SOC481: Indian Society and Social Problems

Course Notes

Gurpreet Singh

(*guggu@iitk.ac.in*)

1. SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROBLEM

1.1. Stages of a Social Problem

Any social problem goes through the following stages

1. Emergence of the social problem
2. Legitimation of the social problem
3. Mobilisation of action
4. Formation of an official plan of action
5. Implementation of the official plan

There may be a huge leap between 'Formation of a plan' and 'Implementation of the plan'.

1.2. Modern Society

French Revolution and Industrial Revolution changed the European Society drastically.

Industrial Revolution: Home and workplace got separated (zoning).
French Revolution: Liberalisation and introduction of democracy.

The first Indian writings were cave carvings from the Indus Valley Civilization (3000 BC), but the first scholarly accepted writings from pre-Ashokan empire were from (400-600 BC).

The modernisation of society was ruled by the shift from status to contract

Gemeinschaft → Gesellschaft
(Status is more important) → (Contract is more important)

1.3. Indian Society

Indian society is given a structure by three institutions
- **Caste** → Gives identity
- **Village** → Economic structure *(jajmani)*
- **Family** → Links to hierarchy, division of labour, property, gender, etc.

2. CASTE SYSTEM

2.1. Social Stratification

According to Karl Marx, any society is divided into two parts - *Superstructure* and *Base.* The sort of superstructure is determined by economy.

Marx also argues that the modernisation of society is going through the process of *rationalisation.*

In India, there are 4 major castes
  - Brahmins
  - Kshatriyas
  - Vaishyas
  - Shudras
  - Ati-Shudras (not considered within the social framework)

Sanskritisation: The process of upliftment of a caste as a whole.

Different castes have different sets of rules and regulations. This is known as the *segmental division of society.*

The caste system in India is based on stratification based on occupation. Therefore, there is a lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and individual identity. However, on the other hand, it maintained a balance in society. Castes also prove to be vote banks for political parties.

2.2. Caste and Marriage

Castes are divided into sub-castes. There are, in general, endogamous units of society. Marriage provides a strong boundary for caste.

In case of hypergamy, the rules of *anuloma* marriage are followed, wherein, a woman marries a man of a higher caste. The opposite is known as *pratiloma* marriage, and is generally not practiced within the framework of caste.

2.3. Caste and Food

Generally, the acceptance of water and ordinary foods cooked in water from members of lower-ranking castes incurs the greatest pollution. In North India, such foods are known as kaccha khana, as contrasted with fine foods cooked in butter or oils, which are known as pakka khana.

For purity and soul strength, a *satwik* (vegetarian) diet is followed, whereas for agility and body strength, a non-vegetarian diet is followed.

2.4. Rise of Caste Politics (BSP)

Ambedkar wished for a pan-Indian Dalit Party, although he could not make an impact since the segregated Dalits refused to come together. In the wake of consolidating the Dalit vote bank, Kanshi Ram founded the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 1984.

BSP has emerged as a full-fledged Dalit Party. The party considers the Political Order as quite undemocratic, and believes it needs revised reforms and rules for proper upliftment and affirmation of the backward communities in India.

BSP emerged as a majority in U.P. in the 2007 elections. BSP tries to ensure that Dalit personalities are glorified by various means. BSP has successfully been able to club the Dalits as well as gain the allegiance of many Muslim communities.

2.5. Social Impact of BSP

BSP tried three steps to ensure the horizontalisation of the *Vertical Social Order.*
1. Take pride in one's own identity and publicly showcase Dalit caste identity
2. Adopt individual caste titles/identities
3. Adopt upper caste titles

With the strict implementation of Prevention of Atrocities Act and the collective pride Dalit community has led to near annihilation of the vertical order in many regions.

3. VILLAGE IN INDIA

3.1. Views on Village

The village *(jajmani)* system came to be an institution during the British Raj. There are differing views on the village system
  - **Gandhi:** Believed that the village system would have been the core of Swaraj India, and the concept of occupational relation through generations should be continued.
  - **Nehru:** Believed that we couldn't have operated on low-scale instruments, and therefore needed to shift to a more urban platform, while combining the aesthetics of village (unity and constituency) with industrialization.
  - **Ambedkar:** Claimed that the villages are the sites of practice of prejudice and oppression, and goes very astray from democracy. The village republic is a degradation of society.
    Villages as their own constituency would only uplift the upper castes, and would allow them to dominate over lower castes. Ambedkar had a more Utopian vision, hoping for a complete overturn of the village system.

