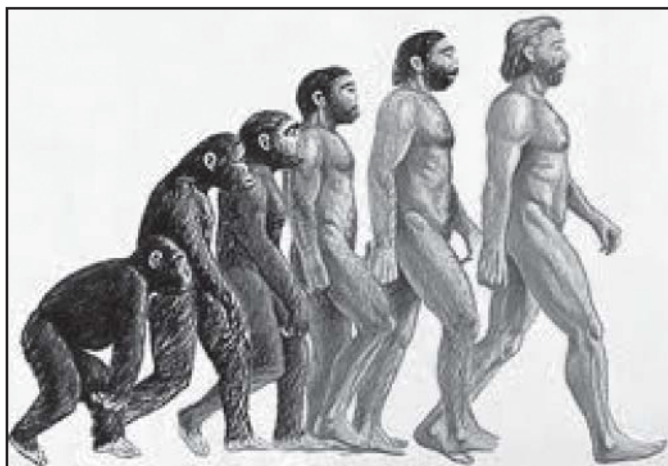


Preface

In order to understand any science, it is essential to know the concepts used by it as its subject matter. Each science has its own notions or concepts, theories, perspective and definition. Notions or concepts are the words selected by each science which indicate specific meaning and through which the science explains and presents its study-material. Notions are logical formation indicating an event. Notions of any science are precise, meaningful and can be verified through sense organs and they can also explain the concerned event. Such furnished language of notions is known as term. Sociology also uses certain concepts to observe, verify and interpret social events. Friends, in this chapter we will discuss some fundamental concepts of sociology, such as society, community, group, social status and role, social norms and social control.

Society

We use the word 'society' in our everyday dealings but in sociology it has a precise meaning. Society is a comprehensive extensive concept. One thing that needs to be clarified here is that we are familiar with human society only as our interests and benefits are linked to it. This may lead to a misunderstanding that society is confined to humans only; but animals, birds, insects also live collectively. There have been scientific studies on group life of termite, honey-bee, ant, chimpanzee etc. Thus, organisms other than humans also have their society and they live a community life. In terms of living



Human Evolution

collectively, human society and society of other organisms are similar. It is only through group or community life that they satisfy their different needs such as sustaining and protecting themselves, maintaining population, entry of new members, maintaining system through division of labour and group unity etc. You can see in the picture how chimpanzee evolved into human being.

Meaning and definition of society

The meaning of the word 'society' as a sociological concept is different than how we use the word in our daily dealings, such as our society's customs or rules, women's society, housing society etc. We use it for caste / community also. The concept of society holds a precise meaning in sociology.

In sociological dictionary, society is described as a self-dependent group of human beings living in a certain geographical area.

MacIver and Page defines society as 'ever changing system of established social relations'.

Thus, human society is not only regional group or collection of human beings, but a complex and changing system of social relations. Society is universal and omnipresent and differs from society of other species than humans because of its cultural characteristics.

Features of society

(1) Social relations : In the mutual presence, conscious social relations exist between two persons. These relations are between a person and person, person and group or between two groups in the form of cooperation, competition, or conflict; and these relations may be social, economic, religious, political or of direct or indirect kind. The conscious interaction between persons leads to the establishment and then development of social relations.

(2) Similarity and dissimilarity : In terms of being human, all members of society are similar but we also find dissimilarity among them in terms of gender. Students of a class of school are similar as they are all humans, but we find dissimilarity among them in terms of gender, age, physical and mental strength, interest, attitude, aims etc. Origin and management of society is possible because of dual existence of similarity and dissimilarity. Both are essential for society and are complimentary to each other.

(3) Different groups and sub-groups : Human society is divided into many groups and sub-groups such as familial, social, cultural, religious, economical, political, etc. These divisions are an important feature of society. In order to satisfy various needs of social life division of labour takes place among humans, which in turn leads to social hierarchy which is based on authority and status. This is indicative of social dissimilarity.

(4) Social control : Each society has a normative system or a set of manners which suggests its members how to behave in different social situations. This is known as social control, which is necessary for the existence and continuity of society. Mores, customs, fashion, laws, manners etc. help in shaping human life and also control it.

(5) Continuity : Social control helps in maintaining the continuity of society. Institutions of family and marriage also help in this process. Through the process of socialization, family internalizes social and cultural heritage and helps in maintaining the continuity of society over generations.

(6) Change : With continuity, change also occurs in society, though the pace of change differs from time to time and society to society, but change is an inevitable feature of society.

Viewing human society in a broader perspective, we find that it consists of many groups and associations. In Indian society, there are various groups, communities, castes, associations and economic classes. The concept of society is not indicative of any specific group or community but it is an abstract concept; while communities or groups are different components of society.

