LESSON 10 PRIMARY CONCEPTS: COMMUNITY

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

10.0 Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to understand and learn about:

- Meaning of Community

- Elements of Community

- Concept of Gemeinschaft and Gesselschaft

Introduction

Man cannot live in isolation. He cannot live alone. He keeps contact with his fellow beings for his survival. It is not possible for him to keep contact with all the people or to belong as a member of all the groups existing in the world. He establishes contact with a few people who live in close proximity or presence to him in a particular area or locality. It is quite natural for people living in a particular locality for a longer period of time to develop a sort of likeness or similarity among themselves. They develop common ideas, common customs, common feelings, common traditions etc.

They also develop a sense of belonging together or a sense of we-feeling. This kind of common social living in a specific locality gives rise to the community. The examples of community include a village, a tribe, a city or town. For example in a village community, all the villagers lend each other hand in the event of need in agriculture and in other occupations.

They take part in all important occasions which occur in a neighbour's home. They are present when marriages, deaths, births take place in any family. They celebrate the festivals together, worship common deities and jointly face all calamities. In this way the sense of belongingness in generated among the villagers which creates village community.

The word **community** has been derived from two words of Latin namely 'com' and munis. In English 'com' means together and 'munis' means to serve. Thus, community means to serve together. It means, the community is an organisation of human beings framed for the purpose of serving together. Community is a people living within a geographical area in common inter-dependence. It exists within the society. It is bound by the territorial units. It is a specific group while society is abstract. "Community living is natural to man.

He is born in it and grows in the community ways. It is his small world. Men, we have seen began with group life. Over the time, they occupied a habitat and while in permanent occupation of it; they developed likeness, common habits, folkways and mores, interdependence and acquired a name.

They developed amongst themselves a sense of togetherness and an attachment to their habitat. A community thus has a habitat, strong community sense, and a manner of acting in an agreed and organized manner. There are various definitions of community.

Definition of Community

"Community is a group of people living in a contiguous geographic area, having common centres of interests and activities, and functioning together in the chief concerns of life."   **- Osborne and Neumeyer**

"Community is the smallest territorial group that can embrace all aspects of social life."   **- Kingsley Davis**

"It is a local area over which people are using the same language, conforming to same mores, feeling more or less the same sentiments and acting upon the same attitudes."   **- Sutherland**

"Community is as "an area of social living, marked by some degree of social coherence."   **- MacIver**

"Community is a social group with some degree of "we feeling" and "living in a given area."   **- Bogardus**
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"Community is any circle of people who live together and belong together in such a way that they do not share this or that particular interest only but a whole set of interest."   **- Mannheim**

In addition **F. Tonnies** , who has been described as the founder of the theory of community, defined ' Community' in his book *Geminschaft and Gesallschaft* (community and association) " as an organic, 'natural' kind of social collectively whose members are bound together by a sense of belonging, created out of everyday contacts covering the whole range of human activities".

Elements of Community

According to **MacIver and Page**, there are two main bases or essential elements on the basis of which community is formed.

(i) Locality:
Locality implies a particular or territorial area unless a group of people live in a particular locality; they cannot establish relations and generate the we-feeling among themselves. Living together facilities people to develop social contacts, give protection, safety and security. Locality continues to be a basic factor of community life. McIver says, though due to the extending facilities of communication in the modern world the territorial bond has been broken, yet "the basic character of locality as a social classifier has never been transcended.

(ii) Community Sentiment:
Community can be formed on the basis of community sentiment. It is extremely essential. It implies 'a feeling of belonging together." It is a 'we-feeling' among the members of a community. People living in a community lead a common life, speak the same language, conform to the same mores, feel almost the same sentiment and therefore, they develop a feeling of unity among themselves.

In other words, it can be said that community feeling has the four important aspects such as we-feeling, interdependence, participation and community control. The community sentiments are developed by we-feeling. The members of community develop we-feeling by their mutual interdependence. They contribute to the progress of the community by participating in its activities. Community controls the behaviour of its members. The obedience to community rules brings uniformity among the members.

Characteristics of Community

(i) Group of people:

Fundamentally, a community consists of a group of people. A solitary individual cannot form a community when a group of people share the basic conditions a common life, they form community.

(ii) Naturalist:

A community is not deliberately or purposively created. It is a spontaneous or natural growth. An individual is born in a community. It is my virtue of community that he develops.