3.2. Jajmani

The landowners or employers are known as the *jajmans* and the labourers or employees are known as the *kamins*.

The tradeoff in the jajmani system and capitalisation is that the exploitation of kamins was very high, however they had more job security, as there was no concept of downsizing.

4. THE MAOIST REVOLUTION

4.1. Rise of Maoists

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed during British raj, opposing the rise of *zamindars*. It widely supported the Congress Party, and collaborated with the Congress Socialist Party. With the government under Nehru, CPI split into two parts, one approving of the Congress Party, whereas the other emerging as the biggest opposing party in the 1957 elections.

With the Telangana Struggle and the border war, the differences worsened, and CPI split, forming Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) in 1964. While CPI continued to support Congress, CPI(M) viewed Congress to be collaborating with foreign capital.

With the rise of green revolution, and the continued exploitation of zamindars, even after the Land Reform Act (1955), the radicals of CPI(M) led a violent revolt in 1967, in West Bengal, in which peasants attacked local landlords, occupied land, burned records and cancelled previous debts. This led to the rise of Naxalites. Some of the Naxalites formed All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), later Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI(ML), while some retained a separate identity and formed the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), inspired by China's chairman Mao.

The Maoists sought to launch a "people's war" of the peasantry through armed warfare. Later, in 2004, the MCC and the People's War Group joined to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist), the largest Maoist rebel group in India.

4.2. Spread of the Maoists

The Maoists spread to eastern and central parts of India, especially the tribal areas, particularly hilly areas of Jharkhand, and Bihar, where they practiced Guerrilla Warfare, and expand the war to seize the state. With the proposal of Special Economic Zones[1] (SEZ) for capitalists, the condition worsened, with the Maoists aiming to turn every SEZ into a battlefield.

In Chhattisgarh, *Salwa Judam*[2] was initiated, which appointed 16 year olds as Special Protection Officers (SPO), who were asked to assist the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in fighting Naxalites, and were commanded to kill their own tribal mates, on the promise of a permanent government job in the police force. The police had also started to take prisoners as an attempt to torture information off them.

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[1] Areas with relaxed tax reforms, and lesser power for the state
[2] Purification hunt

The local *adivasis* are being trapped within these battles against the police and the Maoists. However, the violence imposed by Maoists in urban areas hasn't been random, and the officials were only targeted when they were engaged against the Maoists. The violence acts of Maoists in urban areas were specific and targeted. Opposing to popular belief, the bombings held by Maoists were only in empty areas, such as schools , but only at night.

Meanwhile, this is not the case in rural areas. The violence is more random, and unexplainable. However, the Maoist struggle is not spreading due to the theoretical understanding of the Marxist and Leninist ideologies, but is because of the concept of extended family, and the idea of revenge.

5. PROBLEM OF PRODUCTION

5.1. Spectacle

All professionals and experts believed that the problem of production has been solved with modern technology. The common belief is that all the imperfectness in the system is only because of human wickedness, and the imperfections in the political system.

This is attributed to man's attitude towards nature, as he does not consider himself to be a part of nature. The technological advancements show natural resources to be infinite. Every economist and business takes utmost care in applying capital and income, but are inconsiderate when it comes to polluting and exploiting natural resources, which is truly irreplaceable.

5.2. Critique on Marxism

Marx has considered labour and technology in the capital required for the free market, however ignored the most important, irreplaceable and far larger requirement, nature.

Marx believed that the Utopian society would be a communist one. The order being

Primitive Communism → Slavery → Feudalism → Capitalism → Socialism → Communism

which is realized due to rationalisation and modernisation (technological advancement) of the society.

However, with the advancement of society, we are having a more skewed distribution of wealth, which in turn, uplifts capitalism. Marx claimed that capitalism is indeed a well society, however, capitalism is a reason for this scaled exploitation of natural resources.

