INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the meaning of vulnerable groups will be clearly outlined so as to help the reader understand the basic characteristics of vulnerability. It will further enhance the study of the understanding of these groups with the ability to assess the forms of vulnerability in all these groups.

MEANING OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Our society is a diversified patchwork of different sets of people practicing different cultures, customs and belonging to different race, religion, caste, gender and so on. These diversities however lead to a lot of inequalities in the population. In such conditions there is a growth of vulnerable groups who are the most exploited, suppressed and discriminated groups in the country. The Constitution of India uses the term ‘Weaker Sections’ to refer to these vulnerable groups.

FORMS OF VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS

The unjust treatment meted out by these vulnerable groups are stated as follows:

Discrimination: These groups are discriminated on grounds of being socially and economically weaker sections of the society. In case of women and children it is much greater since the society treats them as biologically weak. Post- globalisation has witnessed the growth of several crimes as against the past due to large-scale migration and displacement. While changes in technology have made lives easier, it has further entangled relationships and the human nature in general has undergone major alterations which in turn
has created a furore in the sphere of social discrimination. For e.g. Pre-Natal Diagnosis for Sexual Determination.

Exploitation: The attribute of taking undue advantage of the weaker sections in the society results in exploitation which in turn leads to anti-social behaviors. For e.g. Insurgency such as the Naxalite movement.

Deprivation: –Exploitation and deprivation are both connected to each other as one leads to the other. For example, the growing cases of malnutrition that is reported daily through the media is rampant in areas that are deprived and exploited.

Neglect: The other main attribute of vulnerability is neglect which generally happens in case of the tribals and women as they seem to be least empowered and illiterate.

Violence: The world today is experiencing major cases of violence against the weak. This has however manifested into insurgent movements and fight for survival movements.

VIOLATION OF RIGHTS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES

The traditional Indian society has a complex system of stratification based on the caste system. Its grades the society in a hierarchical order which is socially visible in the behavior of different caste groups. Problems of the Scheduled caste can be enumerated as follows:

Untouchability and other crimes: Untouchability has been a major crime practiced for generations together against the lower caste. There has always been a depiction of untouchability related crimes in the media and the government of India has taken several measures to combat these sectarian crimes against the lowest in the social strata.

Poverty: Along with Untouchability comes the issue of poverty which is the most prominently held fear of the lower castes in the India society. They are denied access to landholdings and all attempts made to undermine poverty is defeated in the long run. There have been attempts to bring the scheduled caste in the mainstream. However, the success has been limited.
Economic Exploitation: Further, the main issue that the people in this group face is economic exploitation on account of illiteracy, landlessness and poverty. Attempts to alleviate their status were made by social reformers in various parts of India.

VIOLATION TRIBES OF RIGHTS OF SCHEDULED

The Scheduled Tribes, who are the original people (aborigins) from the forests are the most vulnerable group of people in India. They constitute 8.6% of the population living here with a maximum concentration of population seen in the north eastern parts of India. This group is recognized as the ‘weaker’ section by the Constitution of India. The violation of rights which began from the time of the British are still found. The main problems of the tribal’s are as follows:

Land Alienation: The tribal’s have been alienated from their native lands owned by their forefathers for generations together. This is not a post Independence phenomenon, but it was common even during the colonial days. The Forest laws not only alienated the Forest Dwellers (as know today) but further pushed them to the brinks of poverty and vulnerability. They no more live contented lives and their art and culture that was know to proliferate throughout the world, does not exist any longer.

Forest Land Loss caused due to environmental degradation: The Scheduled Tribes are landless and usually face discrimination. They are further deprived of land which is, today used for commercial purposes. Further, the forest cover has been soon depleting in India that has caused severe damages to the environmental conditions in which the tribal’s lived.

Displacement: Development induced displacement has been a regular feature amongst tribals and there has been largescale migration to cities and townships on account of this.

