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## **UNIT 1 HISTORY OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION**

### **Core course-CC8-Social Work with community**

1.Learning Outcome

2.Introduction

3.Global context of History of community organization

4.Community organization in India

### **1.Learning Outcome**

After completing this module student will be able to :

- Understand the history of Community Organization in both global and Indian contexts

### **2. Introduction:**

The history of community organization has its roots in the late nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution in England in the mid-1800s had transformed its economy from an agrarian to an industrial one. This in turn led to the process of rapid urbanization, prompting many people in rural areas to move to urban areas in search of livelihood. The urban areas with industries became centres for exploitation, sickness, accidents, disabilities, unemployment and other socioeconomic issues. The families that strove to make ends meet found it difficult to survive in these circumstances and were left with only a few options to sustain themselves in the industrial centres; namely, government relief, private charity or begging. It was commonly held that such individuals and families were a failure due to their own weaknesses and deficiencies, and that their poverty and distress was born out of individual causes.

### **3. Global context of history of community organization**

#### **3.1 Formation of the London Charity Organization Society**

When a particular area suffered economic distress, many working people were rendered unemployed and lacking any means to make an income. In response, several groups sprung up to alleviate poverty and help such individuals and their families, primarily through private charity and philanthropy. Most often these groups worked autonomously and without much coordination among each other. Hence, some individuals and families succeeded in appealing to, and receiving help from, more than one charity group. There was a need for coordinated effort among these groups to reduce the incidence of repeatedly providing support to the same individual or family. As a result, the first Charity Organization Society (COS) was formed in London in 1869, for 'Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity' (Roof, 1972). The COS would address two issues: 'self-respecting families who were struggling to keep themselves from destitution should be helped and encouraged, and that charities should be organized and coordinated, so that the best use could be made of resources'

### **3.2 Charity Organization Society in the United States of America**

The London COS became the model for the United States, which at the time in 1877 was going through its fourth year of a severe economic depression and industrial strife. This period was characterized by starvation, suicides, hopelessness and destitution. In Buffalo, New York; Episcopal rector, Rev. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen and T. Guilford Smith along with a group of friends decided to start the first COS in their city, with the dual objectives of, bringing order out of the chaos created by the city's numerous charities by offering district conferences at which the agencies could discuss their common problems and coordinate their efforts; and careful investigations of appeals for help and a city-wide registration of applicants. It was believed that by inducing a rational system of scientific charitable administration, cyclical poverty could be addressed and deserving poor could gain some support in their hardship so that they were once again able to take responsibility (for themselves and their families) to become self-reliant, instead of giving charity to the undeserving poor who would learn to receive alms and then become dependent and idle.

### **3.3 The Settlement House Movement**

Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel was the first university settlement house established in London in 1884 by a group of middle-class London reformers. It was initiated by Samuel Barnett who believed that settlement houses were 'places where richer students could live alongside, learn about and contribute to the welfare of much poorer people'. The Settlement workers were mainly middle class reformers, often women volunteers, who would locate themselves in houses in the middle of urban, poor, working class neighborhoods. They conducted research in the surrounding communities and offered services to community members, such as language classes, childcare, healthcare and meeting spaces. Taking inspiration from this idea, social reformers in the United States too began establishing settlement houses, in response to the rapidly growing industrial poverty and impoverishment. The purpose of the American settlement houses was to ease the transition of immigrant workers into the labour force, and to help them to assimilate middle-class American

values. The Neighbourhood Guild in New York was the first American settlement house founded by Stanton Coit in 1886. This was followed by the establishment of the Hull-House in Chicago in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Starr. In 1893, a nurse and progressive reformer, Lillian Wald founded the Henry Street Settlement in New York. By the 1890s, there were at least 400 settlement houses in the United States, of which forty percent were in the industrial towns of Boston, Chicago and New York. A characteristic feature of the settlement house movement was that several important leadership positions (in nearly half of the USA settlement houses) were filled by women, which was unusual in its time, when women were not commonly seen as leaders in business or government. Settlement workers were progressive in their approach because they aimed to gain insights about poverty from directly experiencing the conditions under which poor people lived. They also aimed to enable the poor to form organizations to improve their situation. Some, aimed to build workers organizations that would agitate for reform. This approach was a sharp departure from nineteenth century styles of charity where the wealthy maintained clear boundaries and upheld their superiority in comparison with the poor. It tried to solve social problems and bridging the class differences in rapidly industrializing cities of USA, by acknowledging that poverty was caused by social and economic factors. The Settlement House movement was at its peak around the 1920s. By locating themselves right in the centre of urban poor working-class neighbourhoods, the Settlement Houses accomplished a lot. The Hull-House in Chicago provided not only education (classes in history, art and literature) and services (creche, public baths, homeless shelter and community kitchen) but also a space for political activism advocating for social legislation to combat poverty at several levels in politics. The settlement workers in other areas later persuaded municipal and state governments to take responsibility for the programmes that they had initiated. They also lobbied with local governments to pass reform legislations related to work place safety, minimum wages and sanitation. While the COS had instituted the 'case-work' method of social work practice, the Settlement House movement had laid the foundation for community organization grounded in the idea of the rich and poor living closely together and being interdependent. However, in the following years, radical social workers began to emphasize the inclusion of new methods in keeping with the socio-political changes of the time. Several

