SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE
Social Problems

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Unit II Crime	
Theories of crime, Juvenile delinquency: Causes, juvenile homes and remedial measures, PCR justices against women, Female feoticide, female infanticide - Dowry, Social legislation.	Unit B: Types of Social Problem (Pages 21-42)
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INTRODUCTION

This book *Social Problems* provides the basic knowledge related to problems faced by the society. Social problems are the general factors that damage and affect society. A social problem is typically a term used to describe problems with a specific group of people or area in the world. Social problems involve problems such as crime, poverty, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, unemployment and old age, among others. You can find social problems anywhere in the world, but it tends to affect some areas more than others.

Unit 1 defines the general characteristics of social problems and covers topics such as types of social problems, nature of social disorganization, causes of social problems and social disorganization.

Unit 2 explains in some detail the various types of social problems, such as juvenile delinquency, remedial measures for delinquency, evil practices against women, female foeticide and infanticide, and dowry.

Unit 3 covers the concept of communalism, incidence of communal violence and riots, theoretical approaches, and causative factors.

Unit 4 explains the role of sociology in public health and touches upon various topics, such as the role of sociology in combating diseases like HIV, aging and the problems faced by the elderly, institutions to look after the elderly, etc.

Unit 5 discusses child labour—types and causes, the incidence of child labour in India, strategies for preventing child labour, street child children and child trafficking in India.

Each unit is supplemented with Summary, Key Terms, Check Your Progress Questions (bit questions), Questions and Exercises, and Further Reading.

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UNIT 1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Structure

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will learn about the meaning of social problems and general characteristics. Ever since the existence of human society, social problems have been a perennial feature. Every society is engulfed with social problems. The forces of social change and the subsequent transition of society from a simple society to a complex one have further aggravated the situation, giving rise to innumerable social problems. Therefore, understanding the internal dynamics of society is essential to locate social problems and devise various measures to tackle these problems. In this context, this unit gives you a theoretical understanding of social problems through various perspectives. In this unit, you will be able to understand the various sociological perspectives to comprehend social disorganization or social problems.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning and nature of social problems
- Analyse the characteristics of social problems

- Examine the various theoretical perspectives to understand social problems
- Understand the various types of social problems

1.2 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PROBLEM

C.Wrightmills (1959) had stated quite aptly that the structure and culture of a society, its history, and what happens within it at any time and place affect everyone within it more or less directly. When personal troubles take on the status of mutually recognized and shared difficulties for a sufficient number of people, these exigencies may be perceived as social problems that require social action. From a broader sociological perspective, social problems are defined through a process of social construction in which a situation or condition is collectively perceived as harmful to a sufficient number of people or society itself. The process of constructing a social problem entails gaining public attention and legitimacy for recognizing the troubling aspect of the situation or condition, proposing and obtaining acceptance for solutions, and implementing strategies for change. What is constructed as a social problem differs by society, historical time, place and culture. Thus, the same condition may be defined as a social problem at one point in time or for one group of people, yet as non-problematic at other time periods or for different constituencies.

Social problems are behaviour patterns or conditions that are considered objectionable or undesirable by many members of a society. These members recognize that the corrective policies, programmes and services are necessary to cope with and reduce the scope of these problems (Fuller and Meyers, 1941). Merton and Nisbet consider social problem as a way of behaviour that is regarded by a substantial part of social order as being in violation of one or more generally accepted or approved norms (Merton and Nisbet 1971). Social problems involve actions or patterns of behaviour that are viewed by a substantial number of persons in the society as being harmful to the society or in violation of societal norms, and about which ameliorative action is seen as both possible and desirable.

Therefore, social problems are undesirable situations or conditions or behaviour concerning society, social institutions, social relationships, social structure, social organization, etc. It is always disintegrating and disorganizing. Moreover it is pathological in nature and requires proper attention for its cure.

