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Programme: Master in Sociology   SEMESTER- III

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Patna University, Patna

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

UNIT I: Social Disorganization and Social Problems Concepts and Theories

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Theoretical Approaches to Social Problems in India

Anomie Approach:

This approach was propounded by Merton. Anomie is a condition characterized by the relative absence or weakening or confusion of norms and values in a society or a group. The concept of anomie was originally developed by Durkheim to explain division of labour and suicide but it was Merton who used this concept 41 years after the publication of Durkheim's book Suicide to explain deviant behaviour in terms of functioning of social and cultural structures in the society (Merton, 1938:672-73). Anomie involves a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is disjunction between cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accordance with them.

Anomie is the counterpart of the idea of social solidarity. Just as social solidarity is a state of collective ideological integration, anomie

is a state of confusion, insecurity and normlessness. According to Merton, the disjunction between goals and means and the consequent strain leads to the weakening of men's commitment to the culturally prescribed goals or institutionalized means, that is, to a state of anomie.

Merton maintains that people adapt themselves to this disjunction either by rejecting the cultural goals or the institutionalized means or both. He gives four varieties of deviant behaviour. Merton, thus, locates the sources of strain not in the characteristics of individuals but in the culture and/or social structure.

He says, "the social problem arises not from people failing to live up to the requirements of their social statuses but from the faulty organization of these statuses into a reasonably coherent social system" (Merton and Nisbet, 1971:823). However, Merton's theory is incomplete and inadequate. All social problems cannot be perceived as the result of the responses to strains or mode of adaptation and adjustment.