Lecture 5
Social Problems in Rural and Urban India

Rural and Urban Problems in India

Many scholars have referred to characteristic differences between the rural and urban areas and social problems are often identified by these differences.

Characteristics of Rural Problems

The significant characteristics of the rural areas in India which are associated with certain social problems are:

(a) People are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and a large number of landowners have small and medium-sized landholdings.

(b) The upper caste people still hold large lands while people of the lower castes own either marginal land or work as landless labourers.

(c) Rural people are scattered in comparison to the urban people.

(d) Not only the norms and values but the practices of the rural people too continue to be traditional.

(e) The price the farmers get for their produces is less in relation to the work they put in.

Though the rural economic distress does not affect all farmers equally but the lower and middle-class farmers who are in a majority are forced to send their siblings to the urban areas to find new sources of livelihood. In cities, they are forced to remain in slums and work as daily wage-earners due to the lack of education and proper training. The political economy of the State and the correlation of class forces are primarily responsible for their plight.

The standard of living of the rural farmers is very low and their exploitation by big landlords, intermediaries and moneylenders is far greater. The other rural problems are due to the fact that since the rural people do not live in concentrated masses, the availability of specialised services to them is minimal. This is true for medical, market, banking, transport, communication, education, recreation and many other necessary services for modern living. Thus, in a general way, people in the rural areas are at a great disadvantage and have to suffer many social problems.
Characteristics of Urban Problems

Just as many of the rural problems are the result of isolation and scattered living, many urban problems spring from concentration of population. Again, the political economy of the State and the correlation of class forces are primarily responsible for the plight of not only the rural poor but also the urban poor.

Slums, unemployment, crimes, delinquencies, begging, corruption, drug abuse, environmental degradation, etc. are all urban problems which are generally the result of intolerable living conditions in town and cities. In city life, anonymity increases cases of riots, communal conflicts and agitations.

Social Problems and Social Change in India

Societies often face problems because of the imbalance in the forces of caste, race, gender, class, and so on. Social change is change in the patterned roles, or a change in the network of social relations, or in the structures and organisation of a society. Social change is never complete or total; it is always partial. It can be minor or fundamental. Further, the change can be spontaneous or planned. Planned change is to achieve some set of collective ideals. For example, after Independence, India also had set some collective goals to achieve.

Some of the important changes that we find in our society since Independence are:

(a) Change from tradition to modernity in certain values and institutions
(b) Change from ascribed status to achieved status
(c) Change from predominance of primary groups to predominance of secondary groups
(d) Change from non-formal means of control to formal means of control
(e) Change from collectivity to individualism
(f) Change from non- and anti-scientific methods of investigation to scientific methods of investigation
(g) Change from folkloric knowledge to rationalist knowledge
(h) Change from homogeneity to heterogeneity
(i) Change in the increasing awareness of rights among various sections of society due to the spread of education, weakening of the caste system and religious
fundamentalism (needs critical debating), weakening of traditional sources of security, occupational mobility, enactment of several social laws, and so on.

Though we have achieved many of the set collective goals, many contradictions have also set into our system. For example, accessibility to the legal system has become a problem for the common masses of our country. At times the forces of fundamentalism and parochialism destroy the ethos of nationalism by practising casteism, regionalism, communalism, linguism, extremism, terrorism, and so on.

Many laws have been enacted but either these laws are full of loopholes or they are not properly implemented. Egalitarianism is enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India but the State enforces discrimination in more ways than one. The State preaches cultural pluralism but falls prey to the fundamentalism of all hues. All these contradictions have increased discontent and pessimism among people which in turn have resulted in many social problems.

Discussion

What have we discussed in the first module?

1. General theory of social problems: functionalist, conflict and symbolic interactionist
2. History of social problems theory: the medical model, absolutist approach to conditions in society, modern studies of deviance and the subjective nature of social problems
3. Cultural deprivation, recidivism and social Darwinism
4. Objective reality to social problems: subjectivity and bias (all social research is political; the study of social problems – value-free or not)
5. Characteristics, types and causes of and reactions to social problems
6. The sociological imagination
7. Social structure as the basic unit of analysis: the person-blame approach and the system-blame approach
8. Methods to study social problems
9. Rural and urban problems in India
10. Social problems and social change in India
References