1.3 SOCIAL PROBLEMS AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

As discussed earlier, social problem is a situation or condition in a society that is constructed through human agency as something worthy of being perceived of as a social problem. The same phenomenon may be defined differently or even not considered as a social problem across and within societies and at different points in time. In this regard, Blumer (1971) cautions that social problems are not the result of intrinsic malfunctioning of a society, but are result of a process of definition in which a given condition is picked and identified as a social problem. A society does not exist for a society unless it is recognized by that society to exist.

Lopata (1984) extends this position by arguing that certain aspects or characteristics of any society are likely to be defined as 'conditions' that can be constructed as social problems. In the history of a society, the same situation can be converted through claims-making activities by some members of that society into a social problem in many different ways with a variety of proposed 'solutions' (Spector and Kituse, 1987).

Like the human life course, the process of constructing a social problem typically follows a 'natural history'. Fuller and Meyers (1941), Blumer (1971), and Spector and Kituse (1987) propose five stages of this history:

1. A social problem begins when a number of persons or key authoritative persons organise claims-making activities to define the situation as harmful to individual or social life.

2. The legitimacy of these claims is accepted by official agencies, fear is communicated, and blame is assigned.

3. The condition becomes publicly recognized and defined as a social problem.

4. Procedures to deal with the claims and competing solutions are suggested.

5. Solutions are implemented. Assignment of a label to a newly identified problem, such as the term 'child abuse', 'divorce' or 'juvenile delinquency' is common.

Thus, a social problem may consist of many layers and involve multiple components. In this regard, Fuller and Myers (1941) note that at one level:

A social problem is a condition that is an actual imagined deviation from some social norm cherished by a considerable number of persons. The objective aspect or phase of a problem consists of a verifiable condition, situation or event. The subjective aspect consists of an awareness of definition of certain people that the condition, situation or event is inimical to their best interests and a consciousness that something must be done about it.

1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

These discussions make it apparent that social problem is a condition creating crisis and upheaval in generally established and current values of society. In order to understand the characteristics of social problems, various viewpoints are taken into consideration.

According to Weinberg (1960) social problems have six characteristics.

1. Social problems arise by being collectively defined as objectionable by many members of the community. Thus, adverse conditions not defined by the community as reprehensible are not considered as social problems. For instance, taking alcohol is not regarded as objectionable by society; it is not considered a social problem. But as society recognizes and discusses the problems inherent in alcohol consumption, studies its consequences and devises a plan of corrective action to control it, this comes to be defined as a social problem even though the original situation may not have changed.

2. Social problems change when the concerned behavioural patterns are interpreted differently. For instance, till a few decades ago, mental illness was viewed as insanity and it was considered so disgraceful that the families kept the member's mental illness as a secret. Now the behaviour of a mentally ill person is seen only as one type of 'deviant behaviour' which requires psychiatric and social treatment. Thus, the problem of mental illness today is met more realistically and effectively.

3. Mass media (newspapers, magazines, television, radio, movies) play an important role in creating awareness about the scope and urgency of social problems.

4. Social problems have to be viewed in the context of society's values and institutions; for example, the problem of racial conflict in the United States is different from the problem of untouchability in India.

5. Social problems need to be analysed in terms of the influence upon them by group processes and social relationships.

6. Since social problems vary historically, contemporary social problems are the society's concern; for example, the problem of refugee settlement in India in 1947-48 was different from the problem settling refugees from Assam in 1968 (Ahuja, 2001).

Apart from the aforementioned characteristics, the following characteristics of social problems can be outlined:

- Social Problems are disintegrative: Social problems disintegrate the social system directly or indirectly. It adversely affects social values and since the values of every society differ they are affected differently.

- Social problems generate out of multiple causes: There can be many causes of social problems.
- Social Problems are inter-connected: There is a close correlation between various social problems. For instance, problems like unemployment, poverty and crime are inter-related.
- Social problems leads to both individual and community maladjustment.
- All social problems arise due to pathological social conditions.

1. 5 TYPES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems can be of various types and it is difficult to categorize. But Fuller and Myers (1941) have given three types of problems:

1. Physical Problems: These problems emerge in society but their causes are not based on values or emotions.

2. Ameliorative problems: There is consensus about the effects of these problems but there are differences pertaining to their solutions.

