

Programme: Master in Sociology
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Compulsory Paper: C.C. 11 (SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN INDIA)
Unit I: Social Disorganization and Social Problems Concepts and Theories

The Causes of Social Problems:

No problem is due to a single cause. As stated in the preceding paragraph social problems have no single or simple cause. Each problem has a complex history and is usually due not to one but to many causes, which are sometimes even difficult to determine. Among the several causes no priority can be ranked.

War, poverty, crime or unemployment does not offer single or simple explanation for their occurrence. Sometimes one problem is so interwoven with other problems that it cannot be solved apart from them, for example, the problems of crime cannot be solved without solving the problem of poverty and the problem of poverty cannot be solved without solving of problem of illiteracy. In other words, social problems should be considered in their complex totality and only then they will be understood and dealt with effectively.

Attempts to find out a single cause:-

In spite of the fact that no problem is due to a single cause some sociologists have nevertheless, made an attempt to find out a single explanation for a problem. Even to the laymen the notion that a problem is due to a simple and single cause is widespread.

Lombroso, the father of modern criminology, was of the view that the criminal behaviour is inborn and is primarily a biological phenomenon. He said that the criminal has definite physical stigmata, or anomalies, such as a symmetrical cranium, long lower jaw, flattened nose etc. He represents an atavistic type, or a throwback to primitive man.

The view of Lombroso that criminality is biologically determined was disproved by Charles Gorin, the English statistician, who proved that the criminals in no way differ from the non criminals in physical characteristics. Henry H. Goddard, an American psychologist, asserted that crime is due primarily to mental deficiency, especially feeble-mindedness.

But his assertion was soon negated by various researches. Some sociologists point out that emotional imbalance or glandular disturbance is to be considered the primary cause of criminal behaviour. But their assertion also has been disproved by many criminologists.

The Dutch criminologist held the view that crime is a result mainly of the abuses or presence of the capitalist system. However, his view finds few adherents today. Montesquieu pointed out that the causes of crime are the geographical factors like climate, weather etc., but Cohen has rejected this view and asserted that the conception of Geographical school is more imaginative than factual.

The commonly accepted view about crime today is that there is no single cause of crime; for individuals become criminals for different reasons. Though some common factors may be present in many cases yet in almost every instance the combination of factors is unique. A situation or circumstance may cause one person to turn to criminality but may not affect another similarly.

The criminal behaviour is due to a number of interrelated factors involving environment and personality. Walter C. Reckless remarked that criminology may be forced to abandon the hopeless search for general causes of crime and be satisfied with establishing the relative importance of certain conditions associated with criminal behaviour.

What is true of crime is also true of other social problems like unemployment, poverty, suicide, war etc. No single or simple explanation can be offered for their occurrence. Unemployment may be due to bad economic planning, industrialization or inadequate system of education.

Poverty may be the result of poor conservation of natural resources, biological disabilities of the people or capitalistic system. Suicide may be due to mental un-adjustment, family disputes or evil social customs. Similarly, war may be due to the aggressive nature of people, economic conditions or imperialistic aspirations of some people.

Thus it is apparent that the particularistic interpretation of social problems ascribing them to a single cause is wholly inadequate. The origin of social problems lies not in a single cause but in many causes which cannot be put under a single theory.

A problem may be due to a combination of physical, biological, mental and cultural factors or any one of them. No hard and fast rule can be laid down about the causes of social problems. As discussed above a situation or condition may affect different people in a different way. People living under the same conditions do not necessarily behave in the same manner.

It does not, however, mean that any effort to find out the cause of a social problem is vain, but, on the other hand, it points out to the necessity of finding out all the causes of a problem and not to rest content with a single or clear cut explanation of it. Only after we have found out all the causes of a social problem, it can be adequately solved.

According to Lundberg and others, interferences with communication among the members of a community produce deviant behaviour. Interferences with communication may arise on account of two factors (i) Personal factors like feeble-mindedness, physical disability etc., and (ii) Social factors like urbanisation, industrialisation, immobility, conflicting codes and standards, and weak social institutions.

It may be that a particular factor is a primary source whereas the other factors are secondary, but which is the primary source, opinions differ on it. Thus P.A. Parsons held that the incomplete adjustment of man to material resources is responsible for his problems, whereas A. B. Wolfe maintained that the fundamental social problem is one of population. Ogburn contended that many social problems are the

result of the failure of the original nature of man to adjust itself to constant changes in culture and its institutions.