, that address women and girls' specific interests, vulnerabilities and needs, will also be fruitful in this context, information should be widely disseminated with regard to financing women in taking up Environmental work.



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14.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Ester Boserup

Ans to Q No 2: (i) **Chemicals and pollution:** Women exposures to toxic chemicals depend on the division of labour in the private and public arenas. For example women are disproportionately exposed to pesticides used in non-waged agricultural activities. Women's responsibilities in household work mean that they are more exposed to toxic chemicals found in products used for cleaning, personal care, and pest control, and to pesticides and house building materials stored at home. Another risk is pesticide containers recycled for other uses, which may have severe health consequences. In rural areas, indoor pollution affects women more than men, as they are more exposed to smoke from burning fuels. In urban areas, risk factors include exposures to chemicals and indoor air pollution from household solid fuel. These hazards play a role in more than 80 per cent of the diseases regularly reported by the WHO. Inefficient burning of biomass in unventilated homes releases high levels of black carbon, causing approximately 2 million deaths per year, mainly of women and children in the poorest communities.

(ii) **Water:** Both women and girls play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of freshwater as a natural resource, and they are often responsible for sanitation and for

maintaining a hygienic home. Water is also a prerequisite for gardening, raising livestock and agriculture. Women and girls bear disproportional the burden of deteriorating water quality and availability in rural and urban areas. A gender analysis is relevant in the management of water as a natural resource, in the planning and design of sustainable water technologies and their application to local conditions. Today 2.8 billion people - approximately 40 percent of the world's population - live in river basins impacted by water scarcity. Lack of access to water decreases women's contributions to agricultural production and their business opportunities. Droughts also bring health hazards through lack of water for drinking, cooking and hygiene, as well as food insecurity. Other health consequences are nutritional deficiencies and burdens associated with travelling to collect water and this adversely affects women.

Ans to Q No 3: (i) There is an urgent need of development of gender action plans in all environmental organisations and ensure that gender action plans are used in dialogue with other donors.

(ii) Inclusion of women in decision making processes at all levels is very important.



14.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : Write briefly about the relationship between environment and gender.

Q. 2 : Discuss the impact of environmental degradation on the lives of women.

Q. 3 : Examine how degradation of environment is related to disempowerment of women.

Q. 4 : Provide suggestions to mitigate the impact of environmental problems on women.

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UNIT 15: PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Participation of Women in the Assam Movement

15.4 Participation of Women in the Bodoland Movement

15.5 Let Us Sum Up

15.6 Further Reading

15.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

15.8 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- discuss the role of women in politics
- discuss the participation of women in the Assam Movement
- describe the participation of women in the Bodoland Movement.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Participation of women in socio-political movement is not a new phenomenon. Women continue to be a part of the resistance movement throughout the world. The foundation of political participation of women in India was laid during the Freedom Movement. The selfless participation of large number of women had strengthened the movement. However, gender equality was nowhere the agenda of Indian National movement. It was not the main thrust of the national movement. Either directly or indirectly large number of women participated in the freedom struggle. The contribution of women in getting freedom is noteworthy. They proved that women are capable of strengthening the political movement. The participation of women in freedom struggle had its impact on the society and family and on women themselves.

In the Non-cooperation Movement which can be considered as the first potent milestone in India's liberation struggle, women in Assam made a significant presence. It must be mentioned here that Gandhiji's call to women had an immediate liberating effect and he was able to draw large number of women into the movement. In the beginning, a small number of women participated in the Movement, like Bidyutprova Devi, Girija Devi, Hemanta Kumari Devi, Dharmada Devi, Nalinibala Devi, Pushpalata Das, Guneshwari Nath and Chandraprova Saikiani. They organised meetings both at the rural and the urban level to disseminate the message and intent of "non-cooperation, swadeshi and constructive work". Gandhiji's visit to Assam in 1921 provided boost to their activities. The Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam too saw a vibrant participation of women. In 1930, Pushpalata Das along with Sarla Saxena, Punyaprava Barua and Jyotsna Majumdar, established the "*Mukti Sangha*" to mobilise girls in the national movement. Their fiery spirited speeches encouraged many young minds to fight for Poorna Swaraj. It is during this movement that at various places of Assam, "*Nari Bahinis*" or women squads were formed for carrying out programmes of picketing. Anti-opium campaign was very strongly carried out by women during this phase. With a large number of men behind bars, women came out in thousands breaking the law to show their support to the programme of Salt Satyagraha. In the Quit India Movement women in Assam came out in large numbers. It was in 1940's that women wings were made an integral part of the Indian National Congress at both national and provincial level. In Assam, the women's wing was set up in September 1940 with Pushpalata Das and Amolprava Das as joint secretaries. The following year, the All Assam Girl Students' Committee was formed in Shillong. In the face of unprecedented police repression and with large numbers of men in prison, prominent women leaders took upon themselves the task of coordinating the activities. Chandraprova Saikiani was one of the main guiding forces among women. In 1942, the *Mrityu Bahini* or Suicide Squad was formed to carry out subversive activities in a more organised manner. The Quit India phase showcased the rise of a novel wave of female militancy. Kanaklata, Ratnabala Phukan, Buddheshwari Hazarika, Khahuli

