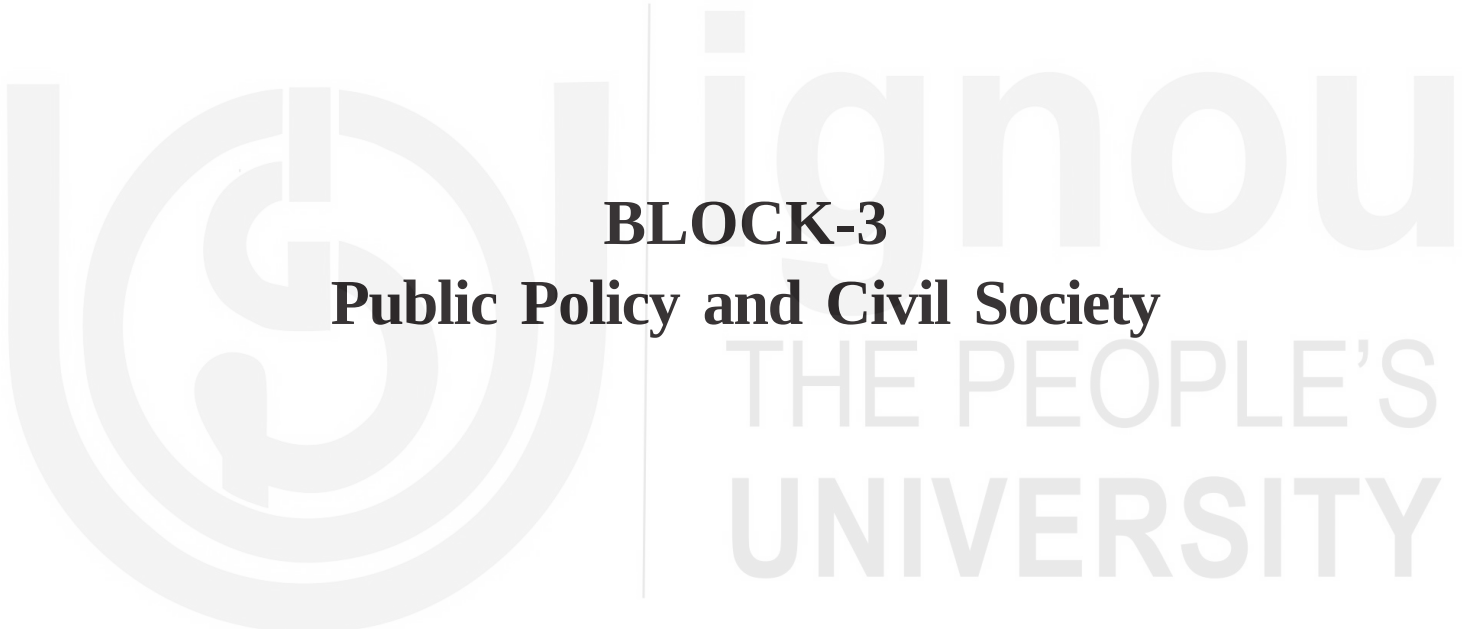




BLOCK-3

Public Policy and Civil Society

UNIT 8 ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Meaning of Interest Groups
- 8.3 Types of Interest Groups
- 8.4 Theories Related to Interest Groups
- 8.5 Strategies of Interest Groups in Policy Process
- 8.6 An Appraisal of the Role of Interest Groups
- 8.7 Conclusion
- 8.8 Glossary
- 8.9 References
- 8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning and nature of interest groups;
- Describe the different types of interest groups;
- Elucidate the strategies used by interest groups to influence public policy; and
- Critically examine the role of interest groups in policy process.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Policymaking is not a one person show. It is not limited to mere government by the legislators and executive. It involves different stakeholders and has to take care of the dynamic relationship between all interest groups. This makes public participation necessary for effective and accountable policymaking and it ensures cooperation and commitment at the implementation stage too. Public policy is the legal framework to secure the interests of people. It is a vehicle to give expression, shape and dynamism to the aspirations and interests of people of different sections. Since it has to deal with multi or varied aspects and demands of the people, public policy cannot operate in a vacuum, nor in isolation of the society in which it is operating.

This makes it mandatory for public policy of any government to take care of the different groups of people and organisations working for securing their rights and interests. Here comes the role of interest groups in public policy process, who represent the interests of different people. People having common interests; often come together for the fulfillment of their goals. When people have some

*Contributed by Ms. Daisy Sharma, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

common interests, they get easily mobilised. When people with common interests come together in an organised form, they are called interest groups. These interest groups are organisations of people with policy goals, who work within the political process to promote such goals. They try to influence or initiate government policy in their interest. They use lobbying, engage in electioneering, as well as educate and mobilise public to achieve their goals. Unlike political parties, they do not take part in elections or try to win control over government. They are not interested in running the government; all they want is to influence public policy of the government in order to secure their common interests. This Unit will discuss the role of interest groups in the policy process. It will examine their meaning, nature and importance in policy making and implementation. It will also make an appraisal of the role played by interest groups, as well as the strategies they adopt to influence the policy process.

8.2 MEANING OF INTEREST GROUPS

Interest groups are associations of individuals or organisations with common interests or shared concerns. They are non-political in nature and try to influence public policy in favour of their common interests. They have specific public policy agendas. We can say that interest groups are groups with vested interests, who are politically active in law making process, only to the extent to achieve their interests. These interest groups can be of different size and nature. However, they all focus on achieving the interests of their members. Some of them have a large membership base, while others represent only a few members.

In order to maximise their benefits, they try to pressurise the State. They are organised actively for the promotion and defense of their common interests. They have some specific interests and their activities are limited to the promotion and protection of these very interests. We can say that interest groups are basically voluntary associations of people, which come together for the sake of their common shared interests. They are autonomous and politically neutral. Irrespective of any party in power, they try to bargain with government and affect its decision making in favour of their shared interests. They do not try to place their own members in the government, but they try to influence government decisions by either establishing contacts with the government authorities or creating pressure on them by using various legitimate techniques like lobbying, corresponding, publicising, propagandising, petitioning, demonstrating etc. Sometimes, they use illegal methods too like strikes and corruption to get to their goals.

Interest groups, may *directly*, for instance by meeting government officials, participating in public hearings, providing draft reports to members of government or may *indirectly*, for instance, through consultants/lawyers seek to affect government policy. Now, there is increasing recognition to the emergence of interest groups and their efforts to impact public policy. Studies in public policy give due attention to understanding the nature and scenario under which interest groups emerge and impact the State or public policies. Interest groups have gained prominence for *two* major reasons. *Firstly*, everyone knows that a single person can have no effect on policy making or policy process, whereas government's policies impact every person of the society. It is the collective organised effort, which is recognised by government and given due weightage. Acknowledgement of this united power demonstrates that government surely responds to collective voices, makes people of common interests come together for the protection of their interests.

Secondly, when people become a member of any political party, despite their keen interest, they have to set aside their individual agenda for the ideology, command and policies of their party. Hence, interest groups give a better chance to people to let government take notice of their demands without any restrictions. Hence, they try to mould government's stand in their favour. Even though interest groups do not directly participate in political process like contesting the elections or entering government jobs, they have become a pertinent component in policy making in the democratic framework. Even in any kind of government-totalitarian, feudalistic, or dictatorship, the role of interest groups cannot be denied in policy making.

Unlike political party, a person can be a member of two or more interest groups at the same time. Interest groups are basically divided into mass interest groups and traditional interest groups. Mass interest groups have large membership; they have well-organised associations like trade unions. On the other hand, there are traditional interest groups also called as elite interest groups, who value quality over the quantity. They include very few and very specific persons like Association of Defense Officer's Wives, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). In short, we can say that interest groups have the following characteristics:

- They are organised group of people.
- They have common interests.
- They are voluntary in nature.
- They are autonomous in their working.
- They are politically neutral.
- They are different from political parties.
- They do not want to form government, but they want governments to listen to their demands and promote their interests.
- They have limited goals, as they only wish to fulfil their shared interests.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

1. Describe the nature of interest groups.

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2. Explain the reasons for the growing importance of interest groups.

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8.3 TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

There are various categories of interest groups:

Economic Interest Groups

This is largest category of interest groups. It includes organisations, which represent big business houses like the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Federation of All India Food Grain Dealers Association, and All India Manufacturers' Organisation. Trade Unions and Professional Associations also fall under this category. Their members have a direct incentive to support the actions of these groups. Economic interest groups engage in direct actions like demonstrations, writing letters, presenting memorandum to government, and meeting with government officials. They also avail services of professionals to secure their interests.

Public Interest Groups

They are also known as citizens' action groups. They are concerned with a broad range of issues that affect public at large, such as social and environmental issues. As their name suggests, they do not work in their own interests and are basically not-for profit organisations. Due to this, they are given high weightage in policy process. For example:

- Environment Protection Groups such as Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan
- Democratic Rights Organisations
- Civil Liberties Associations
- Gandhi Peace Foundation
- Women's Rights Organisations

Ideological Interest Groups

There are certain interest groups based on the support or opposition to one particular ideology. Their support for any policy depends exclusively on whether they find it ideologically sound. For example, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and American Conservative Union (ACU). These are generally found in the West.

