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## **UNIT 3 SOCIAL PROBLEMS: THE INDIAN CONTEXT**

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## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the relationship between social transformation and social problems in the Indian context from a historical point of view;
- describe the linkage between the structural transformation and social problems;
- explain the relationship between social factors and social problems; and
- point out the nature of the State intervention to deal with these problems in India.

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit, we propose to discuss ‘Social Problems: The Indian Context’. There are certain unique features of the Indian Society. Indian Society, even today, maintains continuity with her remote past. The Social institutions such as *Varnashram*, Caste, joint family system and village communities emerged in the early phase of India society which are also responsible for several of the social problems in the modern period. India has been a multi-religious, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural and multi-regional society, since time immemorial. These diversities of Indian society have made significant cultural contributions and certainly they are a source of strength to the rich cultural heritage of India. But at the same time, they have often posed a number of problems to the social, cultural and political cohesiveness of Indian society.

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## 3.2 TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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We have discussed the theoretical relationship between social transformation and social problems in the Unit-1 of this course. The present unit provides an opportunity to understand this relationship with special reference to India.

In this context, we have to keep in mind the following aspects of transformation and their relationship with social problems:

- historical, and
- structural.

The historical understanding of transformation and its relationship with social problems may be divided in the following two parts:

- understanding social problems through different historical phases, i.e., ancient, medieval and modern (upto the 19<sup>th</sup> century) periods,
- social problems in the contemporary period.

### 3.2.1 Social Problems: Historical Phases

The Indian society, being part of an ancient civilisation, has passed through different historical phases. The *Vedic* period in India sowed the seeds of a

civilisation – characterised by the emergence of sophisticated philosophy, religion, astrology, science and medicine. Its institutional base centered around *Varnashram* and caste, emphasis on rituals, higher position of ritual performers over others and the sacrifice of animals. The following were the major social problems in the early phase of the Indian civilisation.

- conflict between the two major social groups, i.e., the Aryans and the *Dasas Dasyu* as mentioned in the Vedic texts.
- increasing rigidity of social hierarchy,
- emphasis on the observance of rituals,
- sacrifice of animals.

Jainism and Buddhism emerged as a protest against these practices. It is to be noted that during the Vedic and the post-Vedic periods, the social position of Women was quite high. The child marriages were not common in this period.

India's contact with Islam has passed through the phases of conflict, gradual accommodation, increasing synthesis and the revival of communal antagonism. With the advent of the Muslim rule in India, two major trends were visible in the Indian Society:

- i) The first was the trend of the growing insularity and attitude of avoidance towards others.

This strengthened the notion of the purity – pollution and practice of untouchability. The rigid restrictions on the sea - voyage were imposed on the people in this period. As a consequence, firstly, it reduced the spirit of enterprise and adventure among the Indians. Secondly, it minimised contacts of Indians with the outside world.

- ii) During the early phase of invasions and conflicts, the practice of *Sati* and the child-marriage developed as a defense mechanism among the Hindus. Only a small section of the Muslim population immigrated to India from Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and the Arab countries. The rest of them were local people who accepted Islam. Due to contacts with Hinduism and conversion, the Muslim in India were also influenced by caste-system. Thus, the social hierarchies were introduced even among the Muslims in India.

- iii) The second trend was in the form of the emulation of the customs of the Muslim rulers by the elite and section of the upper caste Hindus. This encouraged the adoption of the practice of *Pardah* (veil to cover the face) by the upper caste women in north India.

In the medieval period, the *Bhakti* movement, reassert the humanist elements of the Indian civilisation by preaching equality, speaking against rituals, the caste rigidity and untouchability. The practices of untouchability, child marriage, *sati*, infanticide, organised *thagi* (cheating) increased in the Indian Society particularly during the declining phase of the Mughal empire. Even the religious beliefs encouraged the addiction of tobacco, hashish and opium.

By the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the colonial administration in India was fully established. After 1820, it adopted a reformist zeal. There were several

social reform programmes to eradicate the practices of *Sati* and the *Thagi* – widely prevalent during this period.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the questions related to the social problems of *sati*, remarriage of widows, spread of modern education, evils of child marriage and of untouchability were raised by social reformers.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were four major reform movements:

- Brahmosamaj–led by Raja Rammohan Roy,
- Aryasamaj–led by Swami Dayanand Sarawati,
- Prarthana Samaj–led by Mahadeva Govind Ranade,
- Ramakrishna Mission–inspired by Ramkrishna Paramhansa and led by Swami Vivekanand.