Economic Exploitation and Bonded Labour: On account of being landless there is a need to work as agricultural labourers in the farms to earn a living for themselves. This however, takes a brutal turn and the indebted poor are made to work as bonded labourers where they are expected to work for long hours without being paid and it is the employee who decides the tenure and the nature of such work. Matters worsen when the families are attacked for not obeying orders.
Lack of Basic amenities: The tribals lack all basic necessities required to live a life in a sufficiently decent life. Right from malnutrition, disease, lack of proper food, excess intake of liquor, lack of schooling, the tribals face a larger set of problems and the government which lacks in an adequate monitoring sector finds the entire exercise of spending on their amenities, a very difficult exercise. Large scale corruption has not only led to deprivation but today the tribals are more into insurgent movements and are ready to sacrifice their lives demanding for separate states.

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

In India, women are the most vulnerable and this happens in almost every caste, religion and race. There is discrimination, both for being a low caste and for being a woman. Some social customs and traditions, beliefs and cultural values accord secondary status to women. The only way the change in the lives of women can come is through the change in the general mindsets of the people.

With several movements fighting for the rights of women, the women today are found to be economically more independent than what they were in the yesteryears. In general, the problems faced by women are as follows:

Violence is almost universal problem of women: Violence against women is not a new phenomenon in India. —Women in Indian society have been victims of ill-treatment, humiliation, torture, and exploitation for as long as written records of social organisation and family life are available. These records are replete with incidents of abduction, rape, murder, and torture of women.

Discrimination and Decline in the Female Population: Normally, in the population of any country, male-female ratio remains more or less the same, that is, 50:50. In India as the census reports reveal female population has been steadily declining ever since 1901. The male preference has led to the abuse of technology.

Thousands of —unwanted female‖ children are killed at the stage of foetus itself. It is said that in India, out of 12 million female children born every year, around 25% of them die before they attain the age of 15. Of the children who die
every year, about 3 lakh female children, that is, more than the number of male children, die for one or the other reason. Of the children which die every year in India, the 6th child dies due to gender discrimination.

Economic Exploitation: Women workers are given much work but are paid less wages or salary especially in the unorganized sector. —Equal pay for equal work|| remains only a slogan. —Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 has proved to be a dead letter in this regard. There are also sufficient instances of such exploitation even in the organized sector.

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Etymologically, a child is any young human being below the age of full physical development or below the legal age of majority. It is only when the right environment is provided that children grow into good and successful human beings. However, today the times have changed and children from all strata of the society face severe difficulties in the form of excessive exposure to media, violence in all forms beginning right from their homes, fear and lack of trust.

Following are a few issues that surround children’s life’s and their freedom is endangered:

Lack of access to education: Education which is believed to be the basic right of every child in the world, has been denied in most parts of India. This is very prominently seen throughout the country irrespective of the government attempts to promote education to children.

Poverty and Malnutrition: According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) globally, 30% of children under five are estimated to be stunted and 18% have low weight-for-height, and 43 million children are overweight. Optimal breastfeeding could save the lives of 1.5 million children under five every year. Nearly nine million children die every year from preventable diseases and infections: the largest killer being Diarrhoeal disease. There are over 2 billion cases of diarrhoeal disease every year and is the leading cause of malnutrition.
amongst children under five. Violence and Child Abuse: According to UNICEF violence against children can be "physical and mental abuse and injury, neglect or negligent treatment, exploitation and sexual abuse. Violence may take place in homes, schools, orphanages, residential care facilities, on the streets, in the workplace, in prisons and in places of detention." Such violence can affect the normal development of a child impairing their mental, physical and social being. In extreme cases abuse of a child can result in death. Child abuse has many forms: physical, emotional, sexual, neglect, and exploitation. Any of these that are potentially or actually harmful to a child's health, survival, dignity and development are abuse. This definition is derived from the W.H.O.

Child Labour: India is sadly the home to the largest number of child labourers in the world. The census found an increase in the number of child labourers from 11.28 million in 1991 to 12.59 million in 2001. M.V. Foundation in Andhra Pradesh found nearly 400,000 children, mostly girls between seven and 14 years of age, toiling for 14-16 hours a day in cottonseed production across the country of which 90% are employed in Andhra Pradesh. 40% of the labour in a precious stone cutting sector is children. NGOs have discovered the use of child labourers in mining industry in Bellary District in Karnataka in spite of a harsh ban on the same. In urban areas there is a high employment of children in the zari and embroidery industry. Poverty and lack of social security are the main causes of child labour.