Nath and Damayanti Bora were active members of the Mrityu Bahini and were acclaimed as fearless radical women nationalists. Besides them, common women of the Assamese society made immense contributions via means like facilitation of hiding weapons, using their domestic role to support subversive and revolutionary activities.

Thus, Assam is a land where women took part in every aspect of society - be it administration, cultural aspects since the ancient time. In this unit, we shall discuss participation of women in two very significant movements that occurred in Assam, namely- the Assam Movement and the Bodoland Movement.

15.3 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE ASSAM MOVEMENT

In the case of Assam Movement which had at its core, the demands of locating and expelling illegal migrants from Assam, economic development of the state, safeguarding larger Assamese linguistic and cultural identity, infrastructural development of the state; the participation of women was as widespread as that of men. The participation of women from different class, caste and the communal background is one of the most important features of the anti-foreigners' agitation of 1979-85. Women were spontaneous participants and they took part in all activities, be it *satyagraha*, picketing or procession. The agitation was primarily a student-led movement with the student community, both boys and girls participating in large proportions. One of the important roles played by the women in this movement was the act of fundraising for the sustenance of the movement. The numerous Mahila Samiti (Women's Association) that came up during the agitation contributed money to All Assam Students' Union (AASU) to carry on the agitation and this process lasted until the end of the agitation. Assam Women Writers Association supported the cause of the agitation and pleaded the government not to hold election without correcting voters list which allegedly comprised a large number of names of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

In almost every corner of every locality, a women's association was formed and these women were not merely supporting the agitation but they were creating new avenues for self-employment and self-dependence. They used handloom as their traditional companion and instrument to carry their fights against the 'other'. The newspaper reports were full of their offer to help victims of violence, to provide food and aid to those who were picketing, themselves being engaged in picketing and at the same time, weaving cloths, which was the main source of earning for many families. Another notable women's organisation that played a crucial role in the movement is Assam Jagrata Mahila Parishad . It provided crucial assistance in the political mobilisation of women. They symbolised women as mother and their inspiration as a source of strength to carry on the agitation in the face of hardships. An important outcome of the anti-foreigner's agitation in Assam was the emergence of women leaders at the time of the movement. Students involved in the AASU led movement gave girl students the opportunity to lead from the front. An example of such leadership was Rekha Rani Bodo, a tribal leader. She was elected as president of All Assam Tribal Women's Association in 1982 and was a part of AASU.

Another important contribution of women towards the Assam agitation was through their role as "Peacekeepers". During the anti-foreigners' agitation in Assam, thousands of women poured into the streets in support of the agitation and many of them were victims of violence. In such situation, many women's organisations came up who urged for peace. Several Matribahinis (Mother Force) were created to assist those who suffered during the agitation. Samajsewi Matribahini (Social Worker Mother Force) was one such organisation who offered material help to those women who were either molested by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) *jawans* or lost family members, by granting them handlooms to become self-dependent financially. Purbanchaliya Mahila Sanstha (Northeastern Women's Association) was another organisation involved in helping those who suffered due to the agitation. The women involved in this organisation went from place to place, to offer medical and material support to those injured in conflicts that broke out between the protesters and security forces. By

1981, there was many women's organisation involved in maintaining peace in society. They were protesting against the army and police torture on agitators.