These reform movements opposed the practice of untouchability, *Sati*, infanticide and propagated in favour of the remarriage of widows and the modern education. Due to the tireless efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy, the practice of *Sati* was legally abolished in 1829. The *Arya Samaj* contributed significantly in weakening the caste-rigidity and reducing the practice of untouchability in the Punjab, Haryana and the Western Uttar Pradesh. The activities of the *Prarthana Samaj* were mainly confined to the Bombay Presidency. The Ram Krishna Mission contributed significantly in the field of educations and health services..

### 3.2.2 Social Problems: Contemporary Phase

In contemporary India, there are several social problems. Though, they are called as social problems, yet, in some problems socio-cultural overtones are more prominent, whereas, in some others, the economic and legal overtones are conspicuous. Thus, the contemporary social problems may be classified in the following categories:

- i) socio-cultural problems: communalism, untouchability, population explosion, child-abuse, problems of the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, the backward classes, women, alcoholism and drug addiction,
- ii) economic problems: poverty, unemployment, black money;
- iii) Legal problems: crime, delinquency, violence, terrorism.

These classifications are only the purpose of narration. They are closely interrelated with each other. Poverty is an economic as well as a social problem. Similarly, communalism is closely linked with economic factors. The crime and delinquency are having legal overtones but they are closely related to the social and economic factors.

As there were organised social movements against social problems in the previous phases of the Indian society, similarly, concerted social and political movements were launched in the contemporary period against communalism, casteism, untouchability, illiteracy, alcoholism and drug addiction. Gandhi–as the leader of the national movement after 1919, devoted a considerable part of his action-programme for the uplift of *Harijans*, *Adivasis* and Women. He

tried to reorganise education and village industries. He fought relentlessly against communalism, untouchability and alcoholism.

In the contemporary period, there are organised movements of women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backwards castes and labour to protect their interests. There are voluntary organisations working against ecological degradation, drug addiction and child abuse in India.

### 3.2.3 Structural Transformation and Social Problems

Several attempts have been made to understand Indian social problems in terms of structural transformation. In the Indian context, the following three patterns of transformation are visible:

- Sanskritisation,
- Westernisation,
- Modernisation.

*Sanskritisation* is a process through which lower castes achieved upward social mobility either by adventure or by emulating the customs and rituals of the upper castes. It is a cultural process but changes in social status and occupations as a consequence of the upward mobility brought about by sanskritisation makes it also a structural process.

The contact with the West, particularly with England, set in motion another process of transformation in India known as Westernisation. It is characterised by Western patterns of administration, legal system and education through the medium of the English language. Under the impact of the Western way of life, a sizeable section of educated and urbanised Indian adopted Western style of dress, food, drink, speech and manners. The emulation of the West inculcated the values of Western democracy, industrialisation and capitalism. There are cultural as well as structural aspects of Westernisation. It brought about structural changes by the growth of modern occupations related with modern education, economy and industry, emergence of urban centres with the introduction of colonial administration and the rise of urban middle class under the impact of education, administration, judiciary and press. As explained earlier, modernisation and westernisation are closely related in the Indian context. The major components of modernisation such as education, political participation, urbanisation, migration, mobility, money, market, modern technology, communication-network and industrialisation were introduced by the colonial administration. They received an impetus in the post-independence period. The independent India adopted a modern constitution, founded a secular democratic state and followed the policy of planned socio-economic development, democratic decentralisation and the policy of protective discrimination for the weaker sections.

The real question is how these patterns of structural transformation have generated social problems in India? In spite of several contradictions existing in Indian society, revolution, as defined by Marxists and as explained in Unit 1, did not take place in India. The processes of transformation—represented by sanskritisation, westernisation and modernisation have been, by and large, smooth and gradual in the Indian context.

### 3.2.4 Structural Breakdown and Inconsistencies

The following two concepts may help us in understanding the relationship between structural transformation and social problems:

- structural breakdown, and
- structural inconsistencies.

