

Lesson at a Glance

- **Markets tend to be exploitative of people.** Therefore the government makes certain laws to protect people from such exploitation. These laws try to check unfair practices in the markets.
- Private companies, contractors, etc. in order to make **maximum profits** might deny workers their rights and not pay them wages.
- In this regard there is a **law on minimum wages** which ensures that workers are paid fairly.
- The government is also keen to protect the interests of **producers and consumers** in the market. There are also laws for them.
- These laws ensure that the relations between the **worker, consumer** and **producer** are governed in a manner that is not exploitative.
- Well, laws are there to protect various interests. But what is important in this regard is the **implementation of these laws.** Unless these laws are enforced it will be difficult to protect the weak from the strong.
- To ensure that every worker gets fair wages, the government has to regularly inspect work sites and punish those who violate the law.
- Through making, enforcing and upholding these laws, the government can control the activities of individuals or private companies in order to ensure social justice.
- In October 2006, the government amended the **Child Labour Prevention Act**, banning children under **14 years** of age from working as domestic servants or as workers in *dhabas*, restaurants, etc. It made employing these children punishable offence.
- **Bhopal Gas Tragedy** is the world's worst industrial tragedy that took place in the year 1984. Union Carbide (UC), an American company, had a factory in Bhopal in which it produced pesticides. At midnight on 2 December, 1984 methyl-isocyanite (MIC), a highly poisonous gas, started leaking from this VC plant which took numerous lives. Among those who survived, many developed severe respiratory disorders, eye problems etc. Children developed peculiar abnormalities.

- The disaster was not an accident. Union Cabinet had deliberately ignored the essential safety measures in order to cut costs.
- Although UC stopped its operations, it left behind tons of toxic chemicals which have seeped into the ground to contaminate water.
- 25 years later, people are still fighting for justice, for safe drinking water, for healthcare facilities and jobs for the people poisoned by UC.
- Now the question arises why Union Carbide set up its plant in India.
- Foreign companies usually come to India for cheap labour. Here, they can **save costs** and **earn higher profits.**
- **Lower working conditions** including **lower safety measures** are used as ways of cutting costs. In the UC plant, every safety device was malfunctioning.
- In India there is so much unemployment, that there are many workers who are willing to work even in unsafe conditions in return for a wage. The employers take advantage of this.
- The government must ensure that safety laws are implemented. It is also the duty of the government to ensure that the Right to Life guaranteed by the Constitution is not violated.
- The Bhopal disaster shows lacking on the government's part. There were weak safety laws and these too were not enforced.
- Government officials refused to recognise the plant as hazardous and allowed it to come up in a crowded locality. In this way, the safety of the people was disregarded both by the government and by private companies.
- In the year, the Bhopal gas tragedy took place, there were few laws protecting the environment in India. The environment was treated as a free entity and any industry could pollute the air and water without any restrictions.
- The Bhopal disaster brought the issue of environment to the forefront.
- The Indian government introduced new laws on the environment. Henceforth, the polluter was to be held accountable for the damage done to environment.
- Laws were important not only for the workers but also for those who might be injured due to industrial accidents.
- One of the prime responsibilities of the government is to make appropriate laws and to enforce them. Laws that are weak and poorly enforced can cause serious disaster.

■ IN-TEXT QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

1. Why do we need a law on minimum wages?

[NCERT Textbook, page 121]

Ans. We need a law on minimum wages so that workers may get fair wages by their employers. Most often they are denied fair wages. The employers usually take advantage of their poverty and pay them low wages.

2. Find out:

(a) What is the minimum wage for a construction worker in your state?

(b) Do you think the minimum wage for a construction worker is adequate, low or high?

(c) Who sets the minimum wages?

[NCERT Textbook, page 121]

Ans. (a) About Rs 150 per day

(b) Low

(c) The Ministry of Labour.

3. Why do you think enforcement of safety laws is important in any factory? [NCERT Textbook, page 127]

Ans. Enforcement of safety laws is important in any factory because in absence of this there may occur serious disaster. We must not forget the Bhopal gas tragedy. It took place only because the safety laws were lax in the country, and even these weak safety laws were not enforced.

4. Can you point to a few other situations where laws (or rules) exist but people do not follow them because of poor enforcement? (For example, over-speeding by motorists). What are the problems in enforcement? Can you suggest some ways in which enforcement can be improved? [NCERT Textbook, page 127]

Ans. (i) Boarding in a running bus

(ii) Urinating at public places

(iii) Employing children under 14 years of age as domestic helpers

(iv) Giving and taking dowry at the time of marriage

The laws regarding the above situations are not enforced because the government does not take them seriously. Nor is the public so aware.

It is up to we, the citizens of the country, who can take initiatives to improve the enforcement.

5. 'A clean environment is a public facility'. Can you explain this statement? [NCERT Textbook, page 128]

Ans. A clean environment is meant for all those who are living in it. As it is shared by many people at the same time, it is said to be a public facility.