Single Issue Interest Groups

Some interest groups are formed to advocate for or against a single issue. They are mainly *ad hoc* associations. Because of their specific focus they also disappear when their cause is met. For example, National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL).

8.4 THEORIES RELATED TO INTEREST GROUPS

There are *three* important theories of interest group politics:

1. Pluralism and Group Theory
2. Elites and the Denial of Pluralism
3. Hyperpluralism and Interest Group Liberalism

Pluralist theory argues that interest group activity brings representation to all. Interest groups act as a link between people and government. The various interest groups compete among themselves, hence they act like checks and balances. No one group is likely to become too dominant.

Elites and the Denial of Pluralism

Elite theory argues that a few interest groups, primarily the wealthy, have most of the power. There is a great inequality of power among the Groups. Wealthy industrialists and large corporations enjoy a greater share of power. These elite groups are given more weightage during decision making. Hence it hampers the true functioning of democracy as elected governments work for elite interest groups.

Hyper-pluralism and Interest Group Liberalism

Hyper-pluralist theory asserts that there is over-mushrooming of interest groups. There are too many groups and they all have so many demands. Government tries to please every group. This results in contradictory and confusing public policy, lacking in direction. The phrase “interest group liberalism” refers to government’s excessive deference to groups.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

1. Give examples of Economic Interest Groups.

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2. Explain the Elite Theory of interest groups.

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**8.5 STRATEGIES OF INTEREST GROUPS IN
POLICY PROCESS**

Interest groups are closely related to policy process. However, their relationship with policy process varies across the countries. In some countries like Britain, interest groups touch the highest levels of participation in policy process, for example Britain’s major party, the Labour party grew out of British Trade Union. Countries, where political party system is weak, pay more heed to the demands of interest groups. But in the countries with strong and organised parties, the

demands of the interest groups have to match the interest and ideology of political parties. Thus, they have limited inference there.

As political parties have started losing their grassroots connection and elections have majorly become vote bank shows, interest groups have come to play an influential role in policy process. Due to their shared interests, they not only represent their members but their numerical strength also increases. Even by not being a member of that particular interest group, they support its demands for the fulfilment of common interests. This multiplies their significance manifold.

Many powerful and wealthy interest groups like Chamber of Commerce provide finance to the political parties, so they always look for their support and try to compensate them with favourable policies. Some interest groups like Farmer's Associations, though not wealthy in assets, have a strong support base. Their large membership base acts as a vote bank for political parties and their interests are kept in mind in policy process.

Interest groups try to influence policy makers to secure their interests in policy making and policy execution. They use different strategies to achieve their goals such as lobbying, electioneering, meetings etc. Interest groups use direct and indirect methods for goal fulfilment. They engage in "insider strategies," including gaining access to decision makers and using the courts, but they also engage in "outsider" strategies, wherein they go public and use electoral tactics to indirectly influence decision makers. The strategies adopted by interest groups are as follows:

Lobbying

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "Lobbying is any attempt by individuals or private interest groups for influencing the decisions of government. In its original meaning, it refers to efforts to influence the votes of legislators, generally in the lobby outside the legislative chamber." Lobbying can take many forms. Lobbyists represent before the legislative committees, provide them information and try to convince them in their favour. This can include direct discussion with policymakers concerning the views of the interest groups. They try to establish contact with public officials either through letters, emails or calls. They also launch campaigns for generating public opinion in their favour. They also try to have their favourite candidates in the legislation. In the US, the lobbyists exert influence in Congress by influencing the legislative agenda and crafting the language of legislation. A small portion of highly skilled and well-connected lobbyists also achieve access to the White House in their efforts to lobby for the President. Effective lobbyists will use all of the following techniques to present information to policy makers, which is favourable to the interest group the lobbyist is representing. Some methods of lobbying could be:

- Private meetings with public officials.
- Testifying before government committees.
- Testifying before executive rule-making agencies.
- Submitting proposed legislation to members of the legislature for introduction.
- Arranging social gatherings for informal discussions.
- Providing information to legislators.

Electioneering

Interest groups use electoral politics to have a large impact on policy making. In this they try to help their favourite candidates to win the elections. They try to place in public office persons most desirable in the interest they seek to promote. They particularly exploit election times for this purpose. They try to influence the choice of candidates by the parties as well as the public. They provide all kind of help to their favourite candidates in the form of money and material.

Generating Public Pressure

Interest groups use public opinion to pressurise government to pay heed to their demands. They bring an issue in public sphere; publicise it on radio, television, newspapers. They build public opinion in its favour. Since democratic governments can not ignore desires and demands by garnering favourable public opinion, interest groups shape up their demands as public demands by generating favourable public opinion. Public demands fulfillment of its interests by the government. Hence, public pressure helps interest groups to reach their goal.

Propaganda

With the technical advancement in information and communication technology or ICT, interest groups use propaganda to secure public support for their demands and interests. They try to secure their favourable articles, columns and editorials in the leading newspapers and magazines in their favour. By raising their issue on television, radio, they use publicity to get sympathy of public in their favour, which is used to influence the policy and decision of the government. By propaganda, they also try to create public opinion in their favour, and secure their demands in election manifestos of different political parties.

Campaign Assistance

Interest groups launch various campaigns to raise awareness on a particular issue. This way they try to garner the support of public in their favour. They ask general public to contact legislators and government officials for concerned issues. Thus, by launching various campaigns interest groups stimulate the politics of specific community or region of the country. To give strength to their campaigns, they use media, television, newspapers to mobilise public. In order to have a wide impact on the legislators, they also make people participate in large-scale campaigns like boycotting, protesting and demonstrating. These days, interest groups also use social media like facebook, twitter, instagram etc., to raise and popularise a specific issue. This includes endorsements for elections, and unpaid volunteers who work for the publicity and election of the candidates.

Acting as Source of Information

Interest groups use information to persuade legislature to agree to their demands. They supply detailed and valid information and present it in as influential and persuasive way as possible. Public officials also want political cues, about the viewpoints of public towards any issue and the knowledge to understand the issue. If many interest groups are on the same side of an issue, it makes officers-in-charge realise the genuineness of demands. Earlier lobbyists used to adopt an “insider strategy, but now, they use an “outsider strategy”, where they spread information out to the public quickly, using grassroots lobbying to get the members of the public to put pressure on the politicians.

Revolving Door

This term is used to describe the movement of personnel between legislators and industries, between government sector and private sectors. Government hires industry professionals for their private sector experience. Same way, private sector hires government authorities and officials to get access to decision making and seek favourable legislation. This revolving door policy enables the interest groups to get inside information on what is going on in the government and affect the policy decisions accordingly. There are some fears that a “revolving door” of politicians taking lucrative jobs in the private sector after they have helped interest groups would eventually lead to the sidelining of public interest.

Demonstrations

It is one of the offensive methods used by the interest groups. Large-scale interest groups use various kinds of demonstrations like *dharnas*, black flag protests, silent processions and rallies etc. With the help of demonstrations, they try to show their numeric strength, so that they can build pressure on the legislators. Violent demonstrations, however, can backfire by alienating the public instead of pressuring the government. Boycotting is another technique. It involves widespread refusal to buy a good or service to put pressure on the provider.

Gherao

This technique is used by interest groups as one of the last resort method. When despite their lobbying and electioneering, they are not able to convince the public authority in their favour, they encircle and confine the employers. Officers or legislators are not allowed to move until the demands of the interest groups are met. *Gherao* is a kind of human blockade that forces legislators to forcefully accept their demands. It can also be in the method of picketing.

Use of Party Platforms

Interest groups are non-partisan in nature, but they effectively use party platform to secure and promote their interests. They establish contact with various political leaders and try to convince them in their favour. They try to influence the choice of party candidates by providing funds and human support for election campaigns. Each interest group is inclined towards one or another party. They also support political parties in the elections with a promise that they will compensate the interest groups with their favourable policies.

Using Constituents as Lobbyists

This requires the interest group to convince its members to contact a member of the legislature by mail or phone about a specific legislative proposal. The Internet has proved a valuable tool for interest groups, who can now use new technologies to easily connect to thousands of members, and facilitate their contact with government officials.

Litigation

When interest groups are not able to influence the legislators, they turn to courts. Interest groups may submit an *amicus curiae* brief in support of their case. Sometimes, they could themselves be a party or provide lawyers and legal aid to the ones who have filed the case common to their interests.

Interest groups with common interests come together to prove the unity and genuineness of their demands. The pressure built by their numbers makes government to consider their demands. The tactic is useful to project a positive image to the public and policy makers and avoid duplicating efforts.

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

1. What do you understand by lobbying?

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2. Explain the term 'electioneering'.

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3. Describe the Revolving Door Policy.

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4. Write a note on strategies of interest groups.

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8.6 AN APPRAISAL OF THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS

Interest groups play a key role throughout the policy process starting from agenda setting to implementation of the policy they are fully involved at each stage. Legislature of a country decides what issues they need to take up for policy formulation, but interest groups have a huge say in setting the agenda of the government. When legislation is being prepared, those drafting it always consider the likely impact it may have upon any specific and identifiable groups. Interest

groups try to inculcate their demands in the agenda of government and political parties. To find a suitable place for their demands in the agenda they raise an issue in the public. They not only raise the issue but also give information to public and authorities about that issue and try to convince them to fulfill their demands. Due to their knowledge, expertise and first-hand experience in the field, government also gives importance to their findings. This way, they bring new issues to government, which were not covered by the existing policies or make government to amend the current policies to deal with that issue. Hence, they play an important role in agenda setting.