5.3. Farmers Against Globalization

M.D. Nanjundaswamy, the president of Karnataka Farmers Association, campaigned against multinational corporations, which are responsible for intensive agriculture, and demanded the decentralisation of agricultural policies and empowerment of rural *self-management* of agriculture.
In his view, western capitalism is more developed than Indian capitalism, and due to colonial oppression, India has lower rates of import and export. This is a major reason of Globalization to be considered as a failure for the agriculture industry.

5.4. Refusal of Genetically Modified Seeds

GM seeds increase the cost of input, and the crops are more prone to attacks from pests. However, in hopes of generating more revenue, farmers tend to use these seeds, fall into the traps of seed racketeering, and thus are trapped with debts.

6. FARMER SUICIDES IN INDIA

6.1. Durkheim's Types of Suicide

Happens due to social factors, namely *Social Regulation* and *Social Integration* or in other words *Individualism* and *Integration*

1. **Fatalistic**
   - Denotes the kind of suicide due to social regulation.
   - For example, persons with futures pitilessly blocked
   - Least important type

2. **Altruistic**
   - Altruistic suicide occurs when the weight of the society is brought to bear on one person
   - With the idea of individuality spreading, this form of suicide becomes less interesting

3. **Egoistic**
   - Egoistic suicide occurs when the ties binding the individual to others are slackened and there is absence of adequate social integration
   - Conditions of egoism are found in the existence of social values promoting individualism
   - Larger the family size, lesser is the risk of suicide
   - Happens when a person becomes individualistic in his activities

4. **Anomic**
   - Anomic suicide occurs when social regulation is too weak
   - When a person's social wants exceed the possible means for attaining them, the individual remains in perpetual danger of suffering from the disproportion of his aspirations and n achievements

6.2. Agrarian Change in India

Before the British rule, the agriculture was mostly specific to local needs, and were grown according to the suitability of climatic conditions. The social framework of agriculture was organised within caste, family and kinship.

The British colonialism introduced commercialization of agriculture, with new land tenure. The focus shifted now to cash crops, like cotton, sugar-cane, etc.

1. **Caste and Land Reform**

   The rich and the upper caste people reaped the benefit of the expanded forces

of production because of their large-scale landholding and economic position. The loss of crop was covered by lowering wages of agricultural labourers, which usually belonged to lower classes and tribal areas.

British colonialism did not change this structure, rather worked within (assigning positions) this framework itself. High caste people were landholders and intermediaries of the British administration, the medium caste people were the cultivators, and the lower caste people were the labourers. The *jajmani/balutedari* system, therefore, was continued.

Post independence, the economic planning and land reform[3] led to the crumbling of the solidarity within rural areas, however it showed some positive impact in a few states.

2. **The Green Revolution**

   There was significant technological advancement in agriculture during the 1960s. This broadened the economic and social horizon of all categories of farmers.

   With this, however, the cost of cultivation increased, and there needed to be more awareness about the correct usage of fertilizers and pesticides. The lower caste farmers were weak in dealing and coping with these modern institutions.

3. **Rural Credit and Price Policy**

   Although the agricultural policy was earlier meant to mitigate the impact of any undue rise in prices on the vulnerable sections of the population, the price policy in 1990s changed the situation drastically. Public investment in irrigation went down, and low-input low-output prices were inverted.

   With the increase in tariffs, the share of agriculture in GDP fell. Loans

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[3] Land reform is the statutory division of agricultural land and its reallocation to landless people.

became easier, and the feeling of anomie rose.

4. A New Social Order

Joint family was the backbone of the agrarian society, providing support in times of crisis. With the growth of individuality (the new social order), families are different from those of 1950s and 60s.

Large landholders partitioned their families into small units in order to escape ceiling laws[4], which encouraged a shift towards nuclear family. As a result, in most cases, a single person bears the burden of having to eke out a satisfactory livelihood. This compounds a sense of loneliness, and therefore leads to egoistic and anomic suicides.

5. New Agriculture

As new methods came into use, the old and traditional cultivators, who were earlier consulted for agricultural operations, lost their traditional authority, and remained isolated from the larger community.