Finally, if we look at the entire period of the agitation, women's participation was not of equal intensity. At the beginning, the middle-class women living in urban areas were supporters of the agitation. They spontaneously came out of home for processions and picketing. Old ladies and young girls in rural areas supported the agitation and took to the streets. But once the agitation became more intense, women of different ethnic groups too started participating in the agitation. The common perception was that, as the 'Mother Assam' (Aai Axomi) is in danger and everyone should come out of home to save her from 'intruders'.

A positive change brought by the Assam Movement on women's lives was their growing political consciousness. This led to a blossoming of a multitude of women's organisations and women clubs. Some of them were- Mula Gabhoru Santha, Sanjukta Mahila Sangha (United Women's Association), Satya Sandhya Mahila Sangha (Satya Sandhya Women's Association), Sankari Samaj Mahila Samiti (Sankari Society Women's Committee) etc. Although many of these were dissolved after the agitation, yet a large number of these associations continued operating. It gave women a sense of unity, togetherness and strength to stand together against issues, such as domestic violence and social disturbances caused by drunkards. After the agitation was over, many of these women's associations continue working as self-help groups and organisations for social and political empowerment of women.

Although, in the Assam movement millions of Assamese women came out on the street and participated in the different programmes of the movement, yet their role in the success of the movement did not bear any fruitful result for the women with respect of electoral politics. In 1985 the Assam Accord was signed between the Central Government and the leaders of the Assam Movement. The leaders of the movement formed Asom Gana Parishad, (AGP) - a new regional political party in 1985 and took part in the election to the Assam Legislative Assembly held in the same year. It was

ironical that only two women had received the opportunity to file nomination as candidates of AGP in that election despite millions of Assamese girl students and women participating in the Assam Movement. Although it proved that in the mass movement the participation of women was considered very essential, yet they were virtually kept aloof from the electoral politics. Other national political parties were also reluctant to induct women into the electoral politics of the state.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Mention the names of any two women's association involved in the Assam Movement.

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Q.2: What were the demands raised during the Assam Movement?

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Q.3: Write briefly about the role of women as Peacekeeper during the Assam Movement.

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15.4 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE BODOLAND MOVEMENT

The Bodoland Movement has been the most significant tribal movement in contemporary Assam. This movement is rooted in the colonial times but intensified into a radical political, cultural and extremist assertion in the 1980s. Some of the reasons for the emergence of the Bodoland Movement are- feeling of discrimination, deprivation and injustice experienced by the Bodo community in Assam. During the campaign in

order to protect political, economic and cultural identity, the leaders of the Bodoland Movement emphasised that the Bodo people are ethnically different from rest of the people of Assam and hence entitled to political representation in the form of a separate state-Bodoland.

The Bodoland Movement marked the beginning of a political awakening among the Bodo women. With the establishment of the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) in 1986 later known All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in 1993, large number of women from villages to towns had joined this organisation as members. Prior to the formation of the AATWWF there were hardly any women in leadership. The AATWWF was the first organisation in which a large number of women participated. The AATWWF was formed under the direct initiative of the leaders like Upendranath Bramha, Sansuma Khungur Bwismithiary, Subhas Basumatary, and Deora Dekhereb Basumatary, of the ABSU. Pramila Rani Brahma was elected as the first president of AATWWF. With the establishment of this federation, it started to function as the women wing to ABSU, aiding the principal actor in taking forward the Bodoland Movement.

Prior to 1994 women's participation in the ABSU movement was negligible. It was more intense only after the movement for implementation of the Roman Script launched in 1994. Alo (pseudo name), one of the prominent AATWWF members, was a close associate of Upendranath Brahma and took active part in mobilising people on the issues of the Movement.

The Bodoland Movement exhibited-two contradictory trends very clearly: non-violent protests through organising mass rallies, processions, protest rallies, hunger strike, road blockade, etc. and the other trend was violent in nature. The ABSU established a military wing (ABSU Volunteer Force) to conduct armed struggle. Dr. Phukan Chandra Bodo and, later Premsingh Brahma, were in-charge of this wing and were designated as 'chairmen'. They were both former executive members of the ABSU. The Bodo Volunteer Force actively participated in the movement from the beginning. It worked as an underground wing of the ABSU. Its protests

were violent in nature. Its volunteers worked as soldiers for the Bodos during the movement. In 1989, the ABSU and the VF leaders expressed the desire to train the women in arms. The women too wanted to join arms training and they did it. This Force required messengers to carry secret messages. Many AATWWF members of different village councils and district committees were involved in this activity. Carrying money for ABSU was also a part of their job. Thus, from 1989 onwards, women joined the Volunteer Force but they were not involved in 'direct action'. They were taught to use the rifle for their own safety. The aim of such training was to provide some measures for their safety. There was no plan to bring them to armed action. But they were told that if situation so demanded they would be called in. They were trained to carry messages and other necessary articles. Bodo leader Upendra Nath Brahma drew large number of women into the freedom struggle. Brahma believed that a society cannot progress without the progress of women. In response to Upendra Nath Brahma's call a large number of women joined in the movement.

