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## Chapter – 10 Civics

### Law and Social Justice

- To protect people from exploitation the government makes certain laws. These laws try to ensure that the unfair practices are kept at a minimum in the markets.
  - To ensure that workers are not underpaid but are paid fairly, there is a law on minimum wages.
  - There are laws that protect the interests of producers and consumers in the market.
  - The government has to ensure that these laws are implemented which means that the law must be enforced.
  - Enforcement becomes even more important when the laws, the government can control the activities of individuals or private companies so as to ensure social justice.
  - Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution like 'Right against Exploitation' say that no one can be forced to work for low wages or under bondage.
  - The Constitution lays down 'no child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any factory or mines or engaged in any other hazardous employment.'
  - **Bhopal Gas Tragedy:**
    - (i) The world's worst industrial tragedy took place in Bhopal 24 years ago.
    - (ii) Union Carbide (UC) an American company had a factory in the city in which it produced pesticides. MIC, a highly poisonous gas, started leaking on 2 December 1984, at midnight from the factory.
    - (iii) Within three days more than 8,000 people were dead, Hundreds of thousands were maimed.
    - (iv) It stopped its operations but left behind tons of toxic chemicals.
    - (v) 24 years later, people are still fighting for justice, for safe drinking water, for healthcare facilities and jobs for the people poisoned by UC.
  - **What is a Worker's worth:**
    - (i) Foreign companies come to India for cheaper labour.
    - (ii) Wages in USA are higher than that compared to workers in poorer countries like in India.
    - (iii) For lower pay, companies can get longer hours of work.
    - (iv) Cost cutting can be done by other more dangerous means, e.g., lower working conditions including lower safety measures are used as ways of cutting costs.
    - (v) Since there is as much unemployment, there are many workers who are willing to work in unsafe conditions in return for a wage.
  - **Enforcement of Safety Laws:**
    - (i) As the lawmaker and enforcer, the government is supposed to ensure that safety laws are implemented.
    - (ii) It is the duty of the government to ensure that the Right to Life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution is not violated.
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- (iii) Instead of protecting the interests of the people, their safety was being disregarded both by the government and by private companies.
  - (iv) With more industries being set up both by local and foreign business in India, there is a great need for stronger laws protecting workers rights and better enforcement of these laws.

- **New Laws to Protect the Environment:**

- (i) In 1984, there were very few laws protecting environment in India and there was hardly any enforcement of these laws.
- (ii) Environment was treated as a 'free' entity and industry could pollute the air and water without any restriction.
- (iii) Whether it was our rivers, air or groundwater the environment was being polluted and the health of people disregarded.
- (iv) The polluter was to be held accountable for the damage done to environment.
- (v) The Government is responsible for setting up laws and procedures that can check pollution, clean rivers and introduce heavy fines for those who pollute.

- **Environment as a Public Facility:**

- (i) Environment issue in India has highlighted the fact that the growing concern for the environment among the middle classes is often at the expense of the poor.
- (ii) The challenge is to look for solutions where everyone can benefit from a clean environment.
- (iii) The government has to encourage and support factories to gradually move to cleaner technologies.
- (iv) This will ensure that the workers livelihoods are protected and both workers and communities living around the factories enjoy a safe environment.

- **Conclusion:**

- (i) Laws are necessary in many situations, whether this be the market, office or factory so as to protect people from unfair practices.
  - (ii) Laws that are weak and poorly enforced can cause serious harm.
  - (iii) While the government has a leading role in the respect, people can exert pressure so that both private companies and the government act in the interests of society.
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