The concept of the 'structural breakdown' has been used by Talcott Parsons to mean the systemic rigidity which tries to resist or retard social transformation and thus leads to the breakdown of the system or the social disorganisation. In the Third World Countries, there is a growing urge for modernisation in the post-independence period. These countries borrowed parliamentary democracy, adult franchise, modern constitution without the supporting structural base of economy, industrialisation, modern technology, literacy and normative base of rationality, civic culture and secular values. As a result, in several of the ex-colonial societies – democracy could not function successfully. The ethnic, communal, tribal, caste and regional aspirations have become so strong that they are eroding even the basic structures of democracy, modern state and civic society. This is so obvious in the case of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and in many countries of Africa. The impact of social transformation on the Indian society is visible in the following manner.

- on the one hand, three patterns of transformation as mentioned earlier, has created new problems of adjustment,
- on the other hand, occasionally, the process of social transformation has been resisted. In this context, we may cite the examples of the resistance of the urge of the upward social mobility of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, denial of the rightful claims of women, and obstructing land reforms by hook or crook.

In the Indian context, structural inconsistencies are also visible. They are symptoms as well as the cause of social disorganisation and social problems. By structural inconsistencies is meant the existence of two opposite sub-structures within the same structure which are not consistent with each other. In India, on the one hand, there are highly sophisticated modern metropolitan upper and upper middle classes influenced by consumerism. On the other hand, there is a large number of the Indian people who live in inaccessible tribal and rural areas and who might have not seen even a train. A small section of the Indian society belongs to the jet age, whereas, a large Indian population even today depend on the bullock-cart. This situation is the clear indicator of the gap between the rich and the poor, the rural and the urban creating a gulf between the different groups and strata. These structural inconsistencies are the indicators of poverty, inequality, inaccessibility and deprivation existing in Indian society.

### 3.2.5 The Soft State

Gunnar Myrdal in his book '*Asian Drama*' discusses the problems posed by modernisation in several Asian countries – including India. He feels that strong states, effective governments with their capacity to take hard decisions and strict enforcement of the rule of law are the major features of modern European

society but in South Asian countries in general and in India in particular, an approach is being followed by the ruling elite in the post-independence period which has been termed as the policy of ‘soft-state’ by Myrdal. The democratisation of polity has further strengthened this policy. It has weakened the capacity of state in enforcing the rule of law. As a result, there is an increasing rate of crime, violence, terrorism, violation of law, corruption in the public life and the criminalisation of politics.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Describe the major social problems in the following historical phases in India.
  - a) ancient  
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  - b) medieval  
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  - c) modern  
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  - d) contemporary  
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- ii) Name the four major reform movements of the 19th century.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
  - c) .....
  - d) .....
- iii) Mention three major forms of transformations in India.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
  - c) .....

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### **3.3 SOCIAL FACTORS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

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Social problem is a situation that objectively exists in particular society and is subjectively accepted as undesirable by that society. Social problem therefore, is relative to society or has a social context. Hence, study of social problems requires understanding of their social contexts.

The social context may be discussed in a historical or structural perspective. Earlier, we have explained how in various historical phases in India, the different

types of social problems emerged. Now, let us try to understand the major social factors which are associated with various problems.

### 3.3.1 Major Social Factors

Study of Indian social problems – their emergence and persistence in Indian society – requires understanding of the Indian social situation in which the problems exist. One has to analyse the social factors that are relevant to the understanding of social problems in India. Some of the major factors that constitute the social context in India, as far as social problems are concerned, are as follows:

- heterogeneity of Indian population,
- cultural elements,
- economy, poverty and education,
- state and polity,
- urbanisation and industrialisation.

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## 3.4 HETEROGENEITY OF INDIAN POPULATION

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India is a heterogeneous society – where there are several religions, castes, linguistic and tribal groups. The heterogeneous nature of the Indian population has been the cause of a number of social problems in India.

### 3.4.1 Religion

The multi-religious nature of society and conflict among the different religions has given rise to the problem of communalism in India. The phenomenon of communalism, as a vitiated form of inter-religious group relationship, particularly between Hindus and Muslims is a grave problem in India. It has its historical linkage with the Muslim invasions in India, early conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, British rule and policy of encouraging communal-divide, competition for political power, service and resources.