The All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation played a very significant role in promoting political as well as cultural consciousness among the Bodo women and performed an even greater role in the political mobilisation of women during the Movement. The Bodo women under the banner of this organisation collectively performed a wide range of activities to support and sustain the Movement. They participated extensively in protests, dharna, gheraos and processions against police and army brutality and state atrocities. A section of women of the organisation also provided indirect support to the Movement by facilitating the active members with food, nursing and healthcare. Therefore, women participation in the Bodoland Movement reflected the diversity of roles that Bodo women could adapt to. Then again, there was this other section of enlightened and educated Bodo women, equipped with managerial and leadership skills, who assisted in disseminating Bodo sub-nationalist values through fiery speeches and skillful mobilisation. Many Bodo women received training in nursing and healthcare by doctors in Primary Healthcare Centres as a part of the larger strategy of the Movement. These women were to provide nursing and

immediate medical aid to the injured activists. Additionally, there was also an emission of literary activities among Bodo women during the Movement. *Songdan*, the first magazine of Bodo women by Bodo women and for Bodo women, was published in 1991 by the AATWWF. The magazine called *Raikhrnuthi* was published in the same year. These magazines were published once in a year and women related issues were of primary concern to them though they also published other writings of women. The editorial board members were women though the writers were not necessarily women. Many renowned Bodo intellectuals, poets, ABSU activists, etc. wrote on women related issues in those magazines. Those articles discussed the contribution of women to the upliftment of the Bodos, involvement of the Bodo women in politics, women's contribution to the development of Bodo society etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4: What is the full form of AATWWF?

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Q.5: Who was elected as the first president of AATWWF?

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Q.6: Write briefly about the role played by the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation in the Bodoland Movement.

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15.5 LET US SUM UP

- The foundation of political participation of women in India was laid during the Freedom Movement. The selfless participation of large

number of women had strengthened the movement. Either directly or indirectly large number of women participated in the freedom struggle. The contribution of women in getting freedom is noteworthy. They proved that women are capable of strengthening the political movement. The participation of women in freedom struggle had its impact on the society and family and on women themselves.

- In Assam too, women participated in large manner in various socio-political movements. Two major movements that occurred in Assam in post-independent period are- the Assam movement and the Bodoland movement. In these two movements participation of women was very encouraging.
- The main demands of the Assam Movement (1979-85) were the demands of locating and expelling illegal migrants from Assam, economic development of the state, safeguarding larger Assamese linguistic and cultural identity, infrastructural development of the state etc. The participation of women from different class, caste and the communal background is one of the most important features of the anti-foreigners' agitation of 1979-85.
- Women were spontaneous participants and they took part in all activities of the Assam Movement, be it *satyagraha*, picketing or procession. One of the important roles played by the women in this movement was the act of fundraising for the sustenance of the movement. Assam Women Writers Association supported the cause of the agitation and pleaded the government not to hold election without correcting voters list which was alleged to comprise of a large number of names of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
- A number of women's organisations were formed during the Assam Movement, such as Mula Gabhoru Santha, Sanjukta Mahila Sangha (United Women's Association), Satya Sandhya Mahila Sangha (Satya Sandhya Women's Association), Sankari Samaj Mahila Samiti (Sankari Society Women's Committee) etc.
- Another important contribution of women towards the Assam agitation was through their role of "Peacekeepers". During the anti-foreigners'

agitation in Assam, thousands of women poured into the streets in support of the agitation and many of them were victims of violence.