Also, the continuous prejudice against the lower castes from the upper castes increases the isolation of the low-ranking new agriculturists. Modern agriculture has led to the disintegration of the society. Thus cumulative effects of agrarian change led to the emergence of anomic suicides in the context of growing egoism in rural society.

In conclusion, there are two types of farmer suicides that are found
- the disappointment and despair that resulted from the disproportion between achievements and aspirations (*loss of social regulation – **anomie***), and
- the isolation and weaker ties with family (*loss of social integration – **egoism***)

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[4] Part of land reform, which ceiled the maximum amount of landholding.

6.3. Industrially Centered Suicides

Generally, a person becomes a victim to suicidal temptations when he can't elude from reasons such as addiction, sexual philandering, family tension, debt, etc. However, it is not because on only one, but multiple reasons, where one exacerbates the other.

Another major reason for suicide is illicit love affairs. As a marriage in India is not joining of two individuals, but a joining of two families, inter caste marriages are, and have been, a major concern for families. The social regulations on couples to stay separated because of boundaries established by mere caste has been a major reason for suicide attempts.

The frequency of urban suicides is on par with those of agrarian nature, however are much less interesting to study.

Suicides committed by members of the family in order to escape from debt, to help their sons get government jobs[5], etc.

Although, the exact reason of suicide is never known, however is concluded as not multiple, but a single factor, which causes inaccuracies in the collected statistical data.

There are also false accusations on accounts of suicides, as there is, by law, upto 10 years of imprisonment for abetting or instigating suicide. This results in skewed data, and poses a problem in ensuring proper laws and reforms to help prevent suicides.

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[5] In case of factories, if a parent dies, the son inherits that job, given he is eligible

7. WATER SCARCITY INDUCED MIGRATION

7.1. Importance of Agriculture

The migration induced by water scarcity is indirectly due to lack of agriculture. Sluggish agriculture ceases reduction in poverty, and thereby development as a whole. Also, growth in agriculture also propels growth in non-farm sectors as well.

7.2. Distress Migration

People involuntarily migrate away from water scarce regions to water rich regions. This involuntary migration is known as *distress migration*. This out-migration is not temporary, and therefore, is of great concern.

There is a negative depreciation of such lands, as out-migration reduces the labour available to maintain water scarce lands, which causes them to further reduce in terms of productivity.

Also, due to huge in-migration, the migrating families only end up in slums. Due to overpopulation, the living conditions available for them are inhumane. Also, this results in overcrowding of the recipient regions, causing heavy pressure on the state.

7.3. Watershed Development

Watershed Development Projects provide a high benefit-to-cost ratio, and can be helpful in reducing the scarcity of water in water scarce regions. Not only would they reduce out-migration, but would also help in uplifting the employment in such regions.

However, these projects do have some shortcomings. First of all, the employment in these (temporary) projects is confused with sustained employment. A significant decline in out-migration is only achieved only when there is a substantial increase in the irrigation and productivity constraints of the land.

This, also, will only result in the decrease of migration, and cannot act as the solution to the problem of migration. Weather and climate induced uncertainties can only be regulated to a small extent using such projects.

7.4. Common Property Resources

Watershed projects work for only small regions. In order to cover this, Common Property Resources were used, which could successfully transfer resources to a wide audience. The problem is of encroachment and management, which could be, upto some extent, handled by some policy implications.

7.5. Policy Implications

1. Provide *limited irrigation for all*. Water should be available, for not only private lands, but also for community land, and new technologies should be used to ensure the efficient use of water.

2. Distribution of water should be stretched across large number of farms, and different sources of water should be used in conjunction.

3. There should be macro-level planning for water conservation so that there is an organised network of check dams, to avoid internal conflicts.

8. DICTIONARY

- **Fair Trade:** *Fair Trade* refers to the proper flow of cash down the hierarchical structure in an industry in the free market model, so that even the workers at the lowest of the hierarchy receive a fair share.

- **Social Reproduction:** Introduced by Karl Marx, social reproduction refers to the structure and activities which transmit social inequalities from one generation to the next.