



LESSON 7 PRIMARY CONCEPTS: SOCIETY & ITS CLASSIFICATION

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7.0 Objectives

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

- Meaning of Society
- Classification of Society
- Durkheim and Spencer's Understanding of Society

7.1 Introduction

All sciences have their technical terminologies, their own sets of concepts and professional words. Such terminologies are indispensable, for they reduce the vagueness, the ambiguity and the confusion. Without a technical language, scientific communication becomes cumbersome and inefficient. Sociologists, like other scientists, have technical vocabulary. Most of the sociological vocabulary is taken from ordinary English words and has given them a technical meaning. 'Culture', for example, does not mean refinement in artistic or literary taste or good manner, when it is used in sociology or anthropology. Each term is a technical term and has a set of connotations different than its everyday usage. Sociological concepts are different from the ideas of commonsense.

In everyday conversation we use such words as 'society', 'community', 'institution', 'culture', 'custom' and the like. These words or concepts are also basic to an understanding of sociology. **Stuart Chase (1941)** term as 'big words' of sociology be clarified and rendered precise. Definitions are elusive because these words as said above are part of everyday speech and this creates confusion in the minds of social sciences. Every science has its own terms or concepts. These terms helps a student of a science to understand it more clearly. The student of sociology also should have a clear vision and correct understanding of its basic terms. We are trying to clarify basic concepts in this unit and next lessons.

Society: Meaning and definitions

The term 'Society' is the most fundamental one in sociology. But still it is one of the most vague and general concepts in the sociologist's vocabulary. We speak of— The Co-operative Society, The Agricultural Society, The Friendly Society, The Society of Jesus, The Theosophical Society, etc. In these examples, "Society" means no more than an association. Sometimes, we may say, 'I enjoy his society', 'I like the society of artists' 'I move in high society'. These three uses of the word 'society' here indicate company or fellowship. The term society is also used to



mean an urban society, or a rural society, a modern industrial society or a primitive society, an open society or a closed society, and so on. Then what do we mean by society?

The term 'society' is derived from the Latin word 'socius', which means companionship or friendship. Companionship means sociability. As **George Simmel** pointed out, it is this element of sociability which defines the true essence of society. It indicates that man always lives in the company of other people. 'Man is a social animal', said Aristotle centuries ago. Man lives in towns, cities, tribes, villages, but never alone. Loneliness brings him boredom and fear. Man needs society for his living, working and enjoying life. Society has become an essential condition for human life to arise and to continue. Human life and society always go together.

As against its commonsense usage, sociologists use this term in a specific sense and in a precise way. In social sciences since nineteenth century there is a long debate about the use of the concept 'society'. It was taken to mean as tissues of manners and customs that hold a group of people together. In some sense, 'society represented something more enduring and deeper than the 'state', less manipulative and certainly more elusive.

Sociologists have defined society with two angles:

- In abstract terms, as a network of relationships between people or between groups.
- In concrete terms, as a collection of people or an organization of persons.

Definition

"A society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behavior which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behavior. — **Morris Ginsberg**

"Society is the complex of organized associations and institutions with a community". — **G. D. M. Cole**

"Society is considered as tissues of relationship" — **L.T.Hobhouse**

"Society is a web of social relationship" — **MacIver**

"The term society refers not to group of people but to the complex pattern of the norms of interaction, that arise among and between them." — **Lapiere**

"Society is the union itself, the organisation, the sum of formal relations in which associating individuals are bound together." — **Giddings**

"Society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many grouping and divisions, of controls of human behavior and of liberties. This



ever changing, complex system we called society.” — **MacIver & Page.**

7.3 Characteristics of Society

The basic characteristics of society are as follows:

i) **Society consists of People.**

Society is composed of people. Without the students and the teachers there can be no college and no university. Similarly, without people there can be no society, no social relationships, and no social life at all.

ii) **Mutual Interaction and Mutual Awareness.**

Society is a group of people in continuous interaction with each other. It refers to the reciprocal contact between two or more persons. It is 'a process whereby men interpenetrate the minds of each other'. An individual is a member of society so long as he engages in relationship with other members of society. It means that individuals are in continuous interaction with other individuals of society. The limits of society are marked by the limits of social interactions.

Social interaction is made possible because of mutual awareness. Society is understood as a network of social relationships. But not all relations are social relations. Social relationships exist only when the members are aware of each other. Society exists only where social beings 'behave' towards one another in ways determined by their recognition of one another. Without this awareness there can be no society. A social relationship thus implies mutual awareness.

iii) **Society Depends on Likeness.**

The principle of likeness is essential for society. It exists among those who resemble one another in some degree, in body and in mind. Likeness refers to the similarities. People have similarities with regards to their needs, works, aims, ideals, values, outlook towards life, and so on. Just as the 'birds of the same feather flock together', men belonging to the same species called 'Homo sapiens'. Have many things in common. Society, hence, rests on what F.H. Giddings calls consciousness of kind. "Comradeship, intimacy, and association of any kind or degree would be impossible without some understanding of each by the other and that understanding depends on the likeness which each apprehends in the other" Society in brief, exists among like beings and likeminded.

iv) **Society Rests on Difference Too.**

Society also implies difference. A society based entirely on likeness and uniformities is bound to be loose in socialites. If men are exactly alike, their social relationships would be very much limited. There would be little give-and-take, little reciprocity. They would contribute very little to one another. More than that, life becomes boring, monotonous and uninteresting, if differences are not there.