Gradually, the problem of communalism has affected the Hindu-Sikh relationship also. There is a sizeable group of Sikhs in India. They are concentrated in a relatively developed region (Punjab) of the country. Their existence as a powerful community in the region and as a minority in the larger nation is to be taken into consideration in understanding the emergence of communal politics followed by terrorism in Punjab. In this context it must be noted that by and large both Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab have shown a great deal of understanding and amity even in the midst of terrorism. The Indian concept of secularism accepts all religions as equal and does not discriminate one religion against another. As indicated by Myrdal, the policy of a ‘soft state’ and not taking hard decisions against communal organisations has also aggravated problems of communalism in India. The considerations of electoral gains by using religions have also contributed in the growth of communalism in the post-independent period of India.



### 3.4.2 Caste

Another element of Indian social structure is the caste system. The Caste system has been divided Indian population into numerous groups that enter into relationships of various types and degrees among them. It has been the root cause of various social problems in India. The Casteism as a problem refers to both the discrimination of one caste against another and the particularistic tendency of favouring one's caste group in violation of the principle of universalism. The practice of mobilisation on the basis of caste and favour or disfavour shown in education and employment on caste considerations are the major features of casteism. One may justify caste criterion for welfare programmes in favour of the weaker sections in India social situation. At the same time, such welfare measures have generated tensions and conflicts that exhibit casteist tendencies.

The caste system has had its adverse impact on education in India. Traditionally, caste determined the eligibility of the people for education. In the traditional system, education was considered to be the prerogative of the upper castes. Steeped in this tradition of reserving pursuit of knowledge to the upper castes, the masses did not receive education. This is one of the reasons for the problem of widespread illiteracy in India.

### 3.4.3 Language

Another aspect of Indian society is that of the existence of several languages which often leads to conflicts between the different linguistic groups. India has recognised the socio-political reality of language by reorganising the states on the basis of language which has encouraged the assertion of linguistic identities. It may also be noted that as a nation, India has not been able to have a national language that is acceptable to all and that effectively serves as the link language. For historical reasons, English continues to be the link language for the purpose of higher education, administration and diplomacy. In this context, there is a two-fold relationship:

- at the national level, there is the question of the relationship between English and Hindi.
- at the State level, there is the question of the relationship between English, Hindi and the regional languages.

The situation arising out of this peculiar linguistic configuration has created the problems of linguistic minorities in several states, border dispute between states, and the question of the medium of instruction in educational institutions. All these issues have repercussions on national integration. They have generated tensions and conflicts.

### 3.4.4 Tribes

India is a country with large population of tribals. Tribals in India are not a homogeneous group. They differ in terms of their ways of life, exposure to the outside world and adoption of the programmes of welfare and development. The tribals have been isolated from the mainstream of the Indian society for several years which accounted for their backwardness. In addition, they have

been subjected to various types of exploitation by the non-tribals with whom they have come into contact. While the non-tribals exploited the tribals for economic gains, the tribals are facing the phenomenon of detribalisation which refers to the loss or degeneration of the tribal culture and way of life. In this context, the main problems of Indian tribes are backwardness, exploitation, detribalisation, ethnic tensions, various kinds of tribal movements and tribal insurgency in certain parts of India.

### **3.4.5 Minorities**

The heterogeneity of the Indian population has given rise to the problem of minorities in India. The major minority groups that have been identified in India are religious and linguistic. While religious minorities can be considered to exist at the national level, linguistic minorities have their relevance at the state level. Apart from religious and linguistic minority, caste and tribal groups may assume the status of minorities group in the context of inter-group relationships in particular situations.

### **3.4.6 Population Explosion**

Another social factor that has implications of social problems in India is the phenomenon of population explosion. The population in India has been growing phenomenally during this century. Development and welfare programmes for the masses have not been able to catch up with the increasing population. Consequently, the benefits of the developmental programmes gained by the masses whose number is ever increasing, have been far below the expectation.

With the increase in population, the problems of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy has been accentuated in India. In absolute terms the number of people who are affected by these problems have been increasing. The sheer size of the population is also a factor that affects the increasing ethnic problem of various kinds. The larger the size of the caste or the tribe, the greater is the tendency to assert their parochial or ethnic identities at the cost of national integration.

In the population of India, there is a considerable number of the physically handicapped also. They are dependent on society at large for their survival. The country does not have enough institutions to take care of the various needs of the physically handicapped. Many of them turn to streets as beggars which is another social problem.