The legislators who are to determine public policy will take account of how interest groups might respond to it. In electoral policy, interest groups constitute a large vote bank, so legislators cannot ignore their demands. Interest groups are in regular touch with the government officials through lobbying and other techniques. The interest groups take the lead in lobbying for legislative changes that would benefit their members. Their aim is to use legislation to secure improvement for their members that would not be attained in its absence. Government officials often consult interest groups in drafting policy issues, particularly to the issues which Interest groups have taken up.

Interest groups have with professional lobbyists and expertise in the respective fields, an extra edge to define the problem, give its solution and draft the proposal accordingly. Interest groups ensure that their interests are given due consideration. Interest groups lobby against proposed changes in public policy because they perceive a threat to the continued well-being of their members, or some undermining of advantages they currently enjoy. They also provide analysts with their research and suggest various new approaches and practical solutions.

Interest groups continuously make effort to ensure that the policy is well implemented and achieves the targeted results. In the implementation of the policy, they mainly focus on awareness building. They make people aware about the needs and benefits of the policy, as well as the procedure to avail it. They also assess if the policy is implemented as intended or there are any deviations. At regular intervals, government needs to assess and reformulate the policies. Interest groups play important role in this process. They lobby for renewal of policy by throwing light on the limitations of existing policy or suggesting measures to remove its disadvantages or ill-effects.

In the planning process, interest groups act as a channel of communication between government and people. Interest groups facilitate both upward and downward communication. They inform government about the needs, requirements, and aspirations of people. It helps government to chalk out policy goals. They create awareness among people about government's policies and programmes. This way they help in giving true feedback of the government policies.

Biggest criticism of interest groups with regard to their influence on public policy is that they create undue influence on the elected officials by donating money for their campaigns. They assimilate legislators in their side by giving them donations for elections or other lucrative positions. Hence legislators and elected officials are more concerned about the needs of interest groups rather than the needs of general public.

Secondly, interest groups allow rich people to have more influence on public policy rather than the deserving ones. Generally, strong interest groups are the

ones who have more money, who can spend more money on buying lobbyist or building public campaigns. This way rich and powerful interest groups are able to influence public policy but the voice of poor interest groups who have more members than a rich interest groups is ignored.

Undue influence of small but powerful interest groups over the large interest group is considered undemocratic. The government officials and the legislature are seen giving more preference to the powerful interest groups.

Critics also see no common good in the demands of interest groups. They are limited to their own interests. They ignore the interests of the poor or the large sections of the society. James Medison criticised the interest groups. In his Essay in the tenth of Federalist Papers, way back in 1787, he had warned of the “mischief of factions” that could threaten individual or other group liberties.

As there are various interest groups working in the society and their demands are contradictory to each other. Their undue pressure leaves the government in a messy situation. Scholars argue that interest groups have created a condition of hyper-pluralism and the government serves only the interest groups and not the common people.

The interaction between legislature, executive and interest groups for policy making is sometimes referred to as Iron Triangle. While members of Iron Triangle fight on behalf of the interests they represent; they strive for policy outcomes that produce benefits for all members of triangle only, not for the common good.

Interest groups are also criticized for ‘free rider problem’. In large interest groups, not all the people participate in influencing the public policy. Many of the potential members just sit back and let others make efforts to influence the policies. They do nothing but gain all the benefits which the interest group has won. Mancur Olson’s Collective Action Theory believes that the bigger the interest group the bigger is the problem of Free Riders. However, in a large democracy such as India, we need interest groups to put pressure on the government. Active citizens’ participation through interest groups could mitigate many of the criticisms.

Check Your Progress 4

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

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

1. Explain the problem of ‘free riders’.

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2. Make an appraisal of the role of interest groups in policy process.

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8.7 CONCLUSION

Interest groups play an important role in the policy process. They use different strategies to reach their common interests. Despite the criticism levied against them from some quarters, they help the democracy to grow better. They protect and promote the individual interests and help to check the power of majority. Interest groups have the ability to motivate the legislators by providing them sufficient information. Interest groups influence a wide variety of policy issues. Level of their influence on policy making depends upon a number of factors like the extent of their size, organisation and mobilisation. The more organised an interest group is, the more is its influence on policy making. This Unit discussed the meaning and nature of interest groups, theories related to interest groups, and the methodologies they adopt to achieve their shared goals.

8.8 GLOSSARY

Amicus Curiae: Someone who is not a part of legal case, but only provide assistance to it with information, expertise and insight.

Collective Action Theory: The Theory was first published by Mancur Olson in 1965. It says that any group of individuals that wants to serve people faces a lot of problems. One is the size of the group, which is fairly difficult to determine and second is the problem of free riders, who do not do any work and gain benefits out of efforts of other members of the group.

Electioneering: Activities of candidates, parties and groups to influence the election outcome.

Interest Group: An organisation, whose purpose is to pursue the interest of its members, in public or private forums.

Litigation: Bringing a lawsuit against an individual or organisation.

Lobbying: Efforts to influence decision makers. The term originates from the physical layout of the legislature. Legislators deliberate in a chamber and non-legislators gather outside that chamber called lobby.

Lobbyist: One who tries to influence decision makers by espousing the interests of her or his group before policymakers.

Public Interest: Policy aimed at providing benefits to a large sections of broad public, rather than some specific group.

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8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- They are organised group of people.
- They have common interests.
- They are voluntary in nature.
- They are autonomous in their working.
- They are politically neutral.
- They are different from political parties.
- They do not want to form government, but they want government to listen to their demands and promote their interests.
- They have limited goals, as they are concerned only with the fulfilment of their shared interests.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Acknowledgement of the united power of interest groups.
- One person cannot make a difference, but government surely responds to collective voice.
- Even the member of any political party has to set aside their agenda for the ideology, command and policies of their party.
- Interest groups give a chance to people to let government take notice of their demands without any restrictions.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Economic Interest Groups:
 - a) Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
 - b) Federation of All India Food Grain Dealers Association
 - c) All India Manufacturers' Organisation
 - d) Trade Unions and Professional Associations

- Ideological Interest groups
- Single Issue Interest groups

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- A few interest groups, primarily the wealthy, have most of the power.
- There is a great inequality of power among the groups.
- Wealthy industrialists and large corporations enjoy a greater share of power.
- Elite groups are given more weightage during decision making.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Lobbying is an attempt by individuals or private interest groups to influence the decisions of government.
- It may include several methods like private meetings with public officials.
- Testifying before governmental committees.
- Testifying before executive rule-making agencies.
- Submitting proposed legislation to members of the legislature for introduction.
- Arranging social gatherings for informal discussions.
- Providing information to legislators.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Electioneering is a technique used by interest groups to make the candidate of their favour secure.
- Interest groups try to influence the party and voters to choose one particular candidate.
- To influence elections, they use various methods like campaigning for particular candidate, funding his campaign etc.
- Work for the success of a candidate or of a party in an election, in order to seek favours from the candidate after the elections is called electioneering.

3. Your answer should include the following points:

- Revolving door policy is used to describe the movement of personnel between legislators and industries, between government and private sectors.
- This revolving door policy enables the interest groups to get inside information on what is going on in government and impact the policy decisions accordingly.
- There are some fears that a 'revolving door' of politicians taking lucrative jobs in the private sector after they have helped interest groups will lead to diminished public interest.

4. Your answer should include the following points:

- Lobbying
- Electioneering
- Demonstration
- Gherao
- Building public opinion
- Using party platform
- Revolving door policy
- Litigation
- Acting as a source of information
- Generating public pressure

Check Your Progress 4**1. Your answer should include the following points:**

- It is a problem of a large interest group.
- In a large group, not all the people work.
- Some people with potential just sit back and let other people make the efforts, but reap all benefits.
- This reduces the efficiency and effectiveness of the groups.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Interest groups try to influence government policy in their interest.
- For this purpose, they lobby to meet decision makers and try to convince them with their information.
- They also create public opinion in their favour in order to affect the public policy.
- They participate at every stage of policy process right from agenda setting, supervision, reformulation and feedback.
- Act as a channel of communication between government and people.

UNIT 9 ROLE OF NGOs AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Concept of Civil Society
- 9.3 Meaning and Nature of NGOs
- 9.4 Concept of Social Movements
- 9.5 Relationship between NGOs and Social Movements
- 9.6 Role of Civil Society in the Policy Process
- 9.7 A Case Study of Anna Hazare Movement
- 9.8 Conclusion
- 9.9 Glossary
- 9.10 References
- 9.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning and nature of NGOs.
- Describe the nature of social movements.
- Examine the role of NGOs, social movements and other civil society organisations in policy process; and
- Discuss the significance of civil society in policy process.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary public administration is not limited to just the three branches of government; the legislature, executive and judiciary. Due to the recent developments in the role of Welfare State, as well as the rise of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation or the LPG processes, the debate on role of State as a steerer or rower has paved the way for an enabling role of government in which governance involves the activities of government agencies along with private players, private corporations, associations, interest groups and NGOs. Globalisation, in particular, has increased the number and types of stakeholders in public policy process in the form of civil society participation. In post-LPG phase, civil society has gained prominence in negotiation and advocacy with the State, especially at the national and global levels. The increased demand of democracy and accountability has further strengthened the voice of civil society in policy process.