Community

If we view in historical context, humans used to live a nomadic life, sustaining on hunting. Then gradually, they selected specific place and started living settled life. Then onwards, their social life based on that place or region turned into community. Any society comprises many communities such as rural community and urban community. In urban community, there are groups based on language, caste, occupation or religion residing in specific places.

According to MacIver and Page, 'When members of any small or big group reside at one place and try to satisfy most of their needs or interests; that local group is known as community'. Thus, community is one of the various groups of society. In order to understand the concept of community from sociological viewpoint, we will look into its features which are: (1) population, (2) geographical region, (3) interdependence among the members of community, (4) assimilation of activities developed in group life which are based on similar norms-values and (5) community feeling.

In the present time, due to the influence of forces like geographical mobility, transportation, means of communication, industrialization, urbanization and globalization and development of modern technology relations of members of community have not been confined to their community but have extended up to global level. With becoming part of the extensive society, community members' linkages with the extensive society tend to increase. Kingsley Davis has shown two criteria of community: (1) regional proximity: being nearer to each other people of a community feel proximity, and (2) Social totality: major part of the life of members is lived in the limit of community.

Social Groups

From the very beginning, human beings have been living in group. Hunting activities in the primitive time were also carried out in group. Generally, an individual does not live alone or in solitude. S/he lives and develops in group and in order to satisfy various needs s/he participates in family, friend circle, neighbourhood, political, religious or social groups. It is characteristic of human society to get satisfaction from daily activities by being in group. For example, in order to obtain education, a student attends class with other students, passengers of a bus travel together. Thus, being member of the concerned group individuals perform their daily activities.

In brief, persons who are conscious of being similar among them and who interact with each other to achieve collective aims or objectives are known as group. For example, group of friends, kinship group, class, caste, association, people who gather at religious place for worshipping etc.

Sociologically, features of a social group are :

- (1) Two or more than two persons: group of friends, play-group
- (2) Consciousness of being similar: similar caste or religion or community
- (3) Collective aim or objective: audience
- (4) Social interaction: people working under cleanliness campaign

Human society is made of numerous groups. These groups shape the human life and determine the fields of symbiotic life. In this context, we find following groups in society.

Association : Association is a social group in which its members, in an organised way, consciously interact with each other for the fulfillment of common interest/s. These interactions may differ according to the norms of the given association. Individuals' statuses and roles are determined in the association and accordingly members interact with each other. Workers' association, youth association, women's association, traders' association, teachers' association are some of its examples.

Class : Class refers to the division of people on the basis of their economic condition. For example, upper class, middle class and lower or poor class. People of a class hold similar economic and social status.

In the primitive stage, there were no classes based on the ownership of economic resources. However, with gradual increase in complexity in society, different classes such as lord-slave, occupational guilds and bourgeoisie-proletariat classes of industrial society came into existence. With the change in structure and function of society, forms of classes also change. Karl Marx's theory of class is well known in the context of social classes. Max Weber refers to social class as status-group.

Caste : At global level, caste groups are found mainly in India and particularly in Hindu religion. According to Riseley, there are more than three thousand castes in India. According to M.N. Srinivas, castes have stemmed from *Varna system* of Hindu society. Among Hindus, caste membership is congenital. In other words, among Hindus, an individual gets the membership of the caste into which s/he is born. Each caste has its specific social practices, marriage and kinship relations, food habits etc. Earlier, each caste had its own occupation. Even today, there are many castes that have been following their traditional occupations. Caste-based hierarchy exists which shows the status of castes as upper, middle or lower. Caste groups are found in those nations also where Hindu religion is followed. However, in the present time, there have been considerable changes in the traditional form of caste.

Social status and role

In today's complex world, most of the interactions happen in consideration of the status of individual. An individual who interacts in a school or college as a student or teacher does so in the context of his/her status and role.

Meaning and definition of social status

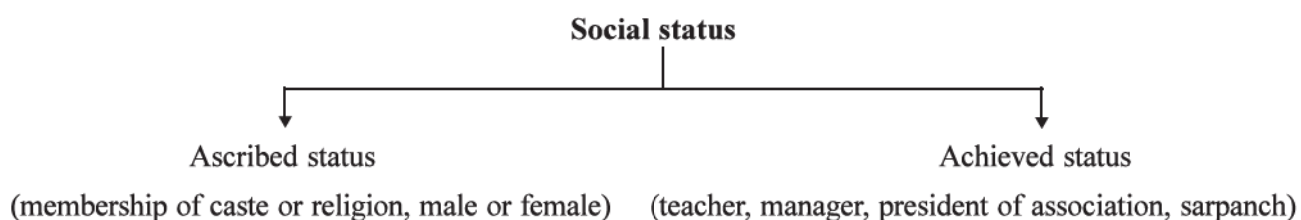
"Social status means an individual's social position in a certain system at a certain time".

