

Preface

In the previous chapter we learnt about some concepts of sociology. In the vast human society, wherever we see, we find many systems and subsystems persisting for the fulfillment of human needs. For example the system of family through which children are born, nursed, protected and embellished. In addition, educational institutions take care of educational needs. Thus marriage, caste, economic and religious institutions are the systems that satisfy different human needs.

Any structure is an orderly arrangement of different parts. For example, a motorcar is a structure made by combination of different parts such as machine, wheels, steering, seat, glass etc. Similarly, other physical objects like building, fan, table, chair etc. are made by combination of different parts. A school is a structure made by combination of different social positions of principal, teachers, students, clerks, peons etc. Family is also a social structure made by combination of social relations of husband-wife, mother-father, brother-sister, etc. In the same way, college, bank, cricket team, caste, village etc. are forms of social structures.

Thus the concepts of social system and social structure are closely linked to each other. No social function is possible without social system and social structure. In brief, both social system and social structure are complementary to each other. Let us try to understand the social system and social structure systematically on the basis of fundamental thoughts shared by sociologists.

Social system and social structure : Explaining the concepts of social system and social structure, sociologist Herbert Spencer has compared human societies with organisms. Bronislaw Malinowski has explained social systems based on human needs in detail. Talcott Parsons has described social action in the context of four subsystems. Let us first understand the social system.

Definition of social system

The way the human body becomes a system by linking different parts through functional relations, social system is also a system where two or more units are linked through functional relations.

Defining social system, Talcott Parsons mentions, "Social system is a complex aggregation of different parts which are linked to each other through functional relations."

Sorokin states that 'social system is an organized group which holds an aggregation of social norms, which determine rights, duties, social position, functions, roles, patterns of mutual behaviour and behaviour with members outside the group.

In brief, it can be said that the social system is a system of interaction of people according to their status and role.

Features of social system

Following are the features of social system as mentioned by Talcott Parsons :

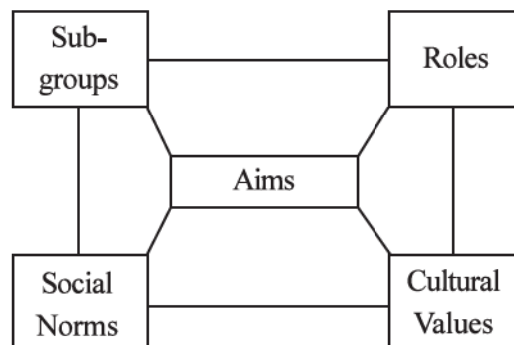
(1) Interdependence between different parts : In order to form a social system, combination of at least two social units is essential. Family becomes a system by combination of social statuses of mother-father, husband-wife, brother-sister etc. These social positions are dependent on each other. Thus, combination of social units of any institution or social group is the first essential feature of social system.

(2) Stability in social system : In order to fulfil human needs system needs to be stable for a longer period, i.e. each system forms its own identity and adapts to the situation. Thus, in spite of changes occurring in the system, the fundamental social system is sustained.

(3) Change in social system : All social systems are changeable. By remaining stable to an extent, social system witnesses changes. In order to maintain itself, the system needs to adapt to the changes, which again results in changes.

Aspects of social system

Aspects of social system can be understood in following way :



(1) Sub-groups : Any society has several groups and each group is a system of social interaction. Any sub-group, having developed as a part of the main group is known as sub-group. Individuals hold several types of social positions in these sub-groups and based on their social positions they interact to play different roles. The concepts of group and sub-group are relative. The concept of sub-group is based on what system of interaction we refer to as group. For example, if we consider India as a group, its states - Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab, etc. are sub-groups. If we consider Gujarat as a group, its districts are sub-groups. If a school is considered as a group, then its students, teachers, administrative personnel, peons etc. are its sub-groups. Thus, members of society hold different statuses in sub-groups. In each sub-group, there is a hierarchy of different statuses.

(2) Roles : An individual holds different statuses in a social system and performs according to his/her status and social norms. This performance is known as role which also indicates individual's duties. Role is a behavioural aspect of status. Each individual has to play different roles in different

sub-groups of the system. For example, a principal takes care of school management, teachers teach, students learn, administrative personnel do the office work, peons serve - these functions are indicative of their roles.

(3) Social norms : Social norms can be referred to as expected pattern of group behaviour linked to certain social situation, social structure and place. These social norms are criteria that determine the human behaviour and they also confirm the human behaviour as either right or wrong. For example, rules of school management regulate the behaviours of all - from principal to students. Social norms form an atmosphere of group life.

(4) Cultural values : Cultural values evaluate the human behaviour in a social system. These cultural values are supported by the group. Besides, the status held by the individual is also evaluated by cultural values. For example, school principal should manage the school in honest and transparent way, teachers should work sincerely, students should behave politely. These can be termed as cultural values. Cultural values can also be referred to as social norms of higher level.

Aims : Social system fulfills its aims through above mentioned four aspects. Aim is a process of achievement. With the purpose of satisfying fundamental and secondary needs of humans, systems such as family, marriage, state, education, religion etc. have come into existence. Each of these systems has one or more than one aims. Social system remains active in order to realize such aims.

Thus, aspects of social system are mutually linked and change in any one aspect has more or less impact on the social system.

Definition of social structure

Before we look into social structure which is based on and closely related to social system, let us try to understand the concept of structure. Structure means different parts linked to each other, orderly arrangement of parts, which lead to the formation of the structure as a whole. For example, house is a physical structure which is made of an orderly arrangement of bricks, sand, grit, cement, window and doors etc. Similarly an arrangement of class rooms, staff room, laboratory, library, office, prayer room etc. leads to the formation of the structure called school or college.