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Globalisation has created both cross-border issues as well as cross-border communities of interest that NGOs represent. The 1990s witnessed a number of factors that spurred the growth of civil society organisations. Technical advancement in global communication facilities helped information and spread of new form of private organisations and their network. In the 1990s, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and in many parts of the world increased the participation of people in a new democratic system; it strengthened the civil society. The United Nations also facilitated the growth of civil society participation. Through this, the major inter-governmental conferences that needed increased public engagement, paved the way for civil society. Civil society was also given due consideration to overcome the unilateralism of the US and its agencies.

9.2 CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Transition to democracy in all Nation States has opened up the political space in an emerging civil society. Charitable organisations have existed throughout the history of humankind, but civil society is a modern phenomenon. In the democratic States, citizens' rights have been extended to all the people and they come together to meet community needs, to defend interest and to promote new policies. They are known by various names like Civil Society Organisations or Citizens' Associations. People's participation in policy process is incomplete without taking into account the contribution of civil society, which is called the third sector of society, different from government and business. It has been observed that the civil society represents the realm of organised social life. This kind of social life is voluntary, self-generating, largely self-supporting and it is bound by a legal order or set of shared values. Civil society has facilitated decentralisation, public participation, people's empowerment and de-bureaucratisation in India. Over the years, its role has increased manifold in the field of policymaking.

By civil society, we mean all public activity that is carried out by an individual, organisation or movement other than government employees or institutions acting in government capacity. Civil societies are organisations with formal structure. Their members strive for a common purpose. In the contemporary times, they have become legitimate partners in policy process as group action is much more effective than an individual one in public policy process. Civil Society is an umbrella term, which includes within itself activist groups, charities, clubs, cooperatives, NGOs, non-profit organisations, voluntary organisations, professional associations, social enterprises, social movements etc. Among all these, social movements and NGOs are the key players in the policy process. This Unit focusses on these two components of civil society.

Check Your Progress 1

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

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the Unit.

1. Explain the meaning of civil society.

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9.3 MEANING AND NATURE OF NGOS

NGOs are the most formal and structured form of civil society. NGOs are defined as organisations that are not only non-government, but also not-for-profit organisations. World Bank has defined NGOs as private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services and undertake community development. The United Nations or the UN has given the acronym NGO that stands for non-governmental organisation. The UN uses this term to distinguish the NGOs from the agencies of government. Many organisations like Oxfam, Greenpeace, Red Cross, Amnesty International and others are serving public at national and international levels. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has observed that the NGOs are the conscience of humanity. French writer Alexis de Toqueville has called them the institutions of democracy.

Sometimes, NGOs are also considered as equivalent to non-profit organisations, but NGOs have special characteristics that differentiate them from non-profit organisations. The non-profit organisations focus on services, whereas the NGOs have a special role of advocacy. They advocate for a cause and a mission. NGOs are also called non-state actors. This points out to the emerging influence of the NGOs on policymaking, which was earlier considered to be the sole domain of the State agencies. NGOs are also called the third sector to distinguish it from the government and private business.

The growing number of NGOs has been seen as a sign of increasing pluralism and democracy. A large number of NGOs help in manifesting diversity of society and they are the representatives of different social needs that government on their own cannot identify or accommodate. The NGOs vary in size, shape, activities and area of working. The NGOs have a legal status in India. They have to get themselves registered under Societies Registration Act of 1860. An NGO is normally characterised as an independent organisation. It is neither run by government nor by profit making firms such as private sector business. Major characteristics of NGOs are as following:

- NGOs are non-governmental and private in nature, as they are separate from the government. Even though they receive support from the government, they have their own structures, rules and regulations;
- NGOs have a formal structure. They properly define the roles and responsibilities of their office bearers;
- NGOs are non-profit organisations who work for the welfare of society. They do not take any surplus to their owner, but to the public;
- NGOs are self-governing organisations, who manage and control their own affairs; and
- NGOs are voluntary organisations. Although they hire some employees or professionals, but majority of the people, and specifically the management participate with the intention of social service only.

9.4 CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A social movement is a widely shared demand for change in some aspect of the social or political order. They are the result of social structures and social processes,

which affect policy making. It can be triggered by a scandal, widely-publicised activities of a few leaders, or by the coming of age of a new generation that takes up a cause. Social movements are a loose coalition of groups and organisations with common goals. Social movements are innovative and non-hierarchical. Collective action of large number of people has a significant political impact. Social movements give ample scope to the individual voices to be heard. Social movements generally emerge out of resistance to the status-quo in which members demand basic human rights or as a resistance to future violations of their rights, as they oppose government initiatives like large-scale dams, buildings, commercial fisheries, industrial activities in ecologically sensitive areas.

Oldest example of social movements in modern times is the labour movement. After the 1960s, we have witnessed the rise of a number of social movements that impact policy process, for example women's rights movement, movement to save environment and so on. Richard Falk (1987) has identified at least *five* types of social movements:

1. Resistance movements for the cause of ecology, environmental protection, peace and disarmament.
2. Permanent, although unofficial, international tribunals conducting enquiries and issuing decisions about cases of State oppression.
3. Movements by NGOs to put pressure on the State to punish perpetrators of human rights violations and recover victims' wrongfully appropriated property.
4. Consumer-based movements to hold governments and corporations accountable for technological disasters and policies adversely affecting human welfare.
5. Counter conferences held in tandem with official State and international conferences and consultations, delegitimizing the latter and evoking more relevant grassroots agendas.

Although social movements emerge as a part of social response or reaction to particular issue or situation, it has caught attention of policy makers and public administrators equally due to its far-reaching policy implications. Social movements are characterised by following features:

- Social Movements want to bring change, either partially or fully in the prevailing policies, values, structures, norms etc;
- Social movements are planned and deliberate upon to achieve the desired change;
- Social Movement are not individual efforts, but an effort of community at large scale;
- Social movements have active and voluntary participation of a large number of people; and
- Social movements also have some structures, however loose or informal.

9.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NGOs AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

History has witnessed so many social movements from time to time on one issue or another like peasant movements, trade unions movements, women's rights movements etc. Every such movement has a close link with the NGOs. Either many NGOs come and join the social movement or some new NGOs are born out of such social movements. For example, a famous NGO namely the Self-employed Women's Association or SEWA emerged out of a protest movement for women's rights. In the 1980s, there were many protest movements against dowry deaths and violence against women and a famous NGO called 'Saheli' emerged out of it subsequently. NGOs are essential components of social movements. Any movement needs a proper structure to represent and raise its voice in front of the authorities and to mobilise people to achieve their goals. NGOs are the formal structures for all of these social movements. However, at the same time, a social movement consists of a number of organisations that collaborate for some common purpose.

Social movements are generally *ad hoc* and evolutionary by nature, whereas NGOs are known for their permanent formal structure. NGOs mainly have a fixed agenda or priority, whereas social movements are more fluid and reactive, as they respond to one or another issue of the time. Social movements are really dependent on their members. They need to keep the members mobilised to have an impact on their goal, whereas NGOs can have the flexibility to change its members as per the needs of time. Social movements are highly radical and innovative in their demands as compared to NGOs. Social movements mainly oppose the government, but are also dependent on the same to fulfill their demands, whereas NGOs can work without opposing the government or without being dependent on the same. Social movements are evolutionary in nature. They rise, fall and disappear in response to the circumstances and levels of their success and failure.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. Discuss the salient features of NGOs.

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2. Describe the characteristics of social movements.

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3. Explain the relationship between NGOs and social movements.

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9.6 ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE POLICY PROCESS

Various social movements and NGOs have been successful in making historic policy initiatives. Their impact is visible at three levels- micro policy, macro policy and norm setting. World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840s was a result of anti-slavery movement of Britain. Geneva Convention, which is the first document of international humanitarian law and accepted framework for the treatment of soldiers in war time. It was the result of the efforts of the International Committee of Red Cross. Montreal Protocol on Substances Depleting Ozone Layer in 1987 was also the result of efforts of NGOs working for environmental protection. NGOs coalition was the main mover in the Mine Ban Treaty of 1997. Article 71 of United Nations or UN Charter gives NGOs the right to voice their concerns in international policymaking. At present, more than 2,500 NGOs in India have a consultative status with the UN.