innovative approaches were also evolving in the field of community organization. The emphasis was now turning towards control by community members instead of agency-driven activities as in the case of the settlement houses of the 1930s. It was against this background that Robert P. Lane's 1939 report titled 'The Field of Community Organization' (also called 'The Lane Report') proved to be a milestone in social work education.

### **3.4 The Lane Report, 1939 and Community Organization**

'The Lane Report' written by Robert P. Lane situated community organization practice within Social Work education. It legitimated community organization as a method of social work practice by presenting a systematic and comprehensive description of the roles, activities, and methods in the field of community organization. The five propositions that emerged through the process of Lane's study were: i. The term 'community organization' refers both to a process and a field ii. The process of organizing a community or some parts of it is carried on outside as well as inside the general area of social work iii. Within Social Work, the community organizing process is carried on by some organizations as a primary function, and by others as a secondary function iv. the process exists on local, state and national levels, and also between such levels v. those organizations whose primary function is the practice of community organization do not as a rule offer help directly to clients (Lane, 1939: 496-97). The report also defined the following functions for community organization (Austin and Betten, 1977): a. fact finding for social planning and action b. initiating, developing and modifying social welfare services c. setting standards d. facilitating interrelationships between different bodies concerned with welfare e. developing public support and participation in social welfare activities

### **3.5 The War on Poverty Programme, USA**

In the 1960s, the USA reeled under a poverty rate of nearly twenty per cent, and its economy drained in the Vietnam war. Then US President Lyndon B. Johnson in his first State of the Union speech in 1964 declared an unconditional ‘War on Poverty’ through a comprehensive socialwelfare legislation titled ‘The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964’. Poverty became a matter of national concern and it was thought that this programme would eradicate poverty in the USA. The original objective of the programme was to: - To sponsor neighbourhood self-help projects - Promote social action - Coordinate existing local services - Provide new services

#### **4.Community Organization in India**

After India gained independence in 1947, the government initiated a number of policies to restructure the village society and bring about ‘development from below’.

There were two objectives to this exercise:

1. To reform agriculture and increase productivity
2. To foster community development, local government and local development planning

The idea of the ‘village community’ was born. It was believed that development could only take place if villagers themselves believed in it and made efforts towards this process. Hence, in 1945, American city planner and architect Albert Mayer met Jawaharlal Nehru with the idea of building ‘model villages’ in India. Mayer envisioned that by improving the living conditions in Indian villages through economic and social progress and ‘inner democratization’ within hierarchical organization of the village society, these model villages could set an example for ‘good housing, sanitation and community structure’. Under the direction of D. P. Singh and in collaboration with an agricultural extension specialist Horace C. Holmes, Mayer began the first pilot development project in Etawah district of Uttar Pradesh in 1948. The main activities of the Etawah project were education of villagers (on subjects like crop yields soil conservations, animal husbandry, sanitation and social education), training of village level workers, conducting demonstrations, and coordination between various departments and agencies. The main innovation and contribution of the Etawah project was the

notion of the Village Level Worker (VLW) who was to be the link between the villagers and the government. The idea was also to create a cadre of low-cost non-specialists from the village itself to balance the top-heavy bureaucracy whose field officers were rarely able to visit all the villages in their charge. Hence, the principle function of the VLW was to get villagers to be interested in government development programmes.

Some other contributions of the Etawah project included a rural newspaper (to inform villagers about modern agricultural practices), appointment of a 'Rural Analyst' (a trained anthropologist who would communicate the unarticulated needs of village people to the government), development of brick-kilns and leather tanning industry and the promotion of literacy and smallscale village industries. According to Perkins (1997: 176) the Etawah project 'was probably the single most important model for all subsequent development work in India, and Nehru took a personal interest in Holmes's work.' Not surprisingly, the Etawah pilot project served as a model for the rural development programmes in India's First Five Year Plan (1951-1956).

In 1951, the Etawah model was scaled up and replicated in 300 villages; one in each of the 15 states; and later expanded to 5200 blocks. This scaling-up was possible due to the financial aid provided by the Ford Foundation and later, through the signing of joint Indo-American Technical Cooperation Agreement. A Community Project Administration Department was created to implement and monitor the programme. This department was subsequently split into two parts with community development programme and the National Extension Service.

Perkins (1997) indicates that the successes of the Etawah project were mainly technical in nature and did not address the social aspects of village organization. Similarly, the nature of people's participation in the community development programmes in India has been inadequate, because people's contributions meant providing contributions in labour or in kind. For poorer people it was mostly in the form of 'shramdan' or contribution of labour to build and repair roads, wells, schools and health centres.