According to Robert Merton, 'social structure means an aggregation of status, role and norms'.

Vidyut Joshi says, "Individuals hold statuses in society and accordingly roles are played. The role is played in a certain relation and in a certain situation. Thus, roles prepare a systematic network of social relations, which is known as social structure."

Therefore, social structure is an abstract construct. Its units include groups, institutions, organizations and associations. In each society, there are institutional methods to link individuals with each other. When individuals link with each other through their social statuses they transform into social structure. For example, family is a social structure in which relations of mother-father, husband-wife, son-daughter are systematically arranged. Similarly a rural community is a structure which includes different castes and sub-castes.

Features of social structure

(1) Group of social statuses: Group of statuses is the first and essential feature of social structure. Any structure emerges from different statuses. Existence of different statuses is a prerequisite for the fulfilment of needs of a group or an institution. Aims of any group or institution can be realized only by division of labour among different statuses. For example, the structure of school sustains through different statuses of principal, teacher, student, clerk, peon etc.

(2) Group of social roles: Social role is a behavioural aspect of social status. Status and role are two sides of a coin. For fulfilment of needs or realization of aim, role needs to be played according to status. For example, principal is expected to manage the school, teachers are expected to teach, clerks are likely to carry out administrative work and students are expected to study. These are the roles they need to play.

(3) Social norms: Social norms are essential to keep social structure active. Norms guide the individual and the group how to perform role according to status. In absence of social norms, a disorder develops in the structure and the whole mechanism gets disrupted. For example, one needs to have stipulated qualification to get selected as a school teacher. Similarly, absence of norms regarding admission in school, examination, syllabus, will make it difficult to realize the aim of education.

AGIL model of social structure

Sociologist Talcott Parsons conceives the AGIL model of social structure as functional necessity of social system. Any social system must perform four basic functions in order to persist itself. These functions are as follows:

(1) Adaptation, (2) Goal attainment, (3) Integration and (4) Latent pattern maintenance and tension management

Adaptation

Goal attainment

(A)

(G)

Economy	Polity
Educational system Religious system Family system	Legal system

Latent pattern maintenance and tension management

Integration

(L)

(I)

(1) Adaptation : In order to persist and fulfil physical needs, society needs to adapt to physical atmosphere. Food and accommodation are fundamental human needs. To fulfil these needs, a system of production and distribution is established in the society. This is done through economy. Thus, in the society, adaptation is achieved through economy.

(2) Goal attainment : For persistence, each mechanism needs to fix some goals. Polity particularly the government machinery of the society takes decisions regarding attainment of goals. It also contributes significantly in deciding goals, making policies and implementing them. The process of goal attainment becomes easier to the extent the problem of adaptation is solved.

(3) Integration : For maintaining its existence, society needs to bring about integration among its internal parts and control them. These needs are fulfilled by legal institutions and courts through implementation of social norms. Loyalty of members towards each other and towards the whole system is essential. Integration is maintained in social system by loyalty, cooperation, coordination and efficiency.

(4) Latent pattern maintenance and tension management : Each society needs to maintain its existence on the basis of certain system or norms. For this purpose society has to solve several problems. In order to maintain the structure, society members should perform their role according to their status. Members should be encouraged to perform their role in a better way. Which will learned to maintain pattern of society.

In the process of performing the role effectively, sometimes tension is created. Further, sometimes, tension is also created due to personality, which leads to conflict. Therefore, society should find a way for removal of internal tension and conflict. This function is performed by the institution of family and also by religious and educational institutions.

Thus, the AGIL model of Parsons solves four functional problems and also achieves social balance. Different action-networks are active to achieve this balance – one of the important among them is socialization. Social values are assimilated through the process of socialization and the processes of social control play an important role in maintaining the social balance. Thus, in the present chapter, we obtained understanding about social system and social structure and learnt about their definitions given by sociologists and anthropologists. Knowledge about features and aspects of social system helps us in understanding social structure properly. Social system and social structure are linked with several processes, which are ever changing. We will learn about them in the next chapter.

Exercises

1. Answer the following questions in detail :

- (1) Describe the meaning and features of social system.
- (2) Discuss the aspects of social system.
- (3) Explain the meaning and features of social structure.

2. Answer the following questions concisely :

- (1) Explain the meaning of social system.
- (2) Explain the AGIL model of Talcott Parsons.

3 Answer the following questions in short :

- (1) Define social system.
- (2) Define social structure.
- (3) Which four functional needs of social structure are presented by Parsons in the AGIL model ?

4. Answer the following questions in one sentence :

- (1) Which institute solves the problem of goal attainment ?
- (2) By what name model of Parsons is known?
- (3) Define sub-groups.
- (4) Give an example of structure.

5. Choose the right option from the following and write :

- (1) Who compared human society with organisms ?
(a) Robert Merton (b) Auguste Comte
(c) Karl Marx (d) Herbert Spencer
- (2) Who gave the concept of social system based on human needs ?
(a) Redcliff Brown (b) Malinowski
(c) Robert Merton (d) Talcott Parsons
- (3) Who gave the concept of sub-systems which emerge from social action ?
(a) Johnson (b) MacIver
(c) Robert Merton (d) Talcott Parsons
- (4) Which of the following is not the sub-group of school ?
(a) Teachers (b) Students (c) Clerks (d) Village

Activity

- Prepare a chart of the structure of your school.
- Prepare a list of the sub-groups of your village or city.