(iii) Permanence:

A community is generally not temporary or short-lived like a crowd or a revolutionary mob. It is a permanent organisation or durable social group. This durability is evident from the age-old communities existing in modern times. A community continues as long as members are there.

(iv) Likeness:

In a community there is a likeness or similarity in language, custom, mores, traditions etc. among the members. So A. W. Green has rightly said, "A community is a cluster of people living within narrow territorial radius who share a common way of life."

(v) A Particular Name:

Every community is always known with a particular name, their immediate bases of origin give such community a particular name. For example based on the linguistic condition people living in Orissa are called Oriyas; living in Kashmiri culture are called Kashmiris.

(vi) Spontaneity:

Every community grows itself spontaneously. A community is not deliberately or purposively created. A kind of natural force acts behind the origin and development of communities. Various factors like customs, conventions, and religious beliefs bind the individuals together.

(vii) Common Life:

Some sociologists like Elwood say that the life of the people in a community is near about the same. There is no epochal difference between the way of life of the individuals. Their eating pattern, dressing style, language etc. are found to be similar. Due to their inhabitation on a particular geographical area, they develop a kind of emotional and cultural uniformity. Community is never formed with a particular aim. But they are the outcome of social uniformity among the individuals.

(viii) Common Interests:

In community, all the members have common and collective interests. People live in community and work together to fulfil these interests. Thus, Newmeyer says,

community is a group of people living in a delimited geographic area, having common interests and activities and functioning together in their concern of life.

He distinguished four major modes of production which he called the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the bourgeois or capitalist. He predicted that all social development will culminate into a stage called communism. Let us simplify this classification of societies or various stages of human history into (i) primitive-communal, (ii) slave-owning, (iii) feudal, (iv) capitalist and (v) communist stages. In this sub-section we will discuss the first three stages.

Tonnies' Classification of Community

Ferdinand Tönnies, a foundational figure in sociology, introduced the seminal concepts of Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society or association) in his influential work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887). These terms represent an ideal-typical dichotomy, a theoretical framework for understanding the fundamental shifts in social organization as societies transitioned from pre-industrial to industrial forms. Tönnies argued that these concepts capture the contrasting nature of social relationships, motivations, and the very essence of human association in different societal contexts. They are not simply descriptions of specific historical periods but rather analytical tools to understand the underlying principles that shape social life.

Gemeinschaft: The Essence of Community

Gemeinschaft, often translated as "community," embodies a form of social life characterized by close-knit, intimate, and personal relationships. It is rooted in a feeling of genuine belonging, mutual understanding, and shared sentiment. These relationships are often affective (based on emotion), traditional (based on custom and habit), and expressive (valued for their own sake). Membership in a Gemeinschaft is often ascribed (based on birth, kinship, or shared locality) rather than achieved.

Key Characteristics of Gemeinschaft:

- **Relationships:** Characterized by intimacy, emotional depth, and personal knowledge. Individuals see each other as whole persons, not merely as means to an end. Interactions are frequent, informal, and extend across various aspects of life.
- **Basis of Unity:** Social cohesion stems from shared traditions, customs, values, beliefs, and a strong sense of collective identity. Individuals feel a natural bond based on common ancestry, shared experiences, and a sense of "we-ness."

- **Social Control:** Social order is maintained through informal mechanisms such as customs, traditions, moral obligations, public opinion, and kinship ties. Deviance is met with social disapproval, gossip, and informal sanctions aimed at restoring harmony within the group.
- **Division of Labor:** The division of labor is relatively simple and less specialized. Individuals often engage in a variety of tasks, and roles are often defined by age, sex, and kinship.
- **Social Change:** Social change is slow and gradual, as traditions and customs are deeply ingrained and resistant to rapid alteration.
- **Examples:** Traditional rural villages, close-knit families, long-standing friendships, tightly bound religious communities.

Underlying Principles of Gemeinschaft:

Tönnies argued that Gemeinschaft arises from a sense of **"natural will"** (Wesenwille), an inherent and instinctive inclination towards communal life and shared existence. This natural will manifests in three primary forms:

- **Blood:** Kinship ties and the feeling of shared ancestry form the most fundamental basis of Gemeinschaft. Family relationships are the prototypical example, characterized by deep emotional bonds and mutual obligations.
- **Place:** Shared locality and a sense of belonging to a particular place (village, neighborhood) create a sense of community. Proximity fosters frequent interaction, shared experiences, and mutual familiarity.
- **Mind:** Shared beliefs, values, traditions, and a common worldview bind individuals together in a "community of mind." This can be seen in religious communities, guilds with shared craft traditions, or groups united by strong ideological convictions.