3. Moral Problems: There is no consensus pertaining to the nature or causes of these problems.

1.6 SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

Social problems are a result of social disorganization. It can be said that social problems and social disorganization are closely inter-related. When the functioning of society is threatened due to the emergence of social problems, it can be said that social disorganization is in existence. In fact, social problems bring about social disorganization. In simple words, social disorganization implies some breakdown in the social organization resulting from forces of social change. The concept of disorganization occupies a prominent place in modern sociological literature. It was developed by Thomas and Zananiecki in their 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America' where they defined social disorganization as decrease of the influence of the existing rules of behaviour upon individual members of the group.

On the other hand, social disorganization is defined by Elliot and Merill as a breakdown in the equilibrium of forces, decay in the social structure, so that old habits and forms of social control no longer function effectively.

1.7 NATURE OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

Social disorganization is an indication of the existence of diseased or disruptive elements of society. The nature of social disorganization is discussed below:

- **Conflict of Mores and institutions:** Every society has its own mores and institutions which regulate the life of its members. But with the passage of time such mores become obsolete and old ones are replaced by new ones. As a result of this, there is conflict which destroys the consensus of social organization and social disorganization ensues; for instance, the difference of opinion in respect of many social institutions and social laws such as divorce, joint family, inter-caste marriages etc.

- **Reversal of Function from one group to another:** In an organized society the functions of different groups are predetermined. But since the society is dynamic, the functions of one group are transferred to another. For instance most of the functions of family are transferred today to nursery schools and clubs which have caused family disorganization which further results in social disorganization.

- **Individuation:** In a traditional society people accommodate everyone's interest. But modern age places high premium on individualism or individualistic tendencies. Men and women take decisions on important matters like marriage, occupation, recreation and morality in accordance with individual prejudices, interest and attitudes. Such a trend can set in dangerous process of disorganization.

- **Changes in the Social Structure:** Change in social structure refers to changes in roles and status of individuals. In an organized society, the roles and status of individuals are defined and fixed. The possibility of conflict between role and status becomes less due to simple division of labour and mechanical solidarity as reiterated by Durkheim. But when society passes from simple to complex division of labour and organic solidarity there is conflict between status and role. For instance, the multiplicity of roles which a modern woman plays can often lead to role conflict and thereby bring about family disorganization.

- **Maladjustment:** In an organized society there is considerable degree of harmony among individuals as a result of which they welcome any change. But in a disorganized society, people do not accept change and are reluctant to adjust with new developments.

- **The society becomes functionally stagnant:** Here, a disorganized society becomes functionally paralysed. The smooth functioning of society is hampered as a result of which the entire social system is

affected including the individual therein. For instance, the toppling down of governments or the creation of an 'anomic' situation can functionally paralyse the society and bring about economic breakdown.

- **The central authority loses its controlling power:** This is when disorganization reaches its climax the central authority loses its controlling power. And to maintain order, the society has to rest upon an authority which may be a single individual (monarchy), a group of individuals (aristocracy) and may be masses (democracy). When authority is unable to make and implement laws there comes sharp resistance from the society resulting in revolutions which jeopardizes the functioning of government.

1.8 CAUSES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

Social problems have been present in every society. Since the dawn of civilization, man has been confronted with social problems of diverse nature. Rienhardt (1952) has referred to three factors in the development of social problems.

1. **Differentiation and multiplication of interests and functions:** In a complex society there is increased opportunity for the collision of interests of various individuals, groups, institutions and systems. Untouchability, communal riots and political crimes are social problems which are the result of the clash of interests of different castes and classes.

2. **Accelerating frequency of social change or growth of civilization:** The growth and development of science and technology has destroyed many old forms of employment resulting in the migration of millions of people and has given rise to class conflicts. It is thus the structural and functional maladjustments arising from revolutionary interventions which create many social problems.