In India, NGOs have played a very significant role in development and policy process even before Independence. All India Spinners Association, All India Village Industries Association were some of the active NGOs during freedom struggle. After independence, abolition of 'Jagirdari,' Land Reforms etc., were the result of the efforts of various NGOs and peasant movements. In Independent India, for the first time, the large-scale role of NGOs in socio-economic development was emphasised by 7th Five Year Plan, when nearly Rs. 1500 million were allocated for NGOs to carry out the development and welfare related activities. 10th Five Year Plan emphasised the role of civil society organisations as integral part of development. In March 2000, the government set a single window on policy matters regarding voluntary sector to promote government-NGO interface. Government has acknowledged that NGOs have certain qualities like proximity to people, knowledge due to practical work, organisational capacities and advocacy skills. The changing socio-economic conditions of the nation and government's enhanced focus on public-private partnership have facilitated the role of NGOs in the development process. NGOs play a key role throughout the policy process. Starting from agenda setting to implementation of the policy, they are fully involved at each stage. Their role in each stage can be gauged in the following activities:

Agenda Setting

Government and legislature of a country decide upon the issues that they need to take up for policy formulation, but NGOs have a significant say in setting the agenda of the government. NGOs advocate some issues by raising the needs and concerns of their group and drawing government's attention to them. Through lobbying or campaigns, they create pressure on the government to take that issue for policy decision. They not only raise an issue, but also give information to

public and authorities about that issue. This spreads awareness about that particular issue. Due to their knowledge, expertise and first-hand experience in the field, government gives importance to their findings. This way they bring new issues to government, which are not covered by the existing policies. They also make the government amend the current policies to deal with that issue. Hence, they play an important role in agenda setting for policy.

Drafting

Drafting of public policy is the domain of experienced civil servants. But they often consult NGOs in drafting policy issues, particularly the issues which NGOs have taken up to voice the concerns of those they represent. The NGOs' expertise in their respective fields gives them an extra edge to define the problem, give its solution and draft the proposal accordingly. NGOs advocate on the parts of problem that should be taken care of. When government is in the process of drafting a proposal, NGOs ensure that their interests are given due consideration. They also provide the analysts with their research and suggest various new approaches and practical solutions. NGOs follow the drafting processes to make sure that their demands are met, and a more inclusive and transparent policy comes into being.

Implementing

NGOs play a direct role in policy implementation. More often, government use Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model, and involve NGOs in service delivery or project execution. They continuously make efforts to see that the policy is well-implemented and achieves the targeted results. In the implementation of the policy, they mainly focus on awareness building. They make people aware about the need and benefits of the policy, the procedure to avail it. They become partners of government in carrying out specific policy targets. For instance, *Akshaya Patra* has become a partner of government in mid-day meal scheme. They also assess if the policy is implemented as intended or there are any deviations.

Monitoring

This is the most important stage in policy process. Even if best policies are formulated, they can not give desired results unless they are well-monitored. NGOs play an important role in monitoring the policies. They keep on comparing the implemented policy with the formulated one and assess if the desired outcomes are met or not. They keep checking for any deviations from the prescribed policy or any lacunae in the implementation process, hence help in better execution of the same. NGOs supervise over implemented policies to see if the benefits of policy have reached the intended beneficiaries or not; if not then what steps should be taken to ensure that. They also carry out research on the policy impact and with this expertise they are in a position to advice the government. They supervise the quality and effectiveness of policy. In this way, NGOs are equal partners in providing feedback of any given policy.

Reformulating

Policy formulation and implementation is not the end of story. Policy process is a continuous process. After a policy is well-formulated and implemented, it needs continuous supervision with regard to the changing needs of society. Feedback of policy implementation urges the government to bring new changes and initiatives in the policy process. At regular intervals, government needs to assess

and reformulate the policies. NGOs play an important role in this process. They lobby for renewal of policy by throwing light on the limitations of existing policy or suggesting measures to remove its disadvantages or ill-effects. NGOs also carry out research to identify the gaps in current policy and suggest new approaches and practical solutions.

Communicating

In the planning process, NGOs act as a channel of communication between government and people. People connect more with NGOs than government authorities because of the interpersonal communication of the NGOs, which facilitate both upward and downward communication. They inform government about the needs, requirements, and aspirations of people. They help government to chalk out policy goals. They create awareness among people about government's policies and programmes. This way they help in giving true feedback of government policies.

Representing Weaker Sections

The important supporting role played by NGOs is representing the weaker sections in policy process, which due to ignorance or other reason are not able to take part in government activities or influence its policies. NGOs as protector of weaker and underprivileged sections influence government policies in their interest. They make representations, arrange demonstrations to initiate or change policies. They continuously monitor the policies to determine whether they serve the weaker sections or not.

9.7 A CASE STUDY OF ANNA HAZARE MOVEMENT

In India's history, there are several case studies of NGOs and social movements, which have left a deep imprint on policymaking in the country. The passing of the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013 is a pertinent case of the impact of social movements on the policy process. We all know how Lok Pal Bill was passed by the government due to the pressure created by Anna Hazare Movement or the Indian Anti-corruption Movement that began in 2011. This Movement was a series of protests, demonstrations across the country to establish strong legislation of Lok Pal Bill to prevent political corruption. On 5th April, 2011, anti-corruption activists and renowned Gandhian Anna Hazare began a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. It was a non-violent, non-political movement. It used social media on massive scale to raise support and awareness about the Lok Pal Bill. Anna Hazare wanted a joint committee to be formed with members of government and civil society. When government declined it, Anna Hazare sat on hunger strike. Many people across the country joined Anna Hazare. He was also given support in the foreign countries.

On 9th April, the government agreed to form a joint committee with a politician as its chairperson and member of civil society as its co-chairperson. This Joint Committee did not reach any agreement. It was decided that two drafts, one of the government and another of civil society will reach the Cabinet since government was intending to pass government draft on local bill. So, Anna Hazare suggested that he will start a hunger strike on 16th August. On the early morning of 16th August, the government imposed Section 144, which forbid the

congregation of five or more people at a given place. Anna Hazare was arrested before he could start his hunger strike. Many members and supporters of team Anna Hazare were taken into preventive custody.

Anna Hazare started hunger strike in the Tihar Jail, where he was put when he refused to sign the bail bond. His arrest led to massive countrywide protests. When he was to be set free from the jail due to law and order situation in the country, he said that he refused to leave the jail unless he was given his right to protest. He left jail only after he was given permission to hold protest for 15 days at the Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi. Over 1,00,000 members gathered at the Maidan. People in thousands marched in different parts of the country in support of Anna Hazare. After many promises made on the part of government, Anna Hazare ended his fast on its 12th day. The Parliament agreed to his three preconditions of Citizens' Charters, Lokayukta in all state governments with the power of Lok Pal, and inclusion of lowest to highest bureaucracy in it. In between, government discarded the proposed Bill and put forward a new revised Bill with a Constitutional amendment.

Anna Hazare consequently declared hunger strike from 27th to 29th December 2011 in Mumbai. He announced that it would be followed by *Jail Bharo Andolan* later on. Due to cold weather and his deteriorating health, Anna Hazare postponed the movement or *Andolan*. On 27th December, Lok Pal Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha, but the session ended before it could be sent to Rajya Sabha. Bill was again introduced in Rajasthan in February 2012. Session again ended without the Bill being passed. Due to this indifferent approach of government, there was a split in the team Anna Hazare.

One group headed by Mr. Arvind Kejriwal wanted to form a new political party for realising the Lok Pal Bill, as government was not interested in bringing it about. He formed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on 26th November, 2012. He contested Delhi Legislative Assembly elections and formed the government with the outside support of Congress. When it was not successful in passing the Lokpal Bill in the Constitutional Assembly, it resigned. After a year of President Rule, Parliament passed Lokpal Bill in 2013. Hence, the great and long struggle of Anna Hazare's Movement, which started in 2011, bore fruit in 2013. This shows how continuous struggle and momentum could help a social movement in exercising large-scale impact on policymaking.

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

1. Explain the impact of NGOs and social movements on policy formulation.

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2. Examine the role of NGOs in policy evaluation.

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9.8 CONCLUSION

It is clear that NGOs play an active role at every stage of policy process. Still questions have been raised about NGOs' role as change agents. NGOs' participation and impact on public policy has drawn a lot of criticism. Critics have pointed out that NGOs do not work in the interest of general public, but have their own vested interests to feed. They become an advocate of the people, who donate them money. That is why many of the NGOs are used for politicisation of a particular issue. The issue of limited accountability is also one of the biggest criticisms of the NGOs. Sufficient attention is not being given to the monitoring and evaluation of programmes run by the NGOs. A debate on 'autonomy vs accountability' is emerging with regard to NGOs' role in policymaking. NGOs work for their limited interests. They usually ignore the broad social and economic perspective. Small NGOs do not have a Pan India presence, whereas larger NGOs are more or less bureaucratic in their approach. We have seen various episodes, when in the name of NGO activism, certain parties have implanted their own agenda in policymaking. This Unit explained the concept of civil society that comprises the NGOs, social movements, interest and pressure groups. This Unit focused on the role of NGOs and social movements in particular. An example of Anna Hazare Movement was taken up and discussed in detail to draw home the significance of social movements in the political and policy process of the country.

9.9 GLOSSARY

Akshaya Patra: The Akshaya Patra is a Foundation that runs mid-day meal programme in schools. It is an NGO which was established in 2000 across India. It aims to deal with classroom hunger and facilitate education of children.

Civil Society: Organisations of a society, which are non-governmental, non-public and voluntary. They aim to promote common good of people.

Jagirdari: A 'jagir' or 'jageer' was a feudal land grant at the foundation of zamindari system introduced by the Delhi Sultanate in early 13th century in India. It continued till the Mughal period and British period in different formats. It was abolished by the Indian Government only in 1951 .

NGOs: A Non-profit Organisation that operates independent of government. It is created to address a social or political issue.

Public Policy: It is a government policy; a blueprint of what government wants to achieve in a particular sector.