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MINORITIES

India is a multi-lingual and a multi-religious country. Indian society is pluralistic in character from the religious and other points of view. Since a very long time people belonging to various religious communities has been living together in this country.

Though the majority of the people living in this land are Hindus [82.41%], people belonging to other religious communities such as Muslims [11.67%], Christians [2.32%], Sikhs [2%], Buddhists [0.77%], Jains [0.41%] and others [0.43%] are also living along with the Hindus by enjoying similar rights and opportunities. By virtue of their numerical strength, the Hindus constitute the majority while the rest of the religious communities come under what is known as —religious minorities‖.
Regarding the concept of —minority‖ in the Indian context, it can be said that the term has not been properly defined anywhere in the Indian Constitution. But —minority status‖ has been conferred on many groups.

According to the Article 29 of the Constitution, any group living within the jurisdiction of India is entitled to preserve and promote its own language, script or literature, and culture. Article 30 states that a minority group —whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish and administer educational institution of their choice.

Problems of Religious Minorities Racial, religious, ethnic, linguistic and other minorities are subject to some or the other problems everywhere. The four main problems which they normally face are:

Problem of prejudice and discrimination : Sharing a common nationality with the majority in the offing, it becomes absolutely essential for the minorities to identify with them. There are several occasions where their behavior is observed so as to check on their affiliations. This hinders their progress in the long run. Problem of preserving their distinct social and cultural life: Several customs and cultures are under scrutiny at times and lead to controversies of all types giving opportunities to aggravate the problems of minorities.

Problem of Protection: Need for security and protection is very often felt by the minorities. Especially in times of communal violence, caste conflicts, observance of festivals and religious functions on a mass scale, minority groups often seek police protection. Government in power also finds it difficult to provide such a protection to all the members of the minorities. It is highly expensive also. State governments which fail to provide such protection are always criticised. Problem of Communal Tensions and Riots: Communal tensions and riots have been incessantly increasing since independence. Whenever the communal tensions and riots take place for whatever reason, minority interests get threatened; fears and anxieties become widespread. It becomes a tough task for the government in power to restore the confidence in them.

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE DISABLED
According to the World Health Organization — Disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

Around 400 million disabled persons live in the developing world. Most often they are the poorest. Poverty is the most important cause of disability. Every year millions of people go below the poverty line. This makes them more vulnerable to disability. The WHO estimates that worldwide there are 1.5 million blind children, mainly in Asia and Africa. In developing countries up to 70 per cent of blindness is either preventable or treatable. The WHO also estimates that around 50 per cent of disabling hearing impairment is also preventable. In 1995 this has affected a total of 120 million people worldwide. It is estimated that at least 10 per cent of the developing world’s population is disabled in one way or the other.

The disabled are deprived of all opportunities for social and economic development. The basic facilities like health, education and employment are denied to them. The State infrastructure is grossly inadequate and ill functioning where disabled are concerned. It is estimated that 40 million of more than 100 million children out of school have disabilities. Around 70 per cent of the disabled are unemployed. Millions are in the verge of collapsing due to severe disabilities. People with physical disabilities at least get noticed, but the others with mental illness are just written off off.

Along with the physical problems they also bear the brunt of social ostracism and stigma. The specific problems encountered by the disabled people are:

Access: Accessibility is fundamental to realization and enjoyment of any right. Though the earlier definition of access included only physical access‘ and took only architectural barrier into consideration, the modern day analysis of access is more holistic in nature. It encompasses within itself accessibility to quality education, information and communication, entertainment and technology. Emanating from the Beijing Conference and the Disabilities Act, this understanding of access provides the scope for not only full personality development but also participation in social and political life. Access to public transport, toilets, hospitals, government offices, public spaces like parks, educational institutions, places of worship are still in accessible to people. Still whatever interventions are made are restricted to the
physical access. The areas like education, teaching aids, books in Braille and interpreters for the hearing and speech impaired are still not available to large sections of the disabled.

