UNIT 15 : SOCIAL ISSUES

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the various social issues that exist within the society,
- explain communalism, regionalism, ethnicity and multiculturalism,
- discuss different measures to mitigate the social issues.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Social issues refer to any undesirable condition that is opposed either by the whole society or by a section of the society. It is an unwanted social condition, often objectionable, the continuance of which is harmful to the society. India is known not only for its big size of population but also for the multiplicity of social problems with which it is confronted. Problems which continue to grow have economic origin, some have social origin, while many more have multiple sources. There is no doubt that these problems are hurdles on the path of India's march towards progress. It is necessary that these problems be tackled and effectively dealt with.

The scientific study of social problems is an essential aspect of the role of sociologists where they are required to analyse these problems scientifically, find out the causes of them and finally suggest and recommend measures to combat or control them. In the previous unit we have already read about some of the major social problems of Indian Society. This unit will be discussing several social issues that exist in the society like communalism, regionalism, ethnicity and multiculturalism.

15.3 COMMUNALISM: MEANING AND CAUSES

Communalism has become one of the biggest menaces of modern India. Problems that arise in the socio-religious relations of the people who belong to various minority communities on the one hand and the majority community on the other can be referred to as "communalism". Communalism and communal riots normally arise when religious matters are politicised. Communalism is often understood as an ideology which states that the society is divided into religious communities whose interests differ and are, at times, even opposed to each other. It is a kind of antagonism found between the religious communities.

According to Ram Ahuja, "The antagonism practised by the members of one community against the people of other community and religion can be termed as communalism."

According to Robert Melson and Howard Wolpe, "Communalism is the political assertiveness of a community to maintain its identity in a plural society undergoing modernization."

"Communalism that gives rise to antagonism, goes to the extent of falsely accusing, harming, and deliberately insulting a particular community and extends to looting, burning down the homes and shops of the helpless and the weak, dishonouring women and even killing persons"-Ram Ahuja.

Causes for the growth of Communalism

The main factors and forces which have encouraged the growth of communalism in India can be mentioned as follows :

- The "divide and rule" policy which the British had followed caused a lot of damage to our national interest creating a rift between the Hindus and the Muslims.
- Resistance to the idea of assimilation found among the Muslims.
- Role of foreign forces which have been instigating communal activities and communal riots in India. These forces play a role in giving training to the communal extremists and in supplying sophisticated technical equipments for fanning the fire of communalism.
- The growing disappointment among the Hindus who constitute the majority community is also a factor in favour of communalism. The Hindus believe themselves to be the 'aethertic' citizens of the country and that due to the "vote bank politics" of the minority community the larger national interest is sacrificed.
- Ruining of the real meaning of secularism by the political parties is also a factor encouraging communalism. Political parties which speak of secularism pay only sympathy to it through words but in practice they support communalism.
- The aggressive Hindu chauvinism also promots the feeling of communalism.
- The economic and educational backwardness found among the people also contribute to the growth of communalism
- The elections which force the political parties and organisations to make communal appeal to the voters and to keep alive the communal feelings.
- The presence of some communal organisations and outfits, and some fundamentalist religious and linguistic groups has been another factor which has fuelled the communal fire which from time to time keeps on burning in several Indian cities.
- Mass poverty, unemployment, scarcity of essential commodities like food, clothing and shelter, ever-increasing population, regional imbalances, economic backwardness, economic inequalities, illiteracy, ignorance and corruption have also contributed to the growth of communalism. The unemployed youth is easily drawn by religious preachers towards religious fundamentalism.

Remedial Measures :

Communalism has impeded the process of development and also hurt the scientific temper and the secular spirit. It has become a threat to the progress of the nation and therefore steps have to be taken to mitigate the problem from its root.

- Efforts have to be taken to promote economic development so that poverty, a driving force behind communalism, can be cradicated.
- The feeling of communalism exists in the mind, and it gets transferred to the child at the time of socialisation. Thus, proper socialisation is necessary for reducing communal hatred. This can be achieved through right education. Parents should teach their children about common living and common sharing rather than creating differences
- Proper use of mass media, both print and electronic should be made to spread the message of religious tolerance, secularism, and common brotherhood.
- Electoral campaigning on communal lines should be stopped. Organisations and political parties creating communal feelings should be banned.
- Religious tolerance should be encouraged by celebrating festivals of all religions and by respecting the religious beliefs of each community. Such a step will cultivate a sense of respect for others' religion and cut down acts of hatred and killing.
- In order to prevent anti – social elements who engage themselves in communal riots, the Committee on National Integration has recommended the formation of peace and brotherhood committees at local levels to ensure healthy atmosphere.
- Various schemes like N.C.C., N.S.S., Girls Guide, Scout, youth leadership and training programmes should be promoted. Educational tours and exchange programmes should also be used for creating healthy temperament among the youth.
- A preventive check should be put on foreign intervention so that national unity is not hampered.