Gesellschaft: The Realm of Association

Gesellschaft, often translated as "society" or "association," represents a form of social life characterized by impersonal, instrumental, and contractual relationships. It emerges in more complex, urbanized, and industrialized societies where individuals are increasingly independent and pursue their own self-interests. Relationships are often rational (based on calculation of costs and benefits), contractual (based on explicit agreements), and instrumental (valued as means to achieve individual goals). Membership in a Gesellschaft is typically achieved through voluntary association based on shared interests or goals.

Key Characteristics of Gesellschaft:

- **Relationships:** Characterized by impersonality, superficiality, and a focus on specific roles and functions. Individuals interact with each other primarily as means to achieve their own ends, rather than as whole persons. Interactions are often formal, fleeting, and limited to specific contexts.

- **Basis of Unity:** Social cohesion is maintained through rational agreements, contracts, laws, and formal institutions that regulate interactions and protect individual rights. Shared interests or goals often form the basis of association.
- **Social Control:** Social order is primarily maintained through formal mechanisms such as laws, police, courts, and bureaucratic regulations. Deviance is treated as a violation of codified rules and is met with formal sanctions.
- **Division of Labor:** The division of labor is highly complex and specialized. Individuals occupy specific roles and are interdependent through a vast network of economic and social exchange.
- **Social Change:** Social change is rapid and dynamic, driven by innovation, competition, and the pursuit of individual and collective interests within a framework of formal rules.
- **Examples:** Modern cities, corporations, political parties, voluntary organizations based on specific goals.

Underlying Principles of Gesellschaft:

Tönnies argued that Gesellschaft arises from **"rational will"** (Kürwille), a deliberate and calculated form of volition where individuals make choices based on their perceived self-interest and rational assessment of means and ends. This rational will leads to the formation of associations based on mutual benefit and contractual agreements.

The Ideal-Typical Nature and the Transition:

It is crucial to understand that Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are ideal types, representing pure forms of social organization that are rarely found in their entirety in real-world societies. Instead, most societies exhibit a mixture of both, with the balance shifting as societies modernize and industrialize. Tönnies saw the transition from predominantly Gemeinschaft-like social structures to more Gesellschaft-like ones as a defining characteristic of modernity. This transition involves:

- **The erosion of traditional bonds:** Kinship and locality become less central to social organization.
- **The rise of individualism:** Individual autonomy and self-interest gain prominence.
- **The increasing importance of formal institutions:** Laws and contracts replace customs as the primary means of social regulation.
- **The expansion of the market economy:** Impersonal exchange and contractual relationships become more prevalent.

Critiques and Contemporary Relevance:

Tönnies' dichotomy has been highly influential but has also faced critiques:

- **Oversimplification:** Critics argue that the sharp distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft can oversimplify the complexities of social life and overlook the persistence of strong social bonds in modern societies.
- **Nostalgia for the Past:** Some interpretations suggest a nostalgic view of Gemeinschaft as inherently "better" than Gesellschaft, which may not always be the case.
- **Empirical Measurement:** Operationalizing and empirically measuring these ideal types can be challenging.

Despite these critiques, Tönnies' concepts remain highly relevant for understanding:

- **The nature of social capital:** Gemeinschaft highlights the importance of strong social networks and trust for community well-being.
- **The challenges of social integration in modern societies:** Gesellschaft raises questions about social cohesion in the absence of strong shared values and personal ties.
- **The impact of globalization and technology:** These forces can both erode traditional communities and create new forms of virtual Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.
- **The tension between individual autonomy and social solidarity:** This fundamental tension, explored by Tönnies, continues to be a central concern in sociological inquiry.

10.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Ferdinand Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft provide a powerful and enduring framework for analyzing the fundamental forms of human association. While ideal-typical, these concepts illuminate the contrasting bases of social relationships, motivations, and social order in different societal contexts, particularly in understanding the transformative impact of modernization on social life and the ongoing interplay between community and society.

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