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## **UNIT 13    GANDHI, CAPACITY BUILDING AND EMPOWERMENT**

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### **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one without power can gain greater control over their lives. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and conscientisation, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns.

Sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through - for example – discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Empowerment as a methodology is often associated with feminism.

With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly, it involves at the psychological level women's ability to assert themselves and this is constructed by the 'gender roles' assigned to her specially in a culture which resists change like in India.

### **Aims and Objectives**

After studying the Unit, you will be able to understand

- The specification of Capacity Building;
- The meaning of power and empowerment;
- The key elements, dimensions and process of women's empowerment;
- Gandhi's views on empowerment.

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## **13.2 EMPOWERMENT**

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Empowerment has become an important concept today. Earlier the term was used by political scientists. They used it in a very restricted sense. Normally by power they meant political power or usually the power politically assigned to an institution by the Constitution or administrative rules. Later on the concept became a tradition of the social sciences. With the coming of the globalisation, empowerment is now being increasingly applied to the economically poor nations and the weaker and the subaltern masses of people. In the developing countries we often speak about empowerment of the blacks, the backward and the deprived sections of the society. During the period from 1960s to 1970s there has been a tremendous rise of feminisation. All over Europe, women came out against the male domination and patriarchy and voiced their concern for the empowerment of women.

### **13.2.1 Meaning of Power**

Power could be defined as control over human, social, material, or intellectual resources. Social divisions, such as gender and ethnicity, are used to perpetuate this control. Power is not a finite commodity that is given and taken: there is the potential for 'win-win' and for all parties to gain. Michel Foucault says that power is nothing but knowledge. In other words those who have power have knowledge. On the basis of such an understanding of power and empowerment, we would refer to some propositions which emerged from the writings of Foucault:

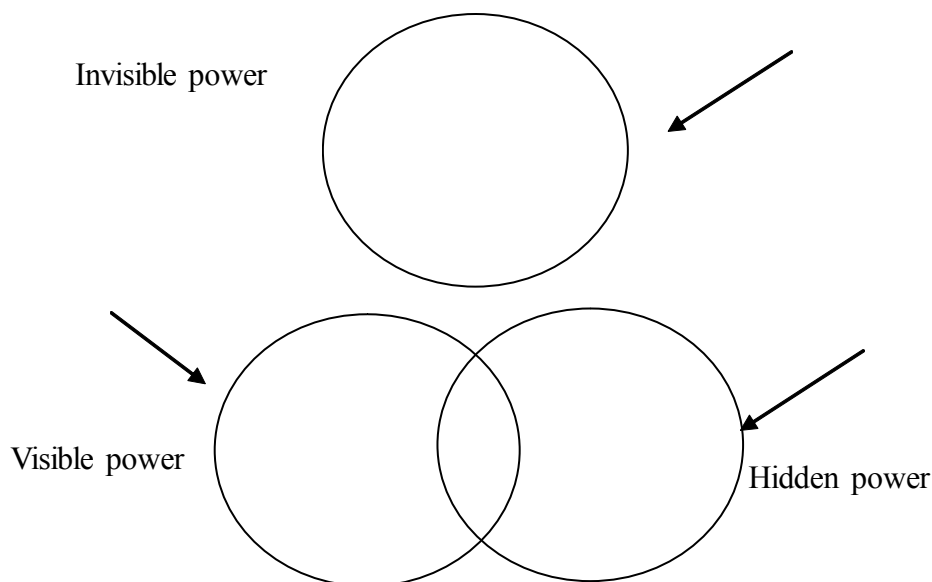
- Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one hold on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points;
- Relations of power are found in economic processes, knowledge relationships and sexual relations;
- Powers come from below: that is, there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations. One must suppose that manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of products in families, limited groups and institutions;
- Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective.

### 13.2.1.1 Dimensions of Power

Power relations can be changed if we understand and focus on all three dimensions of power (rather than only on the power we can see), and if we think about the power we have in different ways.

An example of invisible power is the beliefs and attitudes that shape our understanding about who we are (socialisation).

The power that we can ‘see’, demonstrated in things like structures and behaviours.