- A positive change brought by the Assam Movement on women's lives was their growing political consciousness. Although in the Assam movement millions of Assamese women came out on the street and participated in the different programmes of the movement, yet their role in the success of the movement did not bear any fruitful result for the women in respect of electoral politics.
- The Bodoland Movement marked the beginning of a political awakening among the Bodo women. With the establishment of the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) in 1986 later known All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in 1993, large number of women from villages to towns had joined this organisation as members. Pramila Rani Brahma was elected as the first president of AATWWF. With the establishment of this federation, it started to function as the women wing to ABSU, aiding the principal factor in taking forward the Bodoland Movement.
- The ABSU established a military wing (ABSU Volunteer Force) to conduct armed struggle. In 1989, the ABSU and the VF leaders expressed the desire to train the women in arms. This Force required messengers to carry secret messages. Many AATWWF members of different village councils and district committees were involved in this activity. Therefore, from 1989 onwards, women joined the Volunteer Force but they were not involved in 'direct action'. They were taught to use the rifle for their own safety. The aim of such training was to provide some measures for their safety.
- The All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation played a very significant role in promoting political as well as cultural consciousness among the Bodo women and performed an even greater role in the political mobilisation of women during the Movement. The Bodo women under the banner of this organisation collectively performed a wide range of activities to support and sustain the Movement. They participated extensively in protests, dharna, gheraos and processions against police

and army brutality and state atrocities. They also provided food, nursing and healthcare services.



15.6 FURTHER READING

1) Baishya, D. D. (n.d.). *Political Participation of Women of Assam with Special Reference to Nalbari District.* International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS), II(VIII), 87–95.

2) Chaudhuri, Suchetra Sen. (2004). *The Bodo Movement Women's Participation*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication.

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4) Sharma, Nabanita. (2017). Role of Women during the Anti-Foreigners' Agitation in Assam 1979-1985, *Journal of North East India Studies*, 7(2): 18-32.

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15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Mula Gabhoru Santha, Sanjukta Mahila Sangha

Ans to Q No 2: The demands raised during the Assam Movement were- the locating and expelling illegal migrants from Assam, economic development of the state, safeguarding larger Assamese linguistic and cultural identity, infrastructural development of the state etc.

Ans to Q No 3: One important contribution of women towards the Assam Movement was through their role of "Peacekeepers". During the anti-foreigners' agitation in Assam, thousands of women poured

into the streets in support of the agitation and many of them were victims of violence. In such situation, many women's organisations came up who urged for peace. Several Matribahinis (Mother Force) were created to assist those who suffered during the agitation. Samajsewi Matribahini (Social Worker Mother Force) was one such organisation who offered material help to those women who were either molested by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) *jawans* or lost family members, by granting them hand looms to become self-dependent financially. Purbanchaliya Mahila Sanstha (Northeastern Women's Association) was another organisation involved in helping those who suffered due to the agitation. The women involved in this organisation went from place to place, to offer medical and material support to those injured in conflicts that broke out between the protesters and security forces. By 1981, there was many women's organisation involved in maintaining peace in society. They were protesting against the army and police torture on agitators.

Ans to Q No 4: All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation

Ans to Q No 5: Pramila Rani Brahma

Ans to Q No 6: The All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation played a very significant role in promoting political as well as cultural consciousness among the Bodo women and performed an even greater role in the political mobilisation of women during the Movement. The Bodo women under the banner of this organisation collectively performed a wide range of activities to support and sustain the Movement. They participated extensively in protests, dharna, gheraos and processions against police and army brutality and state atrocities. A section of women of the organisation also provided indirect support to the Movement by facilitating the active members with food, nursing and healthcare.



15.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1 : In which year was the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation formed?

Q. 2 : Mention the name of the military wing of the ABSU.

Q. 3 : Mention names of three women's associations formed during the period of the Assam Movement.

Q. 4 : Examine the participation of women in the Assam Movement.

Q. 5 : Discuss the role of women in the Bodoland Movement.

*** ***** ***

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- **Book**

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2) Arora, N.D.& Awasthy, S.S. (2004). *Political Theory*. New Delhi: Har Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd.
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3) Sharma, Nabanita. (2017). Role of Women during the Anti-Foreigners' Agitation in Assam 1979-1985, *Journal of North East India Studies*, 7(2): 18-32.

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Name of the Paper: .....
Course Code: .....

Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
City Office: Housefed Complex, Guwahati-781006

Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781006
(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1) Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? ☐☐☐

2) Please give your opinions (by ✓ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I)	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II)	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III)	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV)	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V)	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI)	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII)	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII)	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX)	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1) Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

.....

.....

2) What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.