3. **Man's developed insight to make a scientific analysis:** Ever since man has developed his social insight of looking into the working of nature, issues which were formerly regarded as simple are now perceived as a result of various kinds of natural conditions which influence man and society.

Elliot and Merill have ascribed four main causes of social disorganization: the social processes under the three main heads—cultural, political and economic; cultural lag; conflicting attitudes and values; and social crisis.

1.9 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Social Pathology perspective

According to the social pathology approach, social problems result from some 'sickness' in society. Just as the human body becomes ill when our systems, organs and cells do not function normally, society becomes ill when its parts (elements of structure and culture) no longer perform properly. For instance, problems such as crime, violence, poverty and juvenile delinquency are often attributed to the breakdown of the institution of family. The decline of religious institutions, inadequacies in our economic, educational and political institutions are also responsible for generating social problems.

Social illness results when members of a society are not adequately socialized to adopt its norms and values. People who do not value honesty may sometimes face dishonesty due to faulty socialization. So, proper socialization and moral education is necessary to prevent social problems.

Barbara Wooton, in her book *Social Science and Social Pathology* defines Social Pathology as including 'all those actions in the prevention of which public money is spent, or the doers of which are punished or otherwise dealt with at public expense'. It is now widely held that the primary positive contribution of research in this field has been to show that many popular explanations of crime and delinquency are untenable.

According to Barbara Wooton:

Up till now the chief effect of precise investigations into questions of social pathology has been to undermine the credibility of virtually all the current myths. Solid evidence that irreligion, or lack of interest in boy's clubs, or life in the squalor of a problem family or a mother's absence at work have the corrupting effects that they are said to have, or that the younger one embarks on a career of crime, the longer one is likely to stick to it, or that the delinquencies of the younger are 'all the fault of parents', or that problem families repeat themselves generation after generation-solid evidence for any of this is conspicuously lacking; and any evidence that can be found has a way of falling to pieces after close inspection. (Wooton, 1959)

Social Disorganization perspective

According to this perspective, rapid social change disrupts the norms in a society. When norms become weak or are in conflict with each other, society is in a state of anomie, or normlessness. Hence people may steal, physically abuse their spouses or children, etc. According to this view, the solution to social problems lies in slowing the pace of social change and strengthening social norms. Social disorganization implies breakdown of rules and the inability of individuals to depend on a familiar set of expectations that could

successfully guide their actions. Warren (1949) has described it as a condition involving lack of consensus (disagreement about group purposes), lack of integration of institutions (often working at cross purposes), and inadequate means of social control (preventing individuals from playing their individual roles due to confusion). Elliot and Merill (1950) have defined it as a process by which relationships between members of a group are broken or dissolved.

However, social disorganization theory was first developed in the studies of urban crime and delinquency by the Chicago school sociologists. Since then, theory has been frequently applied to urban crime and deviance, though the conditions of social disorganization are also applied to family, community and individual.

It was also noted to what extent physical, economic condition or family population constituted social disorganization. By the 1940s, the term differential social organization (Sutherland, 1947) had been introduced to emphasize that these urban neighbourhoods may not be so much disorganized as organized around different value and concerns. His theory of differential association complements differential social organization by explaining crime as behaviour learned through an exposure of different conforming criminal patterns.

Value Conflict perspective

According to this perspective, problems occur not because things fall apart socially but because different groups in society have different interests, these interests conflict, and these conflicts precipitate conditions that at least some people regard as undesirable. Values are standards of behaviour held by a group of people. Sometimes certain values are considered goals of a group and are absolute and imperative. Different groups have different value systems and when there is incompatibility between values of two different groups there is value conflict.

Theorists like Waller, Fuller, Cuber and Harper hold that clashes in the value system are of basic importance in the origin and development of social problems. Waller (1936) has referred to the conflict between 'organizational' and 'humanitarian 'values. The former favour private property and individualism, while the latter are votaries of remedying the misfortunes of others.

But this view is criticized as it cannot be applied universally since values are relative and differ in different social contexts.