Employment: According to the Census 2002, Disabled people constitute at least 6 per cent of our population; still their basic needs for social security, individual dignity and meaning full employment remain unmet. They are at the mercy of the government and the civil society, which have a lacsidical attitude towards them. The disability Act 1995 provides for 3 per cent reservation in all categories of jobs in government sector. Though it has been three years to this notification, its implementation is still not complete.

Education: Education is yet another thing crucial for the persons with disability. In India education to the disabled is not provided as part of the mainstream but through other isolated institutions which operate on a service and charity mode. Most of the times these institutions are not fully integrated into the mainstream education system. There are only around 3000 special schools in India today. Of them only 900 are schools for the hearing impaired, 400 for children with visual impairment, 700 for those with loco motor disability and one thousand for the intellectually disabled. More than 50,000 children with disability are enrolled in the Integrated Education for Children, a government-sponsored programme. Only a few schools have special provisions like resource rooms, special aids and special teachers. This is restricted only to big cities. Since there are no special schools or special education services in rural India, children with special needs either have to make do with the regular schools in the village or go without education. Pre-vocational and vocational training is provided only in specialized institutions and in select cities.

Discrimination: Persons with disability suffer from both social and material disability. The society, which is caught up with uniformity, cannot see people with differences with the same eye. There is lot of stigma attached to disability, which hinders their normal social interaction. The other discrimination they face is in terms of access to places. Public buildings, public transport system and other places of importance are not accessible to them. The employment opportunities available to them are also very low. They suffer the triple jeopardy of being disabled, poor and stigmatized.

**VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE ELDERLY IN INDIA**
Elderly or old age consists of ages nearing or surpassing the average life span of human beings. The boundary of old age cannot be defined exactly because it does not have the same meaning in all societies. Government of India adopted ‘National Policy on Older Persons’ in January, 1999. The policy defines ‘senior citizen’ or ‘elderly’ as a person who is of age 60 years or above.

Out of every 10 elderly couples in India, more than 6 are forced by their children to leave their homes. With no place to go and all hopes lost, the elderly have to resort to old age homes, which do not guarantee first class treatment. In India, unlike USA, parents do not leave their children on their own after they turn 18 (of course there are exceptions), but children find it hard to accept the fact that there are times when parents want to feel the love that they once shared with them. There are times when parents just want to relax and want their children to reciprocate their care. Every parents wants to see their child grow and be successful but no parent wants their child to treat them like an unnecessary load on their responsibilities.

Every other day, we see news of parents being beaten up by their children, parents and in laws being forced to do the house hold chores, being made to live in small dungeon like rooms, their property being forcefully taken over by over ambitious children.

There are 81million older people in India-11 lakh in Delhi itself. According to an estimate nearly 40% of senior citizens living with their families are reportedly facing abuse of one kind or another, but only 1 in 6 cases actually comes to light. Although the President has given her assent to the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act which punishes children who abandon parents with a prison term of three months or a fine, situation is grim for elderly people in India.

According to NGOs incidences of elderly couples being forced to sell their houses are very high. Some elderly people have also complained that in case of a property dispute they feel more helpless when their wives side with their children. Many of them suffer in silence as they fear humiliation or are too scared to speak up. According to them a phenomenon called ‘grand dumping’ is becoming common in urban areas these days as children are being increasingly intolerant of their parents’ health problems.

After a certain age health problems begin to crop up leading to losing control over one’s body, even not recognizing own family owing to Alzheimer are common in old age. It is then
children began to see their parents as burden. It is these parents who at times wander out of their homes or are thrown out. Some dump their old parents or grand parents in old-age homes and don’t even come to visit them anymore. Delhi has nearly 11 lakh senior citizens but there are only 4 governments’ run homes for them and 31 by NGOs, private agencies and charitable trusts. The facilities are lacking in government run homes.