The ‘rules’ determine who has power. Some people (i.e. those with power) know these rules and can see them; others cannot.

The circles above are examples of ‘power over’, and are characterised by dominance, control, and authority. But other types of power are available to us, such as:

- ‘Power with’ – collective power, if we all agree on something
- ‘Power within’ – internal power
- ‘Power to’ – the will to do things.

### 13.2.2 Meaning of Empowerment

It means different things for different people and groups at different levels, and in different places and times. We find its use in two ways: empowerment of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women. The second meaning which is very popular with the government is the Seventy-Third Constitutional Amendment. The Panchayati Raj has given new powers to women at different tiers of the local government. It is very interesting to note that the sociology and social anthropology have not yet used empowerment in terms of the “new development” attained by the weaker sections.

Power in the traditional Indian society has been hierarchically distributed. There is always much power with the men than with the women. As a result of this kind of unequal power distribution the Indian society has empirically become male dominated. There have

been disabilities in society due to caste and gender inequalities. Democracy in this context is a new value structure which guarantees equal power to both the sexes. And thus, at least in theory gender status does not suffer from unequal power distribution. But this is all in theory. When the Seventy-Third Constitutional Amendment came into existence, it became clear that there is desire to break the unequal power distribution between male and female. The amendment thus became a historical occurrence. It is in this context that empowerment has become a popular word among political scientists, sociologists, and media.

### **13.2.2.1 Diverse Meaning of Empowerment**

We cannot empower others on our terms, but we recognise that people's consciousness and awareness may change as their practical circumstances change. Empowerment is not something that is 'done' to people; it is about releasing their potential. Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which build both individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organisational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.

According to Andre Beteille, "Empowerment is about social transformation. It is about radical social transformation; and it is about the people – ordinary, common people, rather than politicians, experts and other socially or culturally advanced persons, above all it is about power, although the concept of power contained in it is generally left unspecified" (Beteille, 1999, p.590).

### **13.2.2.2 Dimensions of Empowerment**

Empowerment is both a means to an end in itself. The term adopts itself differently in situations and signification is both variable and fluid. Actually the idea of empowerment is drawn from the context of human rights. Human rights, in this sense, are broader. It includes basic needs, economic security, capacity building, skill formation and dignifies social existence. The Indian Constitution has created several rights. It allows a large number of rights for all members of the society irrespective of their social and economic standing. The constitutional amendments give right to the weaker sections and particularly scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Contextually, therefore, empowerment in the Indian context stands for transformation of people belonging to weaker segments. It means that hidden meaning of empowerment is not only political empowerment, but also social and cultural empowerment. In other words, empowerment relates to social transformation among the women. The idea of empowerment is thus, political, economic, psychological, social and cultural. It would be erroneous to think that empowerment consists of political power. It is hoped that with the attainment of political power through Panchayati Raj, the women will also acquire economic and socio-cultural power. There are a large number of situations wherein decisions have to be made at the family, caste, village and regional levels. The empowerment given to women would effect all these level of life.

Several dimensions are given as below:

Psychological:

- Self-Confidence
- Creating space
- Acquiring knowledge

Economic:

- Income security
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Ownership of productive assets

Social:

- Community action
- Action for rights
- Social inclusion
- Literacy

Cultural:

- Redefining cultural rules and norms (ethnic, gender)
- Recreating cultural practices

Political:

- Participation in political process
- Accountable governance

### **13.2.3 The Process of Empowerment**

It is the process which enables one to gain power, authority and influence over others, institutions or society. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- having decision-making power of one's own;
- having access to information and resources for taking decision;
- having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or);
- ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision-making;
- having positive thinking on the ability to make change;
- ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power;
- ability to change others' perception by democratic means; involving in growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated;
- increasing positive self-image and overcoming stigma; and
- increasing one's ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong.

In short, empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives.

A process of empowerment should lead to:

- Increased self-awareness
- Ability to organise
- Control over resources
- Assertion of rights/self-determination

### **13.2.4 Why is Women's Empowerment Important**

It is important for reasons of both principle and pragmatism. It is the right thing to do because women have the same rights as men, but it is also necessary thing to do, because it will make the world better place and help us attain human development.