- Riot-prone areas should be paid special attention by deploying trained anti-riot police force.
- It is necessary to see that importance is given to the development of communal harmony at all levels of education. The young minds should not be polluted with narrow communal ideas.

15.4 REGIONALISM: MEANING AND CAUSES

India is a large country having scores of regional languages, various strains of culture and different loyalties, single as well as multiple. It is a country which is multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual in nature. Regionalism cannot be regarded as unhealthy or anti-national phenomenon-until it takes a militant, aggressive turn which encourages the rise of seperatist tendencies. National Unity is not harmed if people of a region take pride in their language and culture. But regionalism turns to out be a serious threat to national unity when political leaders go beyond their regional unity and make demands that serve only their harrow regional interests.Regionalism plays an important role within the nation as well as outside it. It refers to an ideology and political movement that seeks to advance the interests of regions. Both types of regionalism have different meaning and have positive as well as negative impacts on society, polity, diplomacy, economy, security, culture, development, negotiations, etc.

At the international level, regionalism refers to transnational cooperation between a group of countries linked by geography, history or economic features. To meet a common goal or to resolve a shared problem, In this sense, regionalism refers to attempts to reinforce the links between these countries' economic features.

Regionalism at national level refers to a process where power passes from central to regional governments and where sub-state actors become increasingly powerful. These are the regions within the country, distinguished in culture, language and other socio-cultural factors.

Marshall E. Dimock considers regionalism "as a clustering of environmental, economic, social and governmental factors to such an extent

that a distinct consciousness of separate identity within the whole, a need for autonomous planning, a manifestation of cultural peculiarities and a desire for administrative freedom, are theoretically recognized and actually put into effect. Regionalism is something which remains to be realized and further developed, as well as a phenomenon which has already appeared and taken form. In one sense, and perhaps the best one, regionalism is a way of life, it is a self-conscious process."

According to W.P. Scott. "Regionalism is an approach to study the behaviour that emphasizes the geographical region as the unit of analysis, stressing the relationship between man and his immediate physical environment. Economic social and cultural organisations are analyzed in terms of their interrelationships and functions within the geographic region."

- **Causes of Regionalism**

Some of the most important causes of regionalism in India are as follows: (i) Geographical Factors (ii) Historical and Cultural Factors (iii) Caste and Region (iv) Economic Factors (v) Political-Administrative Factors.

- **Geographical Factors :**

Because of the linguistic distribution along geographical boundaries, the inhabitants of a particular region relate to the territorial orientation based on geographical boundaries. The topographic and climatic variations along with differences in the settlement pattern induce in the people the concept of regionalism.

- **Historical and Cultural Factors :**

The historical and cultural component, which is an important component of regionalism, interprets regionalism by way of cultural heritage, folklore, myths, symbolism and historical traditions. People of a particular cultural group derive inspiration from the noble deeds and glorious achievements of the local heroes. Yet, there are certain political and economic realities which can be covered under the spectrum of historical and cultural factors.

- **Caste and Religion :**

Caste system and religion in Indian society also plays an important role in causing regionalism.When like-minded people or people with similar

interests, tastes and thoughts come together, a bond of we-feeling gets generated. When such unity gets threatened, it may result in regionalism and separation from the larger community.

- **Economic Factors :**

In the present times, irregular developments in different parts of the country may be considered as the prime reason for regionalism and separatism. There are certain regions in the country which are rich in industries and factories; educational and health facilities are sufficiently provided, communication network has been developed; and rapid agricultural development has been made possible. But there are also certain areas where the worth of independence is yet to be realized in terms of socio-economic development.

Of course, the British administration may be held responsible for causing such wide regional variations due to their suitability for the purpose of administration, trade and commerce. But in the post-Independence era, efforts should have been made for regional balance in matters of industrial, agricultural and above all, economic development. This disparity has caused the feeling of relative deprivation among the inhabitants of economically neglected regions. It has manifested itself in the demand for separate states such as Telangana, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand.

- **Political-Administrative Factors :**

Political parties, especially the regional political parties as well as local leaders exploit the regional sentiments, regional deprivation and convert them to strengthen their conflicting support bases. They give place to the regional problems in their election manifesto and promise for political and regional development.

In the present day Indian political scenario some regional parties have strongly emerged and captured power in some states like Tamil Nadu (ADMK,AIADMK), Andhra Pradesh(Telegu Desam), Assam(Assam Gana Parishad). Apart for these, some other regional parties like Akali Dal in Punjab, Jharkhand party, etc. have posed constant threat to the nation.