Deviant Behaviour perspective

Deviance refers to non-conformity to social norms. It is a concept chosen by sociologists to encompass a variety of forms of human conduct that have been defined or reacted to by members of a social system as wrong, bad, immoral, illegal, or worthy of condemnation or punishment. The most

significant scholarship in the early evolution of sociology of deviance was Emile Durkheim's (1897) study of *suicide* .However, suicide and suicidal behaviour is of much interest for sociology of deviance. For instance, Durkheim hypothesized that homicide and suicide acted like two different 'streams' of deviance with nations that had high suicide rates having low homicide rates. When questions are asked about the relationship between such behaviours as criminal violence and non-criminal forms of deviance such as mental illness and alcohol use, for the search for answers bridges the study of 'deviance' and the study of 'crime' (Gensen,2007). So it can be said that the deviant behaviour perspective encompasses the study of relationship between criminal and non-criminal violations of shared evaluative standards (norms) as well as search for general principles or themes that apply to deviance in general.

Various theories of deviance are as follows:

Merton's Theory of Social Structure and Anomie

The theory of anomie provides an explanation for concentration of crime not only in the lower class urban areas but also in lower class and minority groups in general and the high crime rate in American society. The theory derives its main arguments form Durkheim's theory. Durkheim (1897) used the term 'anomie' to refer to a state of normlessness or lack of social regulation in modern society as one condition that promotes higher rates of suicide. Robert Merton (1938) applied this Durkheimian approach to the condition of modern industrial societies, especially in the United States. To Merton, an integrated society maintains a balance between social structure (approved social means) and culture (approved goals).Anomie is the form that societal malintegration takes when there is a dissociation between valued cultural ends and legitimate societal means to those goals. According to Merton, the strong cultural emphasis to success goals in America is not matched by an equally strong emphasis on socially approved means.

To Merton, an integrated society maintains a balance between social structure (approved social means) and culture (approved goals). Anomie is the form that societal malintegration takes when there is dissociation between valued cultural ends and legitimate societal means to those ends. Merton argued that American society evinces this means-ends disjuncture in two basic ways. First, the strong cultural emphasis on success goals in America is not matched by an equally strong emphasis on socially approved means. Everyone is socialized to aspire toward high achievement and success. Competitiveness and success are glorified by public authorities, taught in the schools, glamorized in the media, and encouraged by the values that are passed along from generation to generation. Worth is judged by material and monetary success. The American dream means that anyone can make it big. However, this success is supposed to be achieved by an honest effort in

legitimate educational, occupational, and economic endeavours. Societal norms regulate the approved ways of attaining this success, distinguishing them from illegitimate avenues to the same goal. Merton perceived American values to be more concerned with acquiring success, getting ahead, and getting the money at any cost, than with the right and proper way to do so. While other industrial societies may have the same problem, American society is especially prone to stress achievement of the ends over utilization of approved means. When success goals are overemphasized, the norms governing their achievement become weakened, producing what Durkheim conceived of as anomie. Americans, then, are more likely than members of more integrated societies to do whatever it takes to achieve success, even if it means breaking the law, in part because legitimate efforts to succeed are not as highly valued in American culture.

The pursuit of success by illegal 'innovative' means is viewed as one adaptation to this form of disorganization. Illegal innovation in pursuit of commonly shared success goals is viewed as a common lower-class response to frustrated ambitions, but Merton argued that there are other ways to adapt as well. Some people might adapt to strain by giving up the pursuit of success goals and retreating through the use of drugs, suicide, or mental illness. Still others might rebel and attempt to change the system. The logic of Merton's theory with its emphasis on widely shared goals coupled with unequal opportunity is the basis for designating it as a 'strain' theory. Other theorists have followed the same logic introducing other forms of discrepancy between goals and means as a source of frustrated ambitions.

According to Merton, social structure and anomie are closely related. If the social structure changes rapidly, it creates circumstances favourable for the development of deviant behaviour. A result of change in social structure is the development of structural alternatives for some social functions. This makes the social units performing these functions ineffective and they try to re-establish their power. In such a situation deviant behaviour becomes normal. Changes in social structure make changes in statuses and roles of the members of society. In a changed situation, acting according to new roles and statuses becomes difficult. As a result of which there exists conflict between established social relationships and culminates in deviance.