In order to strengthen people's participation in local self-governance and decentralized administration, the Panchayati Raj system was formally instituted in

1992, with a vision of 'gram swaraj' (village self-rule). The Panchayati Raj is a three-tier system of governance with the village panchayat as its basic unit, the Panchayat Samiti at the block level and the Zilla Parishad at the district level. Taken together, they have the power to plan and to make their local demands known to the state government. They draw up local development plans which fit into the general scheme of community development and adapt the Five-Year Plans to local conditions. Prior to this, most planning was done at state and national levels by 'experts', i.e. technocrats and administrators. Communicating to higher level authorities these 'felt needs' (and a local plan to address these needs) so as to contribute to a national plan, required time and extensive consultation. The Panchayati Raj system provided a contrast to this system of governance, and brought the community at the centre of community development.

One of the initial goals of community development was to create 'village planning commissions' which envisaged a larger role for local institutions in the planning and administration of development programmes. The VLW would work under Extension Officers, who would report to Block Development Officers, thereby instituting an administration of 'development from below'. An important objective of the community development programme was to elicit the 'felt need' of the local community. However these needs had to be compatible with what the administrators viewed as the known means for attaining economic and social progress. They were not designed such that villagers would themselves develop and administer local development plans. As a result, the community and the administrators often seemed to have conflicting roles in their approach to 'development from below'. There has been a history of tension between the requirements of community development and the traditional roles and responsibilities of the state and the national administrative services. The upwardly responsible roles include tax collecting and law enforcement, while the downwardly responsible roles reflect the needs of the community. Dual and sometimes conflicting roles of administrators (such as the block development officers-BDO and the district program officers- DPO) manifested themselves in enabling communities to articulate felt needs against persuading Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads to accept government plans.

One other major impediments to community development in India was the hierarchical organization of rural society. While the national policy had an



egalitarian objective, both traditional leaders and new leaders had issues with the adoption of scientific values which were viewed as western imports. Participation by local centres of power would often frustrate and dilute the goals of government development planning and administration. By the mid-1960s, the enthusiasm and interest in community development and Panchayati Raj institutions began to fade. The broad understanding was that only the rich and the powerful in the rural society benefitted from these organizations and programmes. Many critics believed that the community development programmes had failed to instill in the participants the 'felt-need' to work in a collaborative fashion, and to bring about a developmental change. Finally, in the late 1960s, the onset of the green revolution with its emphasis on increasing agricultural productivity led to the demise of the community development programmes in India.

## **4.1 Labour Unions in India**

Labour unions are a form of organization and association among working people to have a collective voice. In India, labour unions did not exist before 1918. In a 1922 article, Abani Mukherji details the trajectory and reformist nature of the then Indian labour movement. The Nationalists in the Indian independence movement realized the power of industrial labour movement and the organized force of the trade unions. They wanted to control it and use it for political purposes, i.e. mainly as a means to threaten the then colonial government. Due to its roots in the pre-independence era, the development of labour unions in India became inextricably linked to the growth of the anti-colonial independence movement. Even after independence, the labour unions tended to have overlapping interactions with political parties while they engaged in class-based organizing.

Ever since, the Indian labour unions in large measure have restricted themselves to representing their constituents in the organized economy and the formal sector. For effective collective bargaining, they sought institutional accommodation through their links with political parties. While the character and form of the mainstream trade unions and the central trade union federations has remained the same over the past century, one of the biggest blind-spots of the large Indian trade unions is its non-recognition and exclusion of the growing informal workforce. As a result,

while twelve federations of trade union exist at the national level, only one among these represents workers in the informal economy. Besides, even though these 12 federations represent a majority of the formal workforce (which is 8% of the total workforce, concentrated mainly in public sector enterprises) they remain heavily fragmented, factionalized and splintered due to several reasons.

Community organizing based on the model of union-community 'coalition' building, is an important tool to collectivise the workers operating in the informal economy, which constitutes 92 per cent of the Indian workforce (NCEUS, 2007). While formations of such collectivization of informal workers in trade-union like structures are few and have small memberships (vis-à-vis their large numbers in the workforce), they are fast gaining traction all over India. Collective identity in these forms of organizing efforts is not a given, and therefore needs to be constructed. Hence, such efforts recognize that there are causes of injustice other than class. They take cognizance of inequalities embedded in the social structure and institutions, and question the injustice prevalent in unequal social relations. They also lobby for social security and other policy measures to alleviate poverty and structural inequalities through grassroots mobilization. In doing so, they activate the agency of the oppressed providing them the platform to articulate their collective interests on issues of citizenship rights, work and workplace rights, women's rights and human rights. This leads to an effective representation of the issues of marginalized workers to have a collective voice. Community organization plays a key role in this process.