- **Remedial Measures**

In order to eliminate regionalism and achieve national integration the following suggestions may be given.

- **Doing away with regional imbalance:**

  It has been experienced that regional imbalance has been the main cause of discontentment among the inhabitants of a particular region. If the national resources are distributed in a balanced manner, the problem of regionalism will be resolved.

- **Abolition of regional parties:**

  The regional parties play a dirty role in exploiting the regional feelings of people. This cements the base for regionalism. Therefore efforts should be made to ban all regional parties posing threat to national unity.

- **Top priority to the economic development of deprived zones:**

  To curb regionalism equal priority has to be given to all the regions and special attention has to be paid for the economic development of those areas where the people have developed the feeling of relative deprivation. By doing so, the situation will improve and they can be drawn into the national mainstream.

- **Restructuring the society:**

  Our social structure needs urgent restructuring and modification. Presently the where benefits of increased investment in economic and social activities in our society often go to those who need them the least while the majority remains as the deprived section. In a modified social structure low levels of development can be taken care of through growth and anti-national feelings can be checked.

- **Acculturation:**

  Frequent cultural contacts should be encouraged to break the regional barriers and to develop the nationalistic spirit. This will help in promoting a feeling of regional tolerance and exchange of cultural traits.

- **Developed means of Transport and Communication:**
  Most of the backward regions of the country do not have proper link with the rest of the country through transport and communication systems. Due to this reason their interaction and contact with other regional groups become restricted and they develop a feeling of alienation. Therefore, a well-connected network of communication channels will bring people from different regions together, thereby helping to grow a better understanding among different regions.
- **Proper Education:**
  Right education can serve as a very powerful agent for doing away with separatist tendencies and for inculcating the sense of nationalistic spirit among the country men.
- **Appeal through mass media:**
  In the contemporary period, mass media have become one of the powerful agents of change. To motivate people and to cut cross regional boundaries, mass media can be a platform for highlighting the concept of equality of opportunity to every region and the concept of national unity.

15.5 ETHNICITY: MEANING AND CAUSES

An 'ethnic group' has been defined as a group that regards itself or is regarded by others as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics that will help to distinguish the group from the surrounding community. Ethnicity is considered to be shared characteristics such as culture, language, religion, and tradition, which contribute to a person or group's identity.

Ethnicity has been described as residing in:

- the belief by members of a social group that they are culturally unique and different to outsiders;
- their eagerness to find symbolic markers of that difference like food habits, religion, forms of dress, language etc. and to stress upon their significance; and

- their readiness to organise relationships with outsiders so that a kind of 'group boundary' is conserved,protected and reproduced.

From this it can be understood that any reference to ethnicity being genetic is quite problematic. It also describes how some may characterise themselves by an ethnicity different to their birth identity if they reside for a considerable time in a different area and they decide to adopt the culture, symbols and relationships of their new community.

Ethnic Identity and Ethnicity

To form an ethnic identity certain factors has to combine- common descent, socially relevant cultural or physical characteristics, and a set of attitude and behaviour. It is not mandatory that there actually be a common racial origin. In this process, common descent may be real or presumed (supposed). Cultural attributes like distinctive beliefs; institutions, practices, religion, and language often form the bases of identity. In some cases, physical aspects like pigmentation of the skin or body shape provide the foundation of ethnic identity. To strengthen such an identity the members of an ethnic group must also share ideas, behavior patterns, feelings, and meaning. They should be able to distinguish themselves (we) from others (they). They should also recognise that they share a common destiny.

Causes of Ethnic Conflict

- Ethnicity could be traced back to its economic linkages, social deprivation and political disadvantages, experienced by one particular group against an other. Political turbulence, including actions of ethnic social movements, can produce serious reverberations across national borders within a very short period of time.
- When one group feels that the government or state machinery has not been able to provide protection and safety to various ethno-religious and minority groups, it could create a sense of fear in their minds and result in ethnic conflicts.
- Ethnic conflicts, in most of the cases, have their roots in colonial and post-colonial rule. Colonial powers ruling a country through many

administrative and political units divide and segregate the people into many groups and isolate them from one another.

- Competition for scarce resources is another major cause for conflict between groups. Property rights, jobs, educational policy, language rights and other development allocations confer certain benefits on individuals and groups. When these resources are scarce and/or directed favourably towards certain sections of the society, moves toward attaining them begin in organised groups on the lines of religion, caste, class and such other divisions of the society.
- Ethnicity brings about social unrest due to past history of conflicts between groups, and fear about the future. This results in ethnic groups adopting violent means and ways to achieve their objectives.