6. Why do we need new laws?

[NCERT Textbook, Page 128]

Ans. New laws are needed in order to check pollution, clean rivers and banning the use of polythene bags.

7. Why are companies and contractors able to violate environmental laws? [NCERT Textbook, page 128]

Ans. Companies and contractors are able to violate environmental laws because these laws are not strictly enforced.

8. Can you think of ways in which the environment can be protected? [NCERT Textbook, page 129]

Ans. (i) Minimum use of private vehicles

(ii) Afforestation

(iii) Boycott of the use of polythene bags

(iv) Proper disposal of sewage

■ TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

Let's Recall

9. 1. Talk to two workers (For example, construction workers, farm workers, factory workers, workers at any shop) to find out if they are receiving the minimum wages laid down by law?

Ans. • **Construction workers.** They are receiving below the minimum wages laid down by law.

• **Factory workers.** They are also receiving below the minimum wages.

9. 2. What are the advantages to foreign companies in setting up production in India?

Ans. (i) They can manage cheap labour in India.

(ii) They can spend the least on housing facilities for workers.

(iii) They can cut cost by providing lower working conditions including lower safety measures.

Thus, foreign companies can save costs and earn higher profits.

Q. 3. Do you think the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy got justice? Discuss.

Ans. I don't think so. 25 years have been passed, but the people are still fighting for safe drinking water, for health care facilities and jobs for the people poisoned by Union Carbide.

Q. 4. What do you mean when we speak of law enforcement? Who is responsible for enforcement? Why is enforcement so important?

Ans. Law enforcement means that the provisions of the law must be implemented. The government is responsible for this. It must see that the law that it has made is applicable to all, without any discriminations.

Enforcement of law is important because in case any law is not enforced or weakly enforced, there may occur serious disaster. We must not forget the horrible consequences of the Bhopal gas tragedy. It took place only because the safety laws were lax in the country and even these weak safety law were not enforced.

Q. 5. How can laws ensure that markets work in a manner that is fair? Give two examples to support your answer.

Ans. (i) The government should regularly inspect worksites and punish those who violate the law.

(ii) The government should control the activities of individuals or private companies.

Q. 6. Imagine yourself to be a worker working in a chemical factory, which has received orders from the government to move to a different site 100 kms away from the present location. Write about how your life would change? Read out your responses in the classroom.

Ans. I am working in a chemical factory. Due to relocation of the factory. I have to shift to the new place. It will cause many troubles to me. I will have to get new house to live in which may or may not be suitable for my family and earning. The education of my children would be affected badly. There is no good school in the new locality. So, I will have to get my children admitted

in neighbouring town. It will cost more. If I don't disturb my children's education, I will have to leave my family at the same place. This will again cause worry to me. I will have to curtail my expenses for double settlements.

Q. 7. Write a paragraph on the various roles of the government that you have read about in this unit.

Ans. The government is liable to the welfare of its people. For this, it performs several functions. One of the most important functions of the government is to ensure that these public facilities (water, electricity, public transport, sanitation, etc.) are made available to everyone. It makes laws to protect the interests of workers. The Minimum Wages Act specifies that wages should not be below a specified minimum. The government enforces this law so that employers may not exploit their workers by paying them low wages. Through making, enforcing and upholding such laws the government tries to control the activities of individuals or private companies so as to ensure social justice.

Q. 8. What are the sources of environmental pollution in your area? Discuss with respect to (a) air; (b) water and (c) soil. What are the steps being taken to reduce the pollution? Can you suggest some other measures?

Ans. The sources of environmental pollution in our area:

(a) Air - transport and factories emitting more hazardous gases.

(b) Water - disposal of factories waste in Yamuna river, immersion of idols, throwing of garbage in Yamuna river.

(c) Soil - as there is no cultivable land in this area, there is no chance of soil pollution.

Suggestions

- (i) Old vehicles should be banned. Diesel vehicles should be prohibited. Pollution norms should be checked strictly.
- (ii) Factories should be shifted out of the town area.
- (iii) Idol immersion, waste disposal in Yamuna river should be banned.

Q. 9. How was environment treated earlier? What has been the change in perception? Discuss.

Ans. Environment was treated as free entity. Any industry could pollute the air and water without any restrictions. Whether it was our rivers, air, ground water, the environment was being polluted and the health of people was completely ignored.

The Bhopal gas tragedy brought change in perception. The Indian government introduced new laws on the environment. Henceforth, the polluters were to be held accountable for the damage done to environment. Now it is felt that the environment is something that people over generations will share, and it could not be destroyed merely for industrial development.

- Q. 10.** What do you think the famous cartoonist R.K. Laxman is trying to convey in this cartoon? How does it relate to the 2006 law that you read about on page 125?



Ans. In this cartoon, the cartoonist brings to light how we treat children of the same age differently. One child, who belongs to a rich family, gets sympathy from his mother just because she feels it is wrong to burden kids. But at the same time, she is also putting all the burden on another kid. Child labour like this is a menace to society since due to this, all children do not get the same treatment and this is injustice.