Social Movement: A collective and sustained campaign of people who come

together to achieve common goals, which have larger social and political implications.

Voluntary: Actions done willingly without being forced by or paid for.

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9.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Civil society is the third sector of society, different from government and business.
- All public activity that is carried out by an individual, organisation or movement other than government employees or institutions acting in government capacity.
- Organised social life that is voluntary.
- A civil society group is a voluntary group of people striving for a common purpose.
- Civil Society is an umbrella term which includes within it all NGOs and public activity carried out in private capacity by various organisations and movements.

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- NGOs are non-governmental and private in nature, as they are separate from the government. Even though they receive support from government, they have their own structure and rules and regulations.
- NGOs have a formal structure. They properly define the roles and responsibilities of its office bearers.
- NGOs are non-profit organisations. They work for the welfare of society. They don't take any surplus to their owner but to the public.
- NGOs are self-governing organisations that manage and control their own affairs.
- NGOs are voluntary organisations. Although they hire some employees or professionals but majority of the people and specifically the management are participating with the intention of social service only.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Social movements want to bring change, either partially or fully in the prevailing policies, values, structures, norms etc.
- Social movements are planned and deliberate to achieve the desired change.
- Social movement is not one individual's efforts, but it is an effort of community at large scale.
- Social movements have active and voluntary participation of a large number of people.
- Social movements also have some structures however loose or informal.

3. Your answer should include the following points:

- Social movements have a close link with the NGOs.
- Either many NGOs come and join the movement or some new NGOs are born out of such social movements.
- Social movements are generally *ad hoc* and evolutionary by nature, whereas NGOs are known for their permanent formal structure.
- NGOs mainly have a fixed agenda or priority, whereas social movements are more fluid and reactive, as they respond to one or another issue of the time.
- Social movements are really dependent on their members, whereas NGOs can have the flexibility to change its members as per the needs of time.
- Social movements are highly radical and innovative in their demands as compared to NGOs.
- Social movements mainly oppose the government, whereas NGOs can work without opposing the government or without being dependent on the same.

- Social movements are evolutionary in nature. They rise, fall and disappear in response to the circumstances and levels of their success and failure.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- NGOs and social movements raise a particular relevant issue.
- They bring the attention of the government to the demands and concerns of government.
- They create pressure on government by lobbying or campaigns to address some particular demands.
- They also create awareness among people regarding some policy issues. People thus create pressure on the government to address the same.
- They provide information to government authorities and public on the basis of their knowledge and expertise in the area.
- Due to their personal networking they are in a better position to inform government about the needs of people.
- They act as a channel of communication between people and government.

2. Your answer should include the following points.

- Often government assigns NGOs the task to evaluate policy implementation.
- They check if the policies have met desired outcome.
- They also evaluate the loopholes in the policy and suggest remedial actions.
- They also carry out research on the policy impact and advice government accordingly.

UNIT 10 A CASE STUDY OF MAZDOOR KISAN SHAKTI SANGATHAN*

A Case Study of Mazdoor
Kisan Shakti Sangathan

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Genesis of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)
- 10.3 Growth of MKSS
- 10.4 Achievements of MKSS
- 10.5 Conclusion
- 10.6 Glossary
- 10.7 References
- 10.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the concept of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS);
- Discuss the genesis and growth of MKSS;
- Explain the importance of people's participation in democracy; and
- Examine the major achievements of MKSS.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) is a classic example of the role of social movements and NGOs in policymaking. By now we are clear about the significance of NGOs and social movements in a democracy. We read about them in our previous Units of this Course. MKSS is one of the most prominent Indian social movements, which works towards a just and equal society, and has been instrumental in the implementation of Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2005. MKSS is also known as the Association for Empowerment of Labourers and Farmers, which is a grassroots non-political organisation. It was founded on 1 May, 1990, in the remote village of Rajasthan, with the mission of establishing and ensuring access to participatory democratic processes for poor peasants and workers.

MKSS was the result of a struggle for community land held illegally by a feudal landlord. Initially, it struggled to ensure the payment of minimum wages to the workers. Over time, in the process of understanding the causes for the delay or denial of payment of wages, it broadened its ambit and started working for the proper implementation of people's rights, ensuring transparency in government activities and holding it accountable to public. It realised that transparency and

*Contributed by Ms. Daisy Sharma, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

accountability was the basis of good governance and rights of people. Right to Information is the foundation for ensuring transparency and accountability of the government. So, this struggle culminated into the passing of Right to Information Act.

This is one of the very few grassroots level organisations, which could be credited for mobilising the people and ensuring their participation in government demonstrations and *Jansunwais*. In *Jansunwais*, officials get in touch with the public and common people can ask them any question, raise any enquiry or bring any matter of corruption to light.

It was the struggle of MKSS, which forced the government of Rajasthan to enact and implement the Right to Information legislation for the first time in the country. Its success inspired similar demands in other states too. Many state governments and Government of India followed in its footsteps and passed Right to Information Act. Even after championing the cause of Right to Information, MKSS is still working towards building a stronger and more transparent democracy, fighting corruption and creating awareness in the country. This noteworthy contribution of MKSS has won itself global credentials. In this Unit, we will discuss the genesis, growth, significance and achievements of MKSS.

10.2 GENESIS OF MAZDOOR KISAN SHAKTI SANGATHAN (MKSS)

In order to understand the objectives and functioning of MKSS, it is very important to understand the background, which led to the formation of this Sanghathan. It was founded on May 1, 1990 by Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Singh in the village of Devdungari, Rajasthan. The movement, however, was not formed in one day, but is the result of a long-drawn struggle against exploitation of poor people of Rajasthan.

In Sohargarh village in Deogarh Tehsil of Rajsamand District, a land struggle against a feudal landowner made a close team of activists, who had recently come in contact with each other at the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), Tilonia in Ajmer District, where Aruna Roy and Shankar Singh worked. SWRC was a voluntary organisation founded by Aruna Roy's husband Sanjit Roy.

Aruna Roy quit her job of an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer in 1975 to work with SWRC. Shankar Singh was a local politician who was concerned about exploitation, inequality and poverty in rural Rajasthan. Nikhil Dey had given up his studies in the US and had joined Aruna Roy in 1983. These three were working in Devdungri village to help poor access basic political and democratic rights. They were carrying out a study for Union Government's Ministry of Resource Development, to study issues related to the participation of the poor in the government's poverty alleviation programmes.

They came into contact with a policeman called Lal Singh, who actively participated against the exploitation of constables at the hands of senior officers. For his activism he was dismissed from police. Lal Singh lived in Sohargarh village, which was gravely exploited by Jagirdaar Hari Singh. He had illegally controlled the common land of village. He used to raise fine on villagers if their

cattle grazed on it or if they collected firewood from it. Lal Singh brought this matter to the attention of Aruna Roy. They persuaded villagers to fight for their rights and challenge the dictatorial ways of Hari Singh.

In 1988, under Government's programme of "Prashasan Gaon ki Oar", the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) held a public hearing in the Panchayat of Tal. Aruna Roy along with her team challenged Hari Singh's illegal control over a piece of 25 hectare land. To their good luck, patwari of that village provided them all necessary information regarding plot number and other details. Without this formal information, they would not have been able to present their case to SDM. Usually public authorities do not cooperate with public, but somehow due to the help of patwari and his given information, they won their case in front of SDM. This 25 hectare land was transferred to local people. This first win made Aruna Roy and her team understand the importance of access to information in their fight against corruption.

While the struggle in Sohargarh was still going on, Aruna Roy started getting complaints of non-payment of minimum wages to the workers. Central Rajasthan was a drought prone area. Due to small holdings and infertile land, their people mainly depended upon drought relief works of government. Despite their full work, workers were not given their bare minimum wages stipulated for that work. Dadi Rapat was one such site, where work was carried out by State Irrigation Department. Here, most of the workers were from Sohargarh village. When Aruna Roy's team investigated the issue, they found that work measurement mechanism was faulty. Though workers were given individual work, they were paid collectively. Officers used to include bogus names in the list, and the payments were made way below the fixed minimum wages. On the intervention of MKSS all 140 workers there went on strike.

Due to adamant struggle of workers, State Famine Commissioner and Executive Engineer visited Dadi Rapat in 1989. He found that the work was completed as per targets, and he directed for full payment of minimum wages. Despite his directions, workers were still paid lower than minimum wages. They understood that they cannot avail their minimum wages, unless they carry out a collective struggle against this type of corruption. It was this realisation that led to the formation of MKSS on the Labour Day of 1990. In a rally of 1000 people from 27 villages, MKSS was formed with the objective of collective struggle against non-payment of minimum wages. After its formation, MKSS organised a hunger strike in front of the SDM Office, which was lifted only when the District Collector assured the payment of proper wages.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

1. When and for what purpose was the MKSS founded?

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2. Discuss the importance of the struggle of Sohargarh village in the wake of MKSS.

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3. Write a note on the Dadi Rapat incident.