Approaches to the understanding of Ethnicity

There are three main approaches to the understanding of these new ethnic phenomena.

The first approach is the **Primordialist Approach.** This approach holds ethnicity as a collective identity deeply rooted in historical experience or biological traits. This school of thought believes that people grow in certain groups, then they form various clans and ethnicities later on. Basically, primordialists argue that human beings had usually been formed in groups with primordial characteristics that had been given to them since their birth.This approach to ethnic identities and ethnicity considers common descent as the most important factor.

The other approach is known as **Instrumentalist Approach**. It emphasises on the members' notion of being different from others. They believe that ethnic identity of someone can be changed. It upholds that due to some political or economic reason or self-interest, they can change their identity or ethnicity to get benefit. In such a situation,when someone has to choose their ethnic identity, they will choose the one which gives them more advantage. If the ethnicity of that group gives less advantage to him/her on economic or political aspect, that person will choose other ethnic identity to gain the objective.

The **Constructivist approach** rejects the notion of both Primordialist and Instrumentalist approach. It holds that ethnic groups are only products of human social interaction and are social constructs by the society.

15.6 MULTICULTURALISM: MEANING AND ISSUES

Multiculturalism is the phenomenon of multiple of cultures existing within one society. The culture of India has been shaped by its long history, unique geography and diverse demography. The term "multiculturalism", however, has not been used only to describe a culturally diverse society, but also to refer to a kind of policy that aims at protecting cultural diversity. Multiculturalism describes the existence, acceptance, or promotion of multiple cultural traditions within a single jurisdiction.

According to Beteille (2003), "Most of the major religions of the world such as Hinduism and Buddhism, originated in this land while others, such as Christianity and Islam, though came from outside has remained and grown in it for a thousand year and more. This great profusion of linguistic, religious and other customs and usages was associated with a multitude of castes, communities and tribes each of which was the bearer of a particular sub-culture or even sub sub-culture which is transmitted from generation to generation."

Advantages of Multiculturalism

When people learn about different ways of life it helps to break down barriers between ethnic groups. This helps in the loosening of suspicions related to culture they do not understand. Multiculturalism or existence of different cultures develops a better understanding of other cultures; it enriches our lives and encourages tolerance and respect towards others' culture.

Disadvantages of Multiculturalism

Co-existence of different cultures and beliefs welcomes diverse opinions, thoughts and behaviour. One of the negatives is that cultural differences can divide a society. This can lead to prejudice and discrimination towards minorities. There will always be people who think that their religion

and culture is superior and right and that other beliefs and cultures are inferior and wrong. This feeling of superiority leads them to blame ethnic minorities for social and economic problems even when it is not true. Riots can be an outcome of multiculturalism because it becomes difficult at times to create harmony in a society where too many opinions exist. When such clashes of views occur, it becomes obvious that people forget their values and start blaming each other for every single occurrence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1 : What is Communalism?

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Q2 : How do you think political parties promote Regionalism?

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Q3 : What is understood by Ethnicity?

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Q4 : Give an example of communal riot in India.

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Q5 : How is riot an outcome of multiculturalism?

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15.7 LET US SUM UP

- Social issues refer to any undesirable condition that is opposed either by the whole society or by a section of the society. It is an unwanted social condition, often objectionable, the continuance of which is harmful to the society.

- Communalism has become one of the biggest menaces of modern India. Communalism and communal riots normally arise when religious matters are politicised.
- The "divide and rule" policy which the British had followed caused a lot of damage to our national interest creating a rift between the Hindus and the Muslims.
- Regionalism refers to an ideology and political movement that seeks to advance the causes of regions.
- Regionalism does not harm the national unity if people of a region take pride in their language and culture. But it turns out to be a serious threat to national unity when the political leaders go beyond their regional unity and make demands to serve only their narrow regional interests.
- If the national resources are distributed in a balanced manner, the problem of regionalism will be resolved.
- Ethnicity has been described as the belief by members of a social group that they are culturally unique and different to outsiders.
- It shows their eagerness to find symbolic markers of that difference like food habits, religion, forms of dress, language etc. and to stress upon their significance.
- Certain factors like-common descent, a socially relevant cultural or physical characteristics, and a set of attitude and behaviour, has to combine to form an ethnic identity.
- Multiculturalism is the phenomenon of multiple cultures existing within one society. It describes the existence, acceptance, or promotion of multiple cultural traditions within a single jurisdiction.



15.8 FURTHER READING

1) Ahuja.R (1997),"Social problems in India (second edition)",Rawat Publication; New Delhi.