Cohen: Status Deprivation and the Delinquent Subculture

Albert K. Cohen (1955) followed Merton by emphasizing the structural sources of strain that lead to deviant adaptations by the lower class. But Cohen applied it specifically to the delinquent subculture found among lower-class adolescent males. He recognized that the delinquent subculture has an effect on and plays a role in influencing individual lower-class boys to become involved in delinquent behaviour. But he denied any interest in the explanation of variations in individual behaviour or why the delinquent subculture was

maintained over a period of time. Instead, he wanted to explain why it existed in the first place. Cohen's version of anomie/strain theory is in basic agreement with Merton's theory, because both perceive blocked goals as producing deviance-inducing strain. However, rather than the inability to gain material success, in Cohen's view, it is the inability to gain status and acceptance in conventional society that produces the strain. Status in conventional society is achieved by meeting society's standards of dress, behaviour, scholastic abilities, and so on. The most pervasive of these standards, according to Cohen, are those of the middle class.

Adolescents are most likely to be confronted by the middle-class criteria of respectability and acceptance in the public schools. Middle-class expectations are imposed by teachers and administrators on students from all class backgrounds. Such standards as good manners, appropriate demeanour, non-aggressive attitudes and behaviour, attention to grades, studying, and active participation in school activities are among the ways that students gain status and approval. Middle-class adolescents, supported by middle-class parents, are best able to meet these standards. They achieve recognition and gain status by measuring up to these standards, not only in the eyes of adults but to a large extent in the eyes of their peers. However, lower-class youths, especially boys, cannot always meet these standards. They do not have the verbal and social skills to measure up to the yardstick of middle-class values. As a result, their 'status deprivation' produces 'status frustration'.

According to Cohen, the delinquent subculture is a collective response to this frustration, and the nature of its delinquent activities results from a 'reaction formation'. The criteria for acceptability found in this subculture can be met by lower-class boys, who gain status in delinquent gangs by adhering to 'malicious' and 'negativistic' values in opposition to conventional standards. If non-aggression is acceptable in the middle class, then a reputation for aggressive toughness is the way to gain status in the delinquent subculture. If polite classroom behaviour and making good grades will gain greater standing in the eyes of the teachers, then classroom disruption and disdain for academic achievement will gain greater standing in the delinquent subculture.

Cohen argued that Merton's image of deviants turning to illegitimate means because of the deprivation of legitimate means is too rationalistic to apply to the 'non-utilitarian' delinquent subculture. For instance, most of the property offenses committed by delinquent youths are really not intended to produce income or gain material success by illegal means. Rather, they are non-utilitarian responses to status frustration that also meet with the approval of delinquent peers.

Cloward and Ohlin: Differential Opportunity and Delinquent Subcultures

Shortly after Cohen's theory was published, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cloward, 1959) proposed a 'differential opportunity' theory of delinquency. Their theory drew from the anomie theory of Merton and Cohen's subcultural theory on the one hand, and from Shaw and McKay's social disorganization and Sutherland's differential association theories on the other. Although the general propositions of their theory have subsequently been applied to a whole range of delinquent and criminal behaviour, Cloward and Ohlin developed it specifically to account for types of, and participation in, delinquent subcultures.

In Cloward and Ohlin's view, Merton's anomie/strain theory incorrectly assumed that lower-class persons, who are denied access to legitimate opportunities, automatically have access to illegitimate opportunities. They interpreted Sutherland, as well as Shaw and McKay, as focusing on the cultural transmission of delinquent values in lower-class urban areas and implicitly demonstrating the importance of the availability of illegitimate opportunities. Their theory combines anomie, differential association, and social disorganization by proposing that deviant adaptations are explained by location in both the legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures. Motivation and the aspiration to succeed by themselves do not account for either conforming or deviant behaviour, argue Cloward and Ohlin. The individual must be in deviant or conforming 'learning environments' that allow one to learn and perform the requisite skills and abilities. Just because legitimate opportunities are blocked does not necessarily mean that illegitimate opportunities are freely available.