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10.3 GROWTH OF MKSS

‘Jansunwais’ Innovation of MKSS

In 1991, MKSS launched another indefinite hunger strike in front of the SDM office in Bhim. This was carried out to ensure justice for 12 labourers of Barar Panchayat. These workers were denied minimum wages despite their completion and accurate measurement of work. They submitted their case through proper channel, sent notices but all went in vain. Thus, to help them, 5 people belonging to five districts of Pali, Jaipur, Rajsamand, Ajmer and Baran sat on a strike. On fifth day of the strike, police crackdown took place. Next day, the MKSS started a strike against police oppression. They won this battle, as Rural Development Secretary of Government of India stopped the central assistance to Rajasthan for Jawahar Rozgaar Yojna, since it violated the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. As a response, Rajasthan government ordered payment of minimum wages to the 12 Barar workers.

This case made MKSS deduce that it cannot deal with cases of non-payment of wages in a piecemeal approach. Bureaucracy did not pay heed to hunger strikes, since it was least bothered about the lives of the poor. It needed comprehensive strategy to deal with the issue. This led MKSS’ new innovation of *Jansunwai* or public hearings, which gave a platform for collective struggle of workers against non-payment of wages and popularise the demand for accountability and transparency in administration. Now, let us see how the *Jansunwais* came about.

During their struggle for minimum wages, MKSS understood the importance of access to official records and public documents. By this information, they could discover various frauds like fake muster rolls, overbilling in purchase, underpayment of wages etc. This they could make possible with the cooperation of some officer or the other who provided the desired documents and information sought by the MKSS workers.

This led to an awakening among the MKSS that information given by administrative officers was in fact a legitimate right of the people, and could do wonders for increasing transparency and accountability in the administration. With the reference case of Kesar Singh from Bagmal, Ajmer District needs special attention. In this case, Kesar Singh lodged a complaint that the Panchayat had

used his tractor for several construction works of panchayat, but he was not paid any money for that. Despite his request, sarpanch denied to show the records.

On the advice of MKSS, Kesar Singh demanded information from the panchayat samiti, which refused to show the records. Matter then reached the Block Development Officer (BDO), who ordered the payment of his dues, but refused to give him copies of the records. Adamant Kesar Singh then approached the SDO and with pressure being put by MKSS and the larger collective of community, he was allowed to note down records for a year. As expected, there were fake names in muster rolls along with other anomalies. The sarpanch tried to put pressure on Kesar Singh through Caste Panchayat and offered him payment even with interest, but he refused to take any money. He demanded an investigation and appropriate action against the culprits. Investigation brought to light rampant corruption in payment of wages and works of panchayat. An FIR was filed against the Sarpanch. Kesar Singh got his money back. However, the police soon closed the file despite ample proof of corruption.

MKSS understood that these cases of corruption should be brought to the fore at a public platform. Public exposure of corrupt officials in their view could build pressure on government. It could also enhance people's involvement and accountability of authorities to the public. This understanding gave birth to the idea of *Jansunwais* along with the demand of Right to Information.

Jansunwai of Kot Kirana

The first *Jansunwai* was conducted on 2nd December, 1994 at Kot Kirana of Pali district. Here a person sought the help of MKSS, when he was denied minimum wages for his work done for panchayat. MKSS demanded copies of all the muster rolls where he had worked. The access to records was refused by sarpanch and secretary, but the BDO provided the records to MKSS. When a number of anomalies were found in the records, its information was made public. An announcement of *Jansunwai* on 2nd December was then made.

The panchayat officials tried to make people hostile and distributed liquor as bribe to ensure that no one speaks out at the hearing. People gathered in large numbers as a reaction to prevalent corruption. They fearlessly spoke against the fraud and corruption exposed in the records. On the basis of people's affidavits, FIRs were filed. The MLA there took the case to court to save the officials. Due to power of money and muscle, the witnesses turned hostile and the case was closed. But this public hearing left an unforgettable mark in the history of India. Its impact could be felt at the state secretariat in Jaipur. This hearing was followed by two other hearings in Bhim and Vijaypur, in the same month.

Jansunwai of Jawaja

In January 1995, a very interesting public hearing took place in Jawaja (Ajmer District). In this case, access to records was completely denied. So, there was no documentary evidence. But so many irregularities were reported from different sources. So many people openly gave their testimony on corruption. The impact of hearing increased manifold, when concerned gram sewaks (panchayat secretaries) returned the money that they had allegedly taken as bribe for giving housing grants. This demonstrated the positive impact of the power of people's participation in administration.

In April 1995, the then Chief Minister, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat announced in the state assembly that the Right to Information (RTI) will be given to the people.

He also informed the house that corruption will not be tolerated at any cost. In all cases of corruption, money will be recovered from the concerned officials. MKSS organised a number of *Jansunwais* between December 1994 and April 1995. *Jansunwais* mainly depended upon the information provided by any sympathetic officer. Since it was not mandatory for public bodies to provide any information, MKSS realised the importance of Right to Information. During its *Jansunwais*, it started demanding the same.

Due to the relentless efforts of MKSS and their continuous demands for information, the Right to Information Act was passed in the state assembly. It provided that on payment of a prescribed fee, people could get details of expenditure on the work carried out by the government in the last five years. For the first time, in the Indian history, government took up bold and exclusively citizen-centric measures. This gesture of the then chief minister was widely appreciated. It encouraged similar demands in other states too.

Protest of Beawar

Despite the chief minister's promise, nothing concrete was done by the office of the director of panchayats. This compelled MKSS to go on an indefinite hunger strike in the town of Beawar in April 1996. This was MKSS' historic 40 days long dharna for the Right to Information. Interesting feature of this protest was the demand of a political right, which was the basis of good governance. Instead of wages, compensation, people demanded the real power-the information of government records. People from all across Rajasthan started moving to Beawar. People identified this struggle as their own and got fully involved in it. They themselves collected around 46 thousand rupees. Vendors provided free vegetables. Doctors offered their services willingly. Cultural aspect of the protest was noteworthy. Through puppet shows, devotional songs of *bhajan mandalies*, *nukkad nataks*, the people started supporting the protesters and demanding the Right to Information.

This protest caught the attention of the entire nation. People from different parts of the country like journalists, artists, lawyers started visiting Beawar. People developed a slogan of "Hum Jaanenge, Hum Jiyenge" in support of the protest's goals. As a result, panchayats were issued an order to implement the Right to Information Act. But it allowed only inspection and noting down of the information with hand, it did not allow photocopy of documents. MKSS continued its struggle and demanded that Right to Information should be implemented in the form and spirit as chief minister had promised. In 1997, panchayat bodies' rules were amended and government allowed the photocopy of the documents. After continuous struggle, Rajasthan state's Right to Information Act was executed in May 2000.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

1. Examine the importance of Beawar Dharna.

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2. Write a note on the *Jansunwai* protests of Kot Kirana.

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10.4 ACHIEVEMENTS OF MKSS

MKSS has set an example of successful struggle for better governance. Its biggest achievement is enactment of Right to Information Act by the states, as well as the central government. But this Act is just an instrument to achieve the larger goal of MKSS that is transparent, accountable and participatory administration. This is to the credit of MKSS' noteworthy contribution that Aruna Roy, one of its foremost leaders, was awarded with prestigious 'Ramon Magsaysay Award' in the year 2000. This prize is also known as Asian Nobel Prize. It was given for the recognition of her work in community leadership, which she provided through MKSS. In 2010, Ms. Aruna Roy received the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Award. The success of MKSS can be understood in the following ways:

Participation

The biggest contribution of MKSS is that it has brought to the fore people's participation in democratic government processes like no other movement has. Its unique method of *Jansunwais* has given voice to the unheard and unattended. MKSS' volunteers initiate questions in public hearings. Slowly, villagers gather courage and lead the hearing. They ask questions, and seek information on performance of public authorities. The kind of struggle that took place at Beawar for 40 days proved that MKSS had penetrated amongst the masses.

The struggle was supported by commoners, their local style (puppet shows, bhajans etc.). It has given courage to people to stand for their own rights. In *Jansunwais*, when officials are face to face answering the questions of public, it gives real exposure to public. It makes people realise that they can supervise, enquire, and ask questions to officers about their own money. This participation is of highest level and takes democracy to the grassroots level. It is estimated that about 60-80 lakh people use RTI per year. This fact is ample to prove the point we are making here.

Empowerment through Information

Another laurel to the credit of MKSS is that it has ensured empowerment of people by providing them information of the documents, procedures, performance of administration. It is through the efforts of MKSS that Right to Information Act has been passed not only in Rajasthan, but at other states' and central government levels as well. Without information, people have no say in government and administration.

MKSS trains public in demanding, accessing and using information. This makes the community empowered. They seek information from administration, wherever there is any discrepancy in implementation of the Rule of Law. This can bring corrupt officials to book and put them behind the bars. So, under the fear of RTI, officials restrain to do anything contrary to rules, as they are answerable under

the RTI Act. This fear empowers the people. They develop a faith in system that it will do justice to them and they are not simply at the mercy of administrative officials. This empowerment of common people helps in realising and strengthening of democracy.

Accountability

MKSS started its journey as a war against corruption. Increasing accountability of administration was one of its main aims. MKSS has also successfully achieved this target. Through RTI and *Jansunwais*, public can make officials accountable to them. They can check accounts, find discrepancies and question the officials in front of an entire village. An officer in-charge has no option but to answer all the questions. This type of responsibility forces administration to be vigilant and honest during *Jansunwais*. This power holds the entire administration accountable to public for every single penny expended by them.