Social status teaches the individual the ways of behaving with others. An individual holds certain status, of any type, in any group, association, class or caste and the group members expect him/her to behave in accordance with his/her status. In this sense, status indicates individual's relative position in the group and his/her behaviour is role.

In addition to individuals, groups also have certain social position or status. Functions, rights and duties linked to status are determined by the group-norms. Social role is behavioural aspect of social status. For example, when an individual with status of a doctor examines and treats the patient, s/he is playing her/his role. Thus, status and role are closely linked to each other.

In more or less degree, each status has certain authority linked to it. For example, an individual having status of a school principal has many authorities and the ways to execute them while a watchman or a peon of a school does not have much authority.

From the viewpoint of attainment, social statuses are of two types:



(1) Ascribed status: The statuses obtained by birth are known as ascribed statuses and they do not depend on individual's desires or preferences. For example the congenital status of male or female. An individual automatically gets the status of the nation, family, caste or religion in which s/he is born. In certain groups the status of head of the group or in rural society of the past the status of headman was obtained hereditarily. Thus the status obtained by birth or hereditarily is known as ascribed status.

(2) Achieved status : The status which an individual obtains through desire, preference, skills, education and training is known as achieved status. Individual has to make efforts to obtain this status. For example, anyone can get the status of a teacher, doctor, manager, or lawyer through skills, education and training. In the context of achieved status, the process of competition makes the individual more active, such as the first woman speaker of Indian parliament Meerakumar who belonged to the group which was deprived of equal opportunities but through higher education and training she obtained the status of the speaker. In most of the societies, both ascribed and achieved statuses are found.

Social Norms

Social norms guide the behaviour and practices of individuals living in small or large groups. In other words, they are appropriate standards of behaviour. They control the social system and maintain the social structure.

Meaning of social norms

"Social norms can be referred to as social rules which decide human behaviour, occurred in different social situations, as right or wrong".

Norms, generally emerge from global values. For example, humanism is a value. Act that opposes discriminative behaviour based on colour, sex, etc. is a norm. All social norms have support of society.

Members of any society are expected to achieve their aims or satisfy their needs in accordance with the norms of their society. Those who act in compliance with norms get respect and prestige and those who do not, get punished and face humiliation. All types of norms created by society control human behaviour. Society can achieve its goals and develop further if its members act in compliance with norms. Dominance of norms breakers, however, leads to the state of social disorder and anarchy. It is not necessary that all social norms are acceptable to all individuals or groups. Certain norms may be advantageous to certain individuals or groups and the same norms may be disadvantageous for some other individuals or groups. Now, let us see features of social norms.

Features of social norms

(1) Origin of social norms : There are certain social norms such as folkways, customs, and traditions etc. which are not planned. They emerge from the natural course of behaviours and practices. Planned norms are rules of any big administrative unit, bank, educational institute or acts formed by the state. For example, legislative institutions such as state assembly or parliament enact various acts, thoughtfully and in a planned way and in accordance with the constitution of the nation, such as acts preventing female infanticide and dowry.

(2) Learnt through the process of socialization: Social norms are not inherited. One needs to learn them. An individual learns about them through the process of socialization led by the family into which s/he is born and other individuals and friends and the surrounding atmosphere. Family, friends, neighbourhood, school and means of communication acquaint the individual with norms and teach how to follow them. In the childhood, norms are internalized by following the rules of games while playing.

(3) Relation with cultural values : Variation exists in cultural values of different societies. Similarly, we find variations in cultural values of a society at different times. For example, there are norms in Hindu society restricting man-woman relations while in this regard, tribal society has liberal norms. In earlier times, parents had the final say in relation to marriage of their son or daughter, but now elders or parents give due importance to the choice, liking or preference of son or daughter to be married.

(4) Universality and variety : Social norms are universal as they help in sustaining the social relations between human beings. However, with universality there is a variety among them such as customs, ethics, fashion, manners, acts of state etc.

(5) Evaluation of behaviour and form of punishment : Social norms assess the human behaviour as right or wrong. Each norm has mode of punishment for those who violate it. Light or informal punishment is given for violation of norms such as folkways and for violation of norms like acts one faces formal punishment by court (fine, imprisonment, capital punishment, etc.).

Owing to normative system, we find communication between members and stability and order in society.