### **13.2.5 The Key elements of women's empowerment**

The key elements of women's empowerment include both processes and outcomes.

#### **Processes**

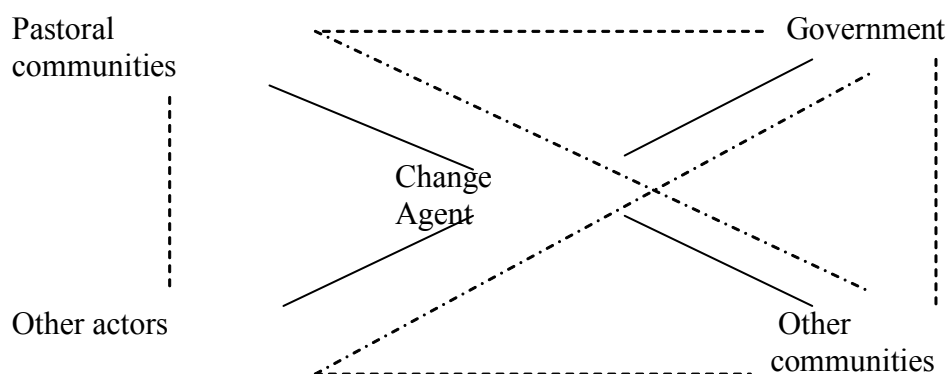
- Power is demanded not given; we cannot say that we 'gave' women power
- Analyse invisible, hidden, and visible power and how these are maintained and then develop a new definition of power ('power with' and 'power within', 'power to')
- Education is central
- An external force or stimulant is needed
- Create a political force of women that is listened to – a movement from the ground
- Spiral, not cyclical: every change brings greater changes
- Make separate spaces and time for women to go through the process (but eventually come back to the mainstream).

#### **Outcomes**

- Must be visible – we need to see that women have changed, and evidence of broad impact.
- Begins with the mind and with changing how women perceive themselves – their abilities, capacities and potential.
- Involves redistribution of power and control over resources
- Changes both women's position (in relation to men) and their condition (material, everyday needs).
- Benefits women in general, not just individual women (collective not individual effort).
- Transformation takes place at many levels – in women's minds; within development workers as change agents; in the creation of an enabling environment.

### **13.2.6 Empowerment Paradigm**

Power lives in the relationships between people. In any situation there are many interdependent relationships, for example:



The ‘change agent’ that seeks to transform these relationships could be anyone – NGO, one of its partners, or a department within government.

The ‘change agent’s role is one of facilitation, and starts with trying to create a common understanding among these different players. Empowerment begins in the mind, and therefore each player’s understanding of power within these relationships holds the key.

### 13.2.7 Marginalisation and Empowerment

“Marginalised” refers to the overt or covert within societies whereby those perceived as lacking desirable traits or deviating from the group norms tend to be excluded by wider society and ostracised as undesirables.

Sometimes groups are marginalised by society at large, but governments are often unwitting or enthusiastic participants. For example, the U.S. government marginalised cultural minorities, particularly blacks, prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act made it illegal to restrict access to schools and public places based on race. Equal opportunity laws which actively oppose such marginalisation, allow increased empowerment to occur. It should be noted that they are also a symptom of minorities’ and women’s empowerment through lobbying.

Marginalised people who have no opportunities for self-sufficiency become a minimum, dependent on charity or welfare. They lose their self-confidence because they cannot be fully self-supporting. The opportunities denied to them also deprive them of the pride of accomplishment which others, who have those opportunities, can develop for themselves. This in turn can lead to psychological, social and even mental health.

Empowerment is then the process of obtaining these basic opportunities for marginalised people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalised others who share their own access to these opportunities. It also includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively, but there are many examples of empowerment projects which have succeeded.