The increasing population of India is making increasing demands on the resources of the land, capital and forest. With the growing population, the hunger for land in both rural and urban areas is increasing. With the growing burden on the national finance, the welfare programmes and social services like education, health, employment, rural development, welfare of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backward castes, youth and women etc. are adversely affected. The needs of fuel, timbers and the hunger of land for cultivation and habitation are steadily depleting the forest resources. The increasing denudation of the forest areas is creating various kinds of environmental problems in the country. The adverse consequences of the ecological imbalance created by deforestation are visible in the changing pattern of rains, increasing soil erosion, floods, scarcity of fodder for animals and firewood for poor people.

<b>Box 3.01. Socio-demographic Profile of States in India</b>							
State/UT	Persons	Growth rate	Sex ratio	Density	Literacy Rate		
					1991-01	T	M
India	1,027,015,247	21.34	933	324	65.37	75.85	54.16
J & K	10,069,917	29.04	900	99	54.46	65.75	41.82
Himachal	6,007,248	17.53	970	103	77.13	86.02	68.8
Punjab	24,289,296	19.76	874	482	69.95	75.63	63.55
Chandigarh	900,914	40.33	773	7903	81.76	85.65	76.65
Uttarachal	8,479,562	19.20	964	159	72.28	84.01	60.26
Haryana	21,082,989	28.06	861	477	68.59	79.25	56.31
Delhi	13,782,957	46.31	821	9294	81.82	87.37	75.0
Rajasthan	56,473,112	28.33	922	165	61.03	76.46	44.34
Uttar Pradesh	166,052,859	25.80	898	389	57.36	70.23	42.9
Bihar	82,878,796	28.43	921	880	47.53	60.32	33.6
Sikkim	540,493	32.98	875	76	69.68	76.73	61.49
Arunachal	1,091,117	26.21	901	13	54.74	64.07	44.24
Nagaland	1,988,636	64.41	909	120	67.11	71.77	61.92
Manipur	2,388,634	30.02	978	107	68.87	77.87	59.7
Mizoram	981,058	29.18	938	42	88.49	90.6	86.0
Meghyalaya	2,306,069	29.94	975	103	63.31	66.14	60.41
Assam	26,638,407	18.85	932	340	64.28	71.9	56.30
West Bengal	80,221,171	17.84	934	904	69.22	77.58	60.22
Jharkhand	26,909,428	23.19	941	338	54.13	67.9	39.4
Orissa	36,706,920	15.94	972	236	63.61	76.0	51.0
Chhatisgarh	20,795,956	18.06	990	154	65.2	77.8	52.4
Madhya Pradesh	60,385,118	24.34	620	158	64.09	76.7	50.3
Gujrat	50,596,992	22.48	921	258	69.97	80.50	58.60
Daman & Diu	158,059	55.59	709	1411	81.1	88.4	70.4
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	220,451	59.20	811	449	60.3	76.3	43.0
Maharastra	96,752,247	22.57	922	314	77.27	86.27	67.5
Andhra Pradesh	75,727,541	13.86	978	275	61.11	70.85	51.17
Karnataka	52,733,958	17.25	964	275	67.04	76.3	57.49
Goa	1,343,998	14.89	960	363	82.32	88.9	75.5
Lakshadweep	60,595	17.19	947	1894	87.52	93.1	81.5
Kerala	31,838,619	9.42	1058	819	91.0	94.2	87.8
Tamil Nadu	62,110,839	11.19	986	478	73.5	82.3	64.5
Pondicherry	973,829	20.56	1001	2029	81.5	89.0	74.0
A&N Islands	356,265	26.94	846	43	81.2	86.0	75.3
Tripura	3,191,168	15.74	950	304	73.66	81.47	65.4
Source: <i>Census of India 2001</i>							

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Write in four lines on religion and politics.  
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- ii) Describe the relationship between caste and education in four lines.  
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- iii) Discuss the problem of language at the Centre and the State levels in four lines.  
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- iv) Mention problems of (a) tribes, and (b) minorities in three lines each.
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  - b) .....  
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- v) Mention five major consequences of population pressure.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
  - c) .....
  - d) .....
  - e) .....

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**3.5 CULTURAL ELEMENTS**

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There are certain cultural elements that have had their own contribution to the persistence of the certain social problems in India. The following cultural traits can be particularly identified in this context.