Some illegitimate roles may be available, while others may not be at all. Just as there is unequal access to role models and opportunities to fulfil conforming roles, there is unequal access to illegitimate roles and opportunities. Among adolescent boys, it is clear that deprivation of legitimate means produces a strain toward delinquent activities, but what kind of delinquent patterns they will become involved in depends on what illegitimate opportunities are available to them in their community. Boys from racial and ethnic minorities, especially those in the lower-class neighbourhoods of large urban centres, are most likely to be deprived of legitimate educational and occupational opportunities. Therefore, high rates of delinquency are to be expected among them. But the kind of subculture or gang delinquency they adopt depends on the nature of the illegitimate opportunities available to them. These opportunities are determined by the social organization of the neighbourhoods or the areas of the city where they are raised.

While Cohen posited a single delinquent subculture, Cloward and Ohlin saw several subcultures. Though they recognized that delinquent gangs carry

on a variety of illegal activities, they argued that these gangs develop more or less specialized delinquent subcultures, depending on the illegitimate opportunities in their neighbourhoods. The first major type of specialized delinquent subculture, 'criminal,' is characterized by youth gangs organized primarily to commit income-producing offenses, such as theft, extortion, and fraud. Theirs is a more or less utilitarian choice of illegal means that corresponds with Merton's innovation adaptation. Such gangs are found in lower-class ethnic neighbourhoods organized around stable adult criminal patterns and values. Organized and successful criminals reside or operate openly in these neighbourhoods, providing criminal role models and opportunities as alternatives to legitimate ones.

The second major type of delinquent subculture, 'conflict', is expressed in fighting gangs. Status in these groups is gained by being tough, violent, and able to fight. They are found in the socially disorganized lower-class neighbourhoods with very few illegal opportunities to replace the legal opportunities that are denied them. There are few successful or emulated adult role models, either conventional or deviant. Youths become alienated from the adult world and view most of the adults they encounter as 'weak'. They are unable to develop the skills, either legitimate or illegal, to achieve economic success and see no way to gain conventional or criminal status. In frustration they turn to gangs in which the only status to be gained is by fearlessness and violence.

The third major type of delinquent subculture, 'retreatist', is primarily focused on the consumption of drugs and alcohol. Retreatist gang members have given up on both goals and means, whether conventional or illegal. Cloward and Ohlin did not specify the type of neighbourhood in which retreatist gangs are found, but they described their members as 'double failures'. Double failures not only perform poorly in school and have little or no occupational prospects, they are neither good crooks nor good fighters. They escape into a different world in which the only goal is the 'kick' and being 'cool'. While most sustain themselves by one type or another of a non-violent 'hustle', status and admiration can be gained only within the gang by getting high and maintaining a drug habit.

Walter B. Miller's Theory

Walter B.Miller (1958), following Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin, concentrated on the delinquency of lower-class male gangs (or, in Miller's terms, 'street corner groups') in economically deprived neighbourhoods. He also agreed with anomie/strain theorists that the commission of delinquent behaviour is motivated by the attempt to gain desired ends. But rather than positing a distinct delinquent subculture(s) adapted to the availability of legitimate or illegitimate opportunities, Miller proposed that delinquent behaviour is a youthful adaptation to a distinct lower-class culture.

Delinquency is one way of achieving or gaining acceptance according to the expectations of this lower-class culture. Lower-class youth learn and act according to the central values or 'focal concerns' of lower-class adults, but the delinquent adolescents express and carry out these values in an exaggerated way. These values are: trouble (revolving around getting away with law violations), toughness (showing physical power and fearlessness), smartness (ability to con or dupe others), excitement (seeking thrills, risk-taking, danger), fatalism (being lucky or unlucky), and autonomy (freedom from authority, independence). By demonstrating toughness, smartness, autonomy, and the other characteristics implied in the focal concerns, lower-class males achieve status and belonging in the street corner groups. These qualities can be demonstrated and the valued ends achieved by fighting and other forms of illegal and deviant behaviour.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Define social problems.
2. How do social problems arise?
3. Are social problems are not the result of intrinsic malfunctioning of a society?
4. What are the various theoretical perspectives of social problems?