One empowerment strategy is to assist marginalised people to create their own nonprofit organisation, using the rationale that only the marginalised people, themselves, can know what their own people need most, and that control of the organisation by outsiders can

actually help to further entrench marginalisation. Charitable organisations lead from outside of the community, for example can disempower the community by entrenching a dependence on charity or welfare. A nonprofit organisation can target strategies that cause structural changes, reducing the need for ongoing dependence. Red Cross, for example, can focus on improving the health of indigenous people, but does not have authority in its charter to install water-delivery and purification systems, even though the lack of such a system profoundly, directly and negatively impacts health. A nonprofit composed of the indigenous people, however, could insure their own organisation does have such authority and could set their own agenda, make their own plans, seek the needed resources, do as much of the work as they can, and take responsibility – and credit – for the success of their projects (or the consequences, should they fail).

### **13.2.8 Economics and Empowerment**

In economic development, the empowerment approach focuses on mobilising the self-help efforts of the poor, rather than providing them with social welfare. Economic empowerment is also the empowering of previously disadvantaged sections of the population, for example, in many previously colonised African countries.

### **13.2.9 Personal Development and Empowerment**

In the arena of personal development, empowerment forms an apogee of many a system of self-realisation or of identity (re-)formation. Realising the solipsistic impracticality of everyone anarchistically attempting to exercise power over everyone else, empowerment advocates have adopted the word “empowerment” to offer the attractions of such power, but they generally constrain its individual exercise to potentially and to feel-good uses within the individual psyche. The concept of personal development is seen as important by many employers, with emphasis placed on continuous learning, increased self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Empowerment is ultimately driven by the individual’s belief in their capability to influence events.

Empowerment can be attained through one or many ways. An important factor in the discovery and application of the human “self empowerment” lies within the tools used to unveil the truth. It has been suggested that Yoga is one such tool that can be used for more than the obvious physical benefits. When Yoga is practised, consistency of the mind/body connection is apparent. Through this connection, the individual finds him or herself with a stronger sense of self and the ability to change areas where bad habits rule, negative emotions run rampant, even controlling addictions through understanding them for what they are. It is more empowering to gain control over the self.

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## **13.3 CAPACITY BUILDING**

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Capacity building often refers to assistance which is provided to entities, usually developing country societies, which have a need to develop a certain skill or competence, or for general upgrading of performance ability. Most capacity is built by societies themselves, sometimes in the public, some times in the non-governmental and sometimes in the private sector.

By 1991 the term had evolved and become ‘capacity building’. UNDP defined ‘Capacity Building’ as the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks, institutional development, including community participation (of women in particular), human resources development and strengthening of managerial systems, adding



that, UNDP recognises that capacity building is a long-term, continuing process, in which all stakeholders participate (ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and water user groups, professional associations, academics and others). Capacity building as “activities which strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behavior of individuals and improve institutional structures and processes such that the organization can efficiently meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way.”

According to Capacity Building – Agenda 21’s definition “specifically capacity building encompasses the country’s human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities. A fundamental goal of capacity building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options, based on an understanding of environment potentials and of needs perceived by the people of the country concerned” (UNCED, 1972).

Capacity building is a continuing process that enables individuals to increase their response to the challenges they face. The attainment of one capacity leads to the recognition and urge to satisfy the other. Capacity building initiatives focus on two levels of organisational and sectorial, programmes. The initiatives that focus on strengthening civil society organisations to enable them to effectively carry out their programmes, strategies and missions are called organisational capacity building initiatives

The sectorial capacity building programmes emphasise the civil society as a sector, creating organisations and institutions that enhances the abilities of communities of civil society organisations (CSO) to affect development outcomes. The sector building programmes also enhance the ability of the sector to deal with other sectors. Organisations’ capacity building focus on a variety of issues such as organisational identity; programmes; planning implementations; leadership; organisational management and financial resources, etc.

This form of capacity building is usually undertaken to increase effectiveness and impact of organisations. Capacity building interventions at the sectorial level focus on strategically positioned organisations. The thrust is on educating the public about the importance of the concerned sector and there by enabling better coordination and boundary management. Therefore, capacity building is critical to local change and is also to promoting sustainable development. Training, Workshops, Seminars, Symposia, Exposure visits are all tools of capacity building.

### **13.3.1 Specifications of Capacity Building**

Capacity Building is much more than training and includes:

- Human resource development, the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively.
- Organisational development, the elaboration of management structures, processes and procedures, not only within organisations but also the management of relationships between the different organizations and sectors (public, private and community).
- Institutional and legal framework development, making legal and regulatory changes to enable organisations, institutions and agencies at all levels and in all sectors to enhance their capacities.