Social Audits

Jansunwais of MKSS have institutionalised a noble technique of social audits of local government bodies. In social audits, Gram Sabha of a village carries out the audit in front of an entire village. It checks if money used for public interest matches with the amount displayed in accounts. It brings into light discrepancies and ensures transparency in government works. Rajasthan government had asked MKSS to conduct about 6-8 social audits of the panchayats, where it has spent a considerable amount during previous year.

The state governments provide MKSS with all necessary information on expenditure and names of officers who have incurred it. MKSS' team visits village well in advance of the social audit to be conducted. It gathers information about actual outlays of money and during audit all expenses are discussed. In proceedings of social audit, villagers decide if money has been actually spent on the purpose shown in accounts. This has impacted governmental working positively.

Transparency in NGOs

The greater success lies in the fact that it has ensured transparency not only in government institution, but also in non-governmental organisations or NGOs. They do not accept any funds from the government. They raise money from community and individuals. They themselves present their accounts during *Jansunwais*. Hence, they promote a culture of transparency and accountability all around.

Changed Equation between Government and Public

MKSS changed the equation between government and public. Before its struggle, people were at the receiving end. They could not question the government. They were at the mercy of governmental bureaucracy, which under the cloud of secrecy, was often into rampant corruption. But after MKSS' struggle for transparency and accountability, especially after RTI, officers have become cautious about their responsibility to people. They think of RTI before committing anything that is contrary to rules.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

MKSS has started its struggle to ensure minimum wages for the workers. In Rajasthan due to poor rainfall, people mostly depend upon drought relief work

of the government for their livelihood. In the process of working on records of panchayats for these relief measures, MKSS became closely attached to the issue of work and wages. After ensuring the transparency in wages, MKSS asked for guarantee of wages through minimum employment assured by government. Along with other social institutions, it raised the demand for extension of work guarantee taking the example of Maharashtra State Employment Guarantee Act 1977 (Government of Maharashtra, 2013).

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

1. How does RTI help in social audits?

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2. Discuss the relationship between RTI and accountability.

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10.5 CONCLUSION

The Case Study of the MKSS is a classic example of understanding the impact of social movements on policymaking. It represents the common will of people to hold administration accountable and ensure true democracy in the nation. MKSS' struggle for RTI and its victory in the same is a clear manifestation of how people's participation can change the face of government, and turn governance into transparent, fair and just system. Its long journey of struggle also signifies that nothing comes easy.

We need persistent and honest efforts to achieve something worthy. That is what the MKSS did. Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Singh signify the importance of dedicated and committed team, which has always kept the public interest above its self-interest. Their team's honesty, integrity, commitment has been the real strength, which infused life into the MKSS and never let it bend in front of the pressure built by government and administration. We need to remember that when people come in open for some cause and are determined to achieve the same, nothing is impossible. In a democracy, people's voice reigns supreme. They just need to be aware about their rights, get organised and stand together. The MKSS personifies that people are very powerful in a democracy and can make government officers pay for their mistakes. This Unit brought the significance and working of the inimitable MKSS into limelight.

10.6 GLOSSARY

Civil Society: Organisations of a society which are non-governmental, voluntary and private. They aim to promote common good of people and fall between the State and the market.

Jansunwais: Innovation of MKSS to hold officials accountable to people. In *Jansunwais*, all villagers gather and question the officials for the public works done by them.

MKSS: Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) is a non-governmental and non-political organisation, which works for ensuring the democratic rights of peasants and labourers. It has been the major force behind the Right to Information legislation all over the country.

NGO: A Non-Profit Organisation or Non-Government Organisation that operates independent of government. It is created to address a social, economic or political issue. It is a pertinent part of the Civil Society.

Right to Information (RTI) Act: It is an Act passed by the Government of India in 2005. It enables citizens to get information from the public authorities.

Social Movement: As a part of Civil Society, it is a collective and sustained campaign of people who come together to achieve common goals with larger social and political implications.

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10.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) was founded on 1st May, 1990.
- It attempts to ensure the access of participatory democratic processes for poor peasants and workers.
- Initially, it struggled to ensure the payment of minimum wages to the workers.

- Over time in the process of understanding the causes for the delay or denial of payment of wages, it broadened its ambit and started working for the proper implementation of people's rights specially the Right to Information.
- Strengthening of democratic values have resulted in increased accountability.
- Increased demand for public participation and accountability of administration.
- Even after championing the cause of Right to Information, MKSS is still working towards building a stronger and transparent democracy, fighting corruption, creating awareness and responsible citizenry in the country.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Incident of Sohargarh village struggle throws light on the importance of information in the fight against corruption and ensuring justice.
- Sohargarh village was gravely exploited by jaagirdar Hari Singh. He had illegally taken control of the common land of village.
- He used to raise fine on villagers if their cattle grazed on it or they collected firewood from it.
- When this matter came to the attention of Aruna Roy, her team persuaded villagers to fight for their rights and challenge Hari Singh.
- In 1988, under Government's programme of "Prashasan Gaon ki Oar" the SDM held a public hearing in the Panchayat of Tal. Aruna Roy along with her team challenged a piece of 25 hectare land under Hari Singh's illegal control.
- With the help of patwari and the information given by him, they won their case in front of SDM. This 25 hectare land was transferred to local people. This first win made Aruna Roy and her team made them understand the importance of information in their fight against corruption.

3. Your answer should include the following points:

- Incident of Dadi Rapat led to the formation of the MKSS.
- It started as a struggle for minimum wages of the workers employed at State Irrigation Department's site at Dadi Rapat.
- Despite their full work, workers were not given their bare minimum wages stipulated for that work.
- Aruna Roy's team investigated the issue and found many procedural lacunae in the measurement of the work and corruption done by officials.
- On the intervention of the MKSS, all 140 workers went on strike.
- State Famine Commissioner and Executive Engineer visited Dadi Rapat in 1989.
- Despite Commissioner's directions, workers continued to be paid lower wages than minimum.

- It was this realisation that led to the formation of the MKSS on the Labour Day i.e., May 1st, 1990. In a rally of 1000 people from 27 villages, the MKSS was formed with the objective of collective struggle against non-payment of minimum wages.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- The MKSS' hunger strike in the town of Beawar in April 1996 led to the enactment of Right to Information Act in Rajasthan.
- Despite chief minister's promise, nothing concrete was done by the office of the director of panchayats.
- MKSS' historic 40 days long dharna demanded the political right of Right to Information, which was the basis of good governance. Instead of wages as compensation, people demanded the real power-the information of government records.
- People from all across Rajasthan started moving to Beawar.
- Cultural aspect of protest was noteworthy. Through puppet shows, devotional songs of *bhajan mandalies*, *nukkad nataks*, people started supporting the protesters and the demand for Right to Information.
- It became a people's struggle. They themselves collected money and all necessary things like food and health essentials.
- This protest caught the attention of the entire nation. People from different parts of the country like journalists, artists, lawyers started visiting Beawar.
- After continuous struggle, Rajasthan state's Right to Information Act was passed in May 2000.

2. Your answer should include the following points.

- Kot Kirana is a small village in Pali district.
- Here first *Jansunwai* was conducted on 2nd December 1994.
- MKSS demanded copies of all the muster rolls of Panchayat on the complaint of non-payment of wages.
- Sarpanch and secretary denied the copies, but they were provided by the BDO.
- When a number of anomalies were found in the records, its information was made public. An announcement of *Jansunwai* was made on 2nd December.
- Panchayat officials tried to make people hostile and distributed liquor, as bribe to ensure that no one would speak up at the hearing.
- As a reaction to prevalent corruption, people gathered in large numbers. They fearlessly spoke against the fraud and corruption exposed in the records. On the basis of people's affidavits, FIRs were filed.

- The MLA took the case to court to save the officials. Due to power of money and muscle, witnesses turned hostile and the case was closed. But this public hearing left an unforgettable mark in the history of India.
- It showed the strength of people's unified participation in exposing the shortcomings and corruption of the government.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Social audits are conducted by Gram Sabha.
- In social audits, all villagers gather to discuss and inspect the works of panchayats.
- Panchayat officials present the information on the works done by them and its total records in front of people.
- Villagers check if the information provided by officials is right or if there is any discrepancy in actual terms.
- During audit they demand any information related with works to be inspected.
- This increases transparency and could hold authorities accountable to public.
- Rajasthan government asked the MKSS to conduct about 6-8 social audits of the panchayats, where it spent a considerable amount during the previous year.
- State government provided the MKSS with all necessary information on expenditure and officers who incurred it.
- The MKSS' team visited village well in advance of social audit day. It gathered information about actual outlays of money. During audit all expenses were discussed.
- In proceedings of social audit, villagers determined if money was actually spent on the purpose shown in the accounts. This had a brought positive impact on government's working.

2. Your answer should include the following points.

- RTI has a direct relationship with accountability.
- When entire information is accessible to public, the officers may not do anything contrary to the rules or for their self-benefit.
- Through RTI and *Jansunwais*, the public can make officials accountable to them. They can check accounts, find discrepancies and question the officials in front of entire village.
- A public officer has no option but to answer all the questions. This type accountability forces administration to be vigilant and honest.
- This power holds the entire administration accountable to public for its every single penny.