1.10 SUMMARY

- Every society is engulfed with social problems. The forces of social change and the subsequent transition of society from a simple society to a complex one have further aggravated the situation, giving rise to innumerable social problems.

- From a broader sociological perspective, social problems are defined through a process of social construction in which a situation or condition is collectively perceived as harmful to a sufficient number of people or society itself. The process of constructing a social problem entails gaining public attention and legitimacy for recognizing the troubling aspect of the situation or condition, proposing and obtaining acceptance for solutions, and implementing strategies for change.

- As discussed earlier, social problem is a situation or condition in a society that is constructed through human agency as something worthy of being perceived of as a social problem.

- Social problems are a result of social disorganization. It can be said that social problems and social disorganization are closely inter-related.

When the functioning of society is threatened due to the emergence of social problems, it can be said that social disorganization is in existence. In fact, social problems bring about social disorganization. In simple words, social disorganization implies some breakdown in the social organization resulting from forces of social change.

- According to the social pathology approach, social problems result from some 'sickness' in society.
- According to social disorganization perspective, rapid social change disrupts the norms in a society. When norms become weak or are in conflict with each other, society is in a state of anomie, or normlessness.
- According to value conflict approach, problems occur not because things fall apart socially but because different groups in society have different interests, these interests conflict, and these conflicts precipitate conditions that at least some people regard as undesirable.
- Deviance refers to non-conformity to social norms. It is a concept chosen by sociologists to encompass a variety of forms of human conduct that have been defined or reacted to by members of a social system as wrong, bad, immoral, illegal, or worthy of condemnation or punishment.
- According to Merton, social structure and anomie are closely related. If the social structure changes rapidly, it creates circumstances favourable for the development of deviant behaviour.
- According to Cohen, the delinquent subculture is a collective response to this frustration, and the nature of its delinquent activities results from a 'reaction formation'. The criteria for acceptability found in this subculture can be met by lower-class boys, who gain status in delinquent gangs by adhering to 'malicious' and 'negativistic' values in opposition to conventional standards.

1.11 KEY TERMS

- **Anomie:** Normlessness.
- **Social pathology approach:** Theory that social problems result from some 'sickness' in society.
- **Social disorganization perspective:** Rapid social change disrupts the norms in a society. When norms become weak or are in conflict with each other, society is in a state of anomie, or normlessness.
- **Value conflict approach:** Problems occur not because things fall apart socially but because different groups in society have different interests, these interests conflict, and these conflicts precipitate conditions that at least some people regard as undesirable.

- **Deviance:** Refers to non-conformity to social norms. It is a concept chosen by sociologists to encompass a variety of forms of human conduct that have been defined or reacted to by members of a social system as wrong, bad, immoral, illegal, or worthy of condemnation or punishment.

1.12 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Social problems are defined through a process of social construction in which a situation or condition is collectively perceived as harmful to a sufficient number of people or society itself.

2. Social problems arise by being collectively defined as objectionable by many members of the community.

3. Social problems are not the result of intrinsic malfunctioning of a society, but are result of a process of definition in which a given condition is picked and identified as a social problem.

4. The various theoretical perspectives of social problems are social pathology, social disorganization, value-conflict and social deviance.

1.13 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on social problem.
2. What are the characteristics of social problems?
3. What is social disorganization?
4. Write a short note on Walter B. Miller's Theory.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss social problem as social constructions.
2. Discuss the relationship between social problems and social disorganization.
3. 'Social problems are not the result of intrinsic malfunctioning of a society'. Explain.
4. Explain the various theoretical perspectives of social problems.

1.14 FURTHER READING

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