- Fatalism,

- Particularism,
- Lack of regard for public property,
- Patriarchal system.

### **3.5.1 Fatalism**

A cultural element that has been relevant to social problems in India is fatalism. The Hindu doctrines of “karma” and rebirth contain strong elements of fatalistic attitude to life—an attitude of acceptance of and resignation to the vicissitudes and failures in life. It has proved to be a one of the mechanisms for checking the resistance of the masses against of injustice and exploitation. Social practices such as untouchability, discrimination, bonded labour persisted in India for a long time almost unchallenged by those affected by them. It happened so because the affected people considered these practices as the result of their ‘Karma’ (action) of the previous birth and luck. The welfare and developmental programmes themselves get a setback on account of the apathy and indifference of the masses who are under the spell of religious fatalism.

### **3.5.2 Particularism**

Another cultural trait widespread in Indian society is particularism as against universalism. This reflected in the excessive consideration for one’s own people, kingroup, caste or religion. Often universalistic standards are set aside in one’s decisions and actions. Corruption – involving favouritism or discrimination that is prevalent in our society is the result of such disregard for the norms of universalism. Some of the intergroup conflicts on the basis of caste, tribe, religion, language or region can also be attributed to the mobilisation based on sectional identities and particularism.

### **3.5.3 Attitude of Public Property**

Another trait of the Indian society that has implications for corruption is the disregard for public property and money. There is a belief that Indians have inherited it as a legacy of the colonial rule. Unfortunately, this attitude seems to have continued to exist in India even after independence. This lack of respect for public property is one of the root causes of corruption, black money, tax-evasion, misappropriation of public goods and use of substandard material in public constructions.

### **3.5.4 Patriarchal System**

As elsewhere in the world, the Indian society, by and large, has been patriarchal where woman is subjected to man. The role of woman in the Indian society has been conceived as that of wife and mother. The woman in India possesses a inferior social status to that of man.

The problem is further accentuated by the cultural need to have male offspring for perpetuating the family performing the rituals after one’s death. It has contributed to the cultural preference for a male child and imposition of inferior status to the female. This had led to the subjugation of women and discrimination against them in various spheres of social life. The problems such as dowry, ill-treatment of the daughter-in-law, wife-beating , illiteracy,

occupational discrimination, social isolation, and psychological dependence, etc. faced by women have roots in this cultural preference for the male.

### 3.6 ECONOMY, POVERTY, EDUCATION

Economically, India remains predominantly an agricultural society. Naturally, there is an excessive dependence of labour force on agriculture. This over-dependence of the labour force on the underdeveloped agriculture is the major cause of many of the social problems in India. It directly leads to poverty which is one of the basic causes of many other social problems in India. The malnutrition, ill-health, beggary, prostitution, etc. are rooted in the large-scale poverty in India.

Indian society is characterised by the unequal distribution of wealth. One observes affluence amidst pervasive poverty in both the rural and urban area of India. On account of this disparity, benefits of development and welfare services also accrue unequally to the different sections of the society. The benefits that the poor gain are comparatively low. Consequently, the lot of the poor and the backward sections of the society has not improved as expected. There is a close linkage between economy, poverty and education. The illiteracy and education. The unplanned growth of higher education has created the problem of educated unemployment.

#### Some Aspects of Human Development in India

India is one of those countries who occupies a low rank in the Human Development Index. Some aspects of the Human Development Index (2000 view) of India is given below:

Box 3.02 Human Development Index			
1.	Life expectancy	63.3 yrs	2. Adult Literacy rate (15 years and above) 57.2%
3.	Combined enrolment ratio	55%	4. % of Population not using improved drinking water sources 12%
5.	Underweight children under age 5	47%	6. % of people living below National Poverty Line 35.0%
7.	Annual Population growth rate	1.9%	8. % of urban population 27.7%
9.	Population not using adequate sanitation facilities	69%	10. Children underweight for age [under 5 years] 47%
11	People Living with HIV/AIDS (2001)	0.79%	

Source: UNDP, 2003

#### 3.6.1 Child Labour

Child labour, a manifestation of poverty in the country has become a social problem in India. A large number of families belonging to the poor section of the society are forced to depend upon their children's contribution to the family income. They are not in a position to spare their children for full-time or even part-time schooling. Thus children who are expected to be in schools are found working as labourers.