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## **13.4 GANDHI ON EMPOWERMENT**

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Gandhi was not only a great political leader but also passionate lover of humanity. An implacable enemy of all injustice and inequality, he was a friend of the lowly and the downtrodden. The marginalised sections, women and the poor commanded his most tender attention.

### **13.4.1 Gandhi on Empowerment of Women**

Gandhi had an instinctive understanding of women and their problems, and had a deep and abiding sympathy for them. In a letter written to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur from Wardha on 20 October, 1936 Gandhi stated: "If you women would only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man had delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slaves and the slave-holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make woman realize her dignity. I was once slave-holder myself but Ba proved an unwilling slave and thus "opened my eyes to my mission" (Jaya Jaitly, 1999).

Gandhi considered women as individual human beings with full and equal right to self-development and blamed men for their inferior status. He said: "woman has as much right to shape her destiny as man has to shape his." He treated women at an equal footing with men. Gandhi said: "Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has a right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him." (CWMG, Vol.14, p.205). He considered them supplementary to each other and emphasised that the well being of one was bound to influence the life of the other.

### **13.4.2 Women Equal to Men**

Gandhi opined that though both men and women are equal in status and opportunities to develop their abilities, they are not identical. They are complementary to each other. They are inseparable pair and one cannot live without the other. But for him equality of sexes did not imply equality of occupation. They are different in nature, and aptitude and have varied interests and functions. Man is supreme in outward activities of a married couple and he should have a greater knowledge thereof; in domestic affairs women ought to have knowledge thereof; on the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of women and therefore in domestic affairs women ought to have more knowledge. "Woman", he said, "is essentially the distributor and keeper of bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term" (Harijan, 24 February, 1940).

But insistence on the care of the home does not imply that women should consume in the slavery of the kitchen or bringing up of children (Gandhi, M. K., 1942, p.179). He instead, preferred part-time work for them so that home is not neglected. He wanted them to take some work which could supplement the income of the family. Spinning, according to him, was one of the best works they could undertake in those times. He described it as the widow's loving companion. Charkha, Gandhi believed, would enable them to safeguard their virtue. Women could work at Charkha while sitting at home. It was both constructive as well as remunerative work at their doorstep.

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## 13.5 CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

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What is more, in the process the sinews of civil society are weakened, virtually giving the wielders of the state power total freedom to act as they wish. Gandhi was of the confirmed opinion that instead of striving for power, we should channelise our energies for the benefit of the humanity. In keeping with this principled stand, he assigned a big revolutionary role to the constructive programmes. Some of the main items of this Programme are: Khadi work, development of village industries, national education, removal of the untouchability and Hindu Muslim unity. Subsequently, he set up a single purpose organisations like All India Spinner Association, Adimjati Sevak Sangh and Harijan Sevak Sangh and a host of other organisations. He also encouraged and helped in setting up of thousands of Ashrams largely manned by constructive workers. Thus, constructive programmes significantly contributed to uplift of the weaker sections of the society. In the process they strengthened the social fabric of civil society, while making solid contributions to social revolution.

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## 13.6 SUMMARY

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In essence, empowerment speaks to self determined change. It implies bringing together the supply and demand sides of development – changing the environment within which poor people live and helping them build and capitalise on their own attributes. Empowerment is a cross-cutting issue. From education and health care to governance and economic policy, activities which seek to empower poor people are expected to increase development opportunities, enhance development outcomes and improve people's quality of life. Empowerment without sharing is not possible. Sharing requires sacrifice. In short, this is the Gandhian formula of sharing and sacrifice. Nobody has done so much as Gandhi did to bring out the masses of illiterate women from the four walls of their houses. He wanted the capacity in them be aroused by making them conscious and aware to feel and realise at every step of their life that they are the builders of their nation and peaceful world.

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## 13.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss Gandhi's Views on Empowerment of Women.
2. How can the empowerment of Women and capacity building be achieved?
3. What is capacity building? How does it contribute to empowerment?

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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