

Programme:- Master in Sociology
Postgraduate Department of Sociology
Patna University, Patna

Semester-III

Compulsory Paper:- C.C. 11 (SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN INDIA)

Unit I:- Social Disorganization and Social Problems Concepts and Theories

The Nature of Social Problems:-

Social problems are the conditions threatening the well-being of society. Lawrence K. Frank in an article 'Social Problems' in the American Journal of Sociology defined a social problem as "any difficulty of misbehaviour of a fairly large number of persons which we wish to remove or correct." Paul B. Harton and Gerald R. Leslie defined it as "a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable, and about which it is felt something can be done through collective social action."

Richard C. Fuller and Richard R. Meyers define a social problem as a condition which is defined by a considerable number of persons as a deviation from some social norm which they cherish. According to Lundberg and others, "A social problem is any deviant behaviour in a disapproved direction of such a degree that it exceeds the tolerance limit of the community".

According to Green, "A social problem is a set of conditions which are defined as morally wrong by the majority or substantial minority within a society." Social problems are situations or conditions which are regarded by society as threats to its established ways or to its well being and, therefore, needing to be eliminated or alleviated.

These situations are deplored by many people. They are the symptoms of social maladjustment. Social problems cause dissatisfaction, suffering and misery. Societies are not always harmonious. They face one another with hostility and suspicion. Therefore, several cases of maladjustment or un-adjustment present

themselves in society. It is the purpose of Sociology to study such cases and discover the underlying causes.

Subjective Element of Social Problems:-

Whether a particular situation is a social problem or not, is largely a matter of subjective judgment. One society may regard a situation a problem, while another may not so regard it. In the same society too what is regarded a problem today may not be so regarded tomorrow because of change of conditions and attitudes.

Social problems are what people think they are and if situations are not defined as social problems by the people involved in them, they are not problems to those people, although they may be problems to philosophers or scientists or to outsiders. Thus prostitution was no social problem in ancient Greece, where the earnings of priestess-prostitutes built and maintained the religious temples.

In ancient India caste system was no problem. The several castes accepted their hereditary status as fixed from the beginning, and their religion sanctioned their acceptance of hereditary status. Slavery in America would have never become a social problem had it not been challenged. In this way a particular situation does not become a social problem unless and until it is considered morally wrong by the majority or at least by a substantial minority.

However, inspite of this subjective nature of social problems, there are some social problems which are universal and permanent. War, crime, unemployment and poverty have always been regarded major social problems by all societies in all times. This goes to show that men everywhere have possessed the same basic drives and have had to deal with the same kinds of environmental and social conditions. That is why many of the social problems of today are identical with those of olden times.

Every social problem implies three things.

Firstly, that something should be done to change the situation which constitutes a problem;

Secondly, that the existing social order will have to be changed to solve the problem;

Thirdly, that the situation regarded a problem is undesirable but is not inevitable. The people deplore the situation because they think that it can be reformed or eliminated.

It may also be noted that a situation becomes a problem only after the people become aware that certain cherished valuations are threatened by conditions which have become acute. Without such awareness no situation can be identified as a problem. This awareness can be known when the people begin to say that “something ought to be done” to remove the situation.

When the people say “something ought to be done” they also propose that ‘this and that should be done.’ Herein ends and means are discussed and alternative solutions proposed. Untouchability became a social problem in India only after it was realized by the people that it constitutes a threat to the social unity and that something ought to be done to abolish it.