Apart from the economic constraints of the families of the working children, the owners of some of the small-scale enterprises also prefer to employ child labour. For them, child labour is cheap. It reduces the cost of production and maximise their profit. Thus, child labour gets encouragement from both - the parents of the children and the owners of the enterprise. Therefore, despite the appalling conditions under which children work and the low wages they earn, child labour thrives in India.

**Activity 1**

Please prepare a report of two pages based on the monthly income and its sources of ten families living in your locality.

**3.6.2 Illiteracy and Education**

Widespread poverty has its own repercussions on education in India. The problem of mass-illiteracy in the country is largely by the result of the situation of poverty under which the masses live. The poor are so preoccupied with the concern for their survival that they do not have the inclination or time for education. It is ridiculous to convince a poor man about the value of education when he is struggling to make both ends meet. Most of the people belonging to the poor section are not inclined for schooling of their children. Many of those who enroll their children in schools withdraw them before they acquire any meaningful standard of literacy. The result is that India is faced with the problem of mass-illiteracy. Nearly 50 per cent of the country’s population capable of acquiring literacy skills are still illiterate.

**3.6.3 Educational System**

The educational system affects the society at large in various ways. Education at the higher level in India has expanded indiscriminately in response to social demands and political pressures. Some of the major features of the educational system in India are as follows:

- widespread illiteracy,
- unachieved targets of the universalisation of education,
- lack of proper emphasis on the primary education,
- misplaced emphasis on higher education which is, by and large, poor in quality excepting institutes of technology, management, medicine and few colleges and universities in the metropolitan centres.

Consequently, there has been no attempt to see that the educational system at the higher level produced the manpower in quality and quantity that the economic system of the country could absorb. The net result of this unplanned expansion has been increased in the educated unemployment and underemployment. Here it is obviously the situation of the producing manpower in excess of the demand of the economic system or mismatch between educational and economy.

There is another kind of mismatch between education and economy in India. It is the situation wherein some of the highly qualified manpower produced by some of the educational institutions in India do not find the placement in the country rewarding enough. The result is the brain drain in which India loses what cream of its highly qualified manpower produced at a very heavy cost of public resources.

### 3.6.4 Industrialisation and Urbanisation

The process of industrialisation and urbanisation has been slow in India. Industrialisation has been concentrated in certain pockets in the country. The result is the inordinate growth of population in a few urban centres. This overgrowth of population in a few urban centres has created various problems of – urban poverty, unemployment, congestion, pollution, slum, etc.

Rural poverty and unemployment have had their own contribution to the urban problem in so far as people migrated from the rural areas to the urban centres in numbers larger than the urban areas can absorb. As a large section of the rural migrants are illiterate and unskilled, they are unable to adjust themselves into the urban economic situation and thereby suffer from unemployment and poverty. Many of them resort to begging and some of these helpless people belonging to the female sex are forced to adopt prostitution for their living. Thus, while urbanisation and industrialisation are processes of development, they have their own adverse by-products in India in the form of various social problems.

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## 3.7 STATE AND POLITY

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The intervention of the State has been very significant either in the checking or in finding solution to the social problems in India. In the early colonial period, several steps were taken by the State to abolish the practice of *Sati* (1829) and to control *thagi*. In the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century steps were taken to provide legal opportunities for inter-community and inter-caste marriage. In 1929, the *Sarada Act* was passed to check child marriages. In the post-independence period, India resolved to constitute a democratic, sovereign, secular and socialist society. In the constitution, special provisions were made to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward classes, women and children.

The practice of untouchability was declared as an offence. Some special measures—such as the *Hindu Marriage Act and Succession Act* were adopted to reform the Hindu Society in general and the Hindu marriage system in particular. The welfare programmes have been launched for the uplift of youth, children, and physically handicapped. The Five Year Plans were launched for the socio-economic transformation of Indian Society. After 1970, special attention was paid towards the removal of poverty, rural development and generation of employment in the rural areas.

The impact of these programmes is visible on the socio-economic life of India. Despite considerable achievements, India is still beset with so many problems such as poverty, unemployment and sub-standard life conditions for a large section of Indian society. The turn taken by Indian polity and electoral process during the post-independence period is also responsible for several of our social problems.