Social control

All human societies, in a more or less degree, are dynamic and changeable. In spite of changes occurring in different parts of the society, the fundamental form of society is sustained for a longer time. Fulfillment of the needs of social life and the continuation of the system of social relations are only possible when members of society behave according to socially accepted norms and therefore methods of social control exist. According to MacIver and Page, "Social control is a method that keeps the whole social system sustained and organized." Social control ranges from a minimum of criticism and taunt to a maximum of capital punishment.

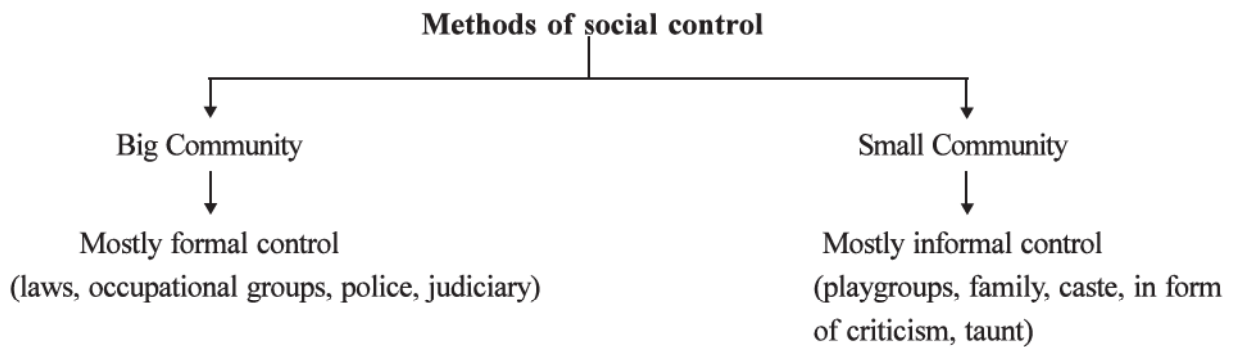
"In a society, means and methods that prevent members from behaving against social norms indicate social control". Let us see its features.

Features of social control :

(1) Universality : Social control exists in all human societies. However, means and methods of social control vary from society to society and from time to time. There is no possibility of society without social control.

(2) Social control as a process: Social control is a result of deviation in social interaction. Social norms are learned and then internalized by individual during the process of socialization. Thus social control is a process of constituting individual in accordance with social norms.

(3) Variety : There are different methods of social control even within a society.



Democratic and autocratic societies have different methods of social control.

As a social science, sociology has its own fundamental concepts. In this chapter, we learnt about some of them. We got familiar with the concepts of society, community, social status and role, norms and social control and their features. If you understand these concepts in detail, you will understand the importance and use of the subject of sociology. In the next chapter, we will try to understand about social system and social structure.

Exercises

1. Answer the following questions in detail :

- (1) Describe the meaning and features of society.
- (2) Describe the meaning and types of social status.
- (3) Explain the concept of social norms and describe its features.

2. Answer the following questions concisely :

- (1) Specify the relation between human and other than human society.
- (2) Explain the concept of community.
- (3) Write a note on caste system of India.
- (4) Define social control and explain its features.

3. Answer the following questions in short :

- (1) What is a concept ?
- (2) State the features of social group in sociological context.
- (3) Explain the concept of association.
- (4) Explain the concept of social status and role.

4. Answer the following questions in one sentence:

- (1) Explain following concepts:
(a) society, (b) group, (c) social norms, (d) social class
- (2) Explain the methods of social control.
- (3) State the norms that emerge from the natural course of behaviours and practices?

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

- (1) What kind of a science is sociology ?
(a) Physical (b) Social (c) Historical (d) Cultural
- (2) What kind of a formation is a concept indicating the event ?
(a) Logical (b) Controlled (c) Illogical (d) Unclear
- (3) In what matter human and other than human society have similarity ?
(a) Cultural (b) Social norms
(c) Symbiotic life (d) None of the three
- (4) Which sociologist has mentioned criteria of community ?
(a) Johnson (b) Kingsley Davis
(c) Auguste Comte (d) Emile Durkheim
- (5) What kind of status do the teachers have in the present time ?
(a) Ascribed (b) Achieved
(c) Unclear (d) None of the three
- (6) What aspect of status is social role ?
(a) Changeable (b) Positional (c) Behavioral (d) Moving
- (7) Due to which system communication between members and stability in society exist ?
(a) Normative (b) Status (3) Class (4) Role
- (8) From which Hindu system castes have emerged ?
(a) Hierarchical (b) Class
(c) Varna (d) None of the three

Activity

- Make a note on diversity of social life surrounding you.
- Visit a voluntary organization or an association and make a note on it.
- Make a list of formal and informal institutions of social control.
- Prepare a chart of different statuses found in family and educational institution.