### 3.7.1 Electoral Process

Politically, India has a multi-party parliamentary form of democracy. Ideally, political parties are to be organised on universalistic ideologies and the citizens are expected to choose their representatives on universalistic principles. In fact, particularistic tendencies play an important role in the electoral process of the country. One can find political parties formed on communal or parochial lines and political mobilisation undertaken by political parties and individuals on the basis of caste, religion, language and region. The political activities of



this sort are negation of the healthy democratic polity. They are also leading to sectional conflicts, atrocities against weaker sections, linguistic and religious minorities. Thus, the political functioning and the electoral process, as they exist today, are fomenting problems of communalism, casteism and conflicts between the different sections of society.

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### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, first of all the relationship between social transformation and social problems has been discussed. The process of transformation has been explained in terms of historical as well as structural aspects in the Indian context. It has been followed by examining the relationship between social factors and social problems, cultural elements and social problems, economy, polity and social problems. Finally, we have discussed the role of the State in dealing with these problems, and the problems being generated by the actual functioning of the Indian polity.

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### 3.9 KEY WORDS

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- Structural Breakdown** : This concept was used by Talcott Parsons to mean the system of rigidity which tries to resist or retard social transformation and thus leads to breakdown of the social structure. The steps taken by the people against systematic rigidity in the form of collective mobilisation has been called by Marxists as revolution.
- Structural Inconsistencies** : This concept indicates the existence of two opposite sub-structures within the same structure which are not consistent with each other.
- Soft-State** : This concept has been used by Gunnar Myrdal in his book ‘The Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations’. By this concept he means the functioning of newly Independent Asian States which find difficulties in taking hard decisions to enforce the rule of law.

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### 3.10 FURTHER READINGS

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Ahuja Ram, 1992. *Social Problems in India*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.  
Singh, Yogendra, 1988. *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*, Reprint, Rawat Publication, Jaipur.

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### 3.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Caste distinctions, overemphasis on rituals over knowledge, rigid hierarchy, higher position of ritual performers, sacrifice of animals.
- b) Attitudes of avoidance, superstition, increased notion of purity and pollution, untouchability, child marriage, lower position of women, strict observance of widowhood.
- c) *Sati*, Widowhood, Child marriage, illiteracy, untouchability, *thagi*, superstitions.

- d) Communalism, untouchability, population explosion, problems of weaker section alcoholism, drug addiction poverty, unemployment, black money, crime, delinquency and violence.
- 2) Arya Samaj, Brahmasamaj, Prarthan Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission.
- 3) Sanskritisation,  
Westernisation,  
Modernisation

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The Indian Society is multi-religious in nature, During the colonial period, the relationship between different religious communities particularly between Hindus and Muslims was politicised. It encouraged a tendency known as communalism which has been strengthened by mutual suspicious ideologies, competition for power, service and resources.
- 2) The education in the traditional Indian system was primarily confined to the upper castes. It has its adverse impact on the spread of mass education. This is one of the reasons for the widespread illiteracy in India.
- 3) English continues to be the link language in India for the purpose of higher education, administration and diplomacy. At the level of the centre, there is the question of the relationship between English and Hindi for the purpose of the medium of instructions and administration and at the State level between English, Hindi and the regional languages.
- 4) a) There are several tribes in India and they comprise around seven per cent of India's population. They are not homogeneous in their customs. They are isolated and exploited and facing the problem of detribalisation.  
b) There are religious and linguistic minorities in India. Sometimes, castes and tribes may also be considered as minorities within specific areas.
- 5) a) Adverse effects on development and welfare programmes,  
b) Poverty,  
c) Illiteracy,  
d) Increased pressures on land, capital, forest and other resources.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) a) Excessive consideration for one's own kin group, caste, tribe or religion,  
b) corruption-involving favouritism,  
c) discrimination,  
d) inter-group conflicts
- 2) This lack of respect for public property is one of the root-causes of corruption, black money, tax-evasion, misappropriation of fund and use of sub-standard materials in public constructions.
- 3) There is a close linkage between economy, poverty and education. The illiteracy in India is directly linked with poverty. There is a mis-match between economy and education in the Indian context.
- 4) In fact, particularistic tendencies play an important role in the electoral process of the country. Several political parties have been formed on communal and parochial lines. At the time elections, castes, religion, language and region play significant roles. This type of mobilisation is also responsible for many socio-economic problems in India.

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