Hence, we find difference in society. Family for example, rests on the biological difference between the sexes. People differ from one another in their looks, personality, ability, talent, attitude, interest, taste, intelligence, faith and so on. People pursue different activities because of these differences. Thus we find farmers, laborers, teachers, Soldiers, businessmen, bankers, engineers, doctors, advocates, writers, artists, scientists, musicians, actors, politicians, bureaucrats and others working in different capacities, in different fields in society. However, difference alone cannot create society. It is subordinate to likeness.

v) Co-operation and Division of Labour.

Primarily likeness and secondarily difference create the division of labour. Division of labour involves the assignment to each unit or group a specific share of a common task. For example, the common task of producing cotton clothes is shared by a number of people like the farmers who grow cotton, the spinners, and weavers, the dyers, and the merchants. Similarly, at home work is divided and shared by the father, mother and children. Division of labour leads to specialization. Division of labour and specialization are the hallmarks of modern complex society.

Division of labour is possible because of co-operation. Society is based on co-operation. It is the very basis for our social life. As **C.H. Cooley** says, 'cooperation arises when men realize that they have common interests'. It refers to the mutual working to get together attainment of a common goal. Men satisfy many of their desires and fulfill interests through joint efforts. People may have direct or indirect co-operation among them. Thus co-operation and division of labour have made possible social solidarity or social cohesion.

vi) Society Implies Interdependence Also.

Social relationships are characterized by interdependence. Family, the most basic social group, for example, is based upon the interdependence of man and woman.. One depends upon the other for the satisfaction of one's needs. As society advances, the area of interdependence also grows. Today, not only individuals are interdependent upon one another, but even, communities, social groups, societies and nations are also interdependent.

vii) Society is Dynamic.

Society is not static; it is dynamic. Change is ever present in society. Changeability is an inherent quality of human society. No society can ever remain constant for any length of time. Society is like water in a stream or river that forever flows. It is always in flux. Old men die and new ones are born. New associations and institutions and groups may come into being and old ones may die a natural death. The existing ones may undergo changes to suit the demands of time or they may give birth to the new ones. Changes may take place slowly and gradually or suddenly and abruptly.



viii) **Social Control.**

Society has its own ways and means of controlling the behavior of its members. Co-operation, no doubt exists in society. But, side by side, competitions, tensions, revolts, rebellions and suppressions are also there. They appear and re-appear off and on. Clash of economic or political or religious interests is not uncommon. Left to themselves, they may damage the very fabric of society. They are to be controlled. The behavior and the activities of people are to be regulated. Society has various formal as well as informal means of social control. It means, society has customs, traditions, conventions and folkways, mores, manners, etiquettes and the informal means of social control. Also it has law, legislation, constitution, police, court, army and other formal means of social control to regulate the behavior of its members.

ix) **Culture.**

Each society is distinct from the other. Every society is unique because it has its own way of life, called culture. Culture refers to, as Linton says, the social heritage of man. It includes the whole range of our life. It includes our attitudes, judgments, morals, values, beliefs, ideas, ideologies and our institutions: political, legal, economic; our sciences and philosophies. Culture is the expression of human nature in our ways of living and thinking, in behaving, and acting as members of society.

Culture and society go together. What distinguishes one society from the other is culture. Culture is a thing which only human beings possess. It is not found at the level of animals. Culture is not society, but an element of society. As **Gillin and Gillin** say, "Culture is the cement binding together into a society its component individuals; human society is people interacting; culture is the patterning of their behavior".

There is yet another attribute on which society depends. It is the gregarious nature of man. Aristotle said that "man is a social animal". Psychologists like McDougall, say that man is social because of the basic human instinct called the gregarious instinct. Gregariousness refers to the tendency of man to live in groups. Man always lives amidst men. He cannot live without it. This internal nature of man has forced him to establish social groups and societies and to live in them.

Human life and society almost go together. Man is born in society and bred up in society, nourished and nurtured in society. From childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to youth, from youth to maturity, from maturity to old age, from old age up to death, man lives in society. He depends on society for protection and comfort, for nurture and education. Participation in society is necessary for the development of personality. Various cases show that man can become man only among men.

Society makes our life livable. It is the nurse of youth, the arena of manhood



and womanhood. Society is, therefore, as Maclver puts it, more than our environment. It is within us as well as around us. Society not only liberates the activities of men—but it limits their activities also. It controls their behaviour in countless ways. It shapes our attributes, our beliefs, our morals and our ideals. Emotional development, intellectual maturity, satisfaction of physical needs and material comforts are unthinkable without society. Society is a part of our mental equipment and we are a part of society. It stimulates the growth of our personality. It liberates and controls our talents and capacities.

Durkheim Classification of Society

Emile Durkheim and Herbert Spencer, two foundational figures in sociology, both sought to understand the evolution and structure of societies. While both employed an evolutionary perspective, they differed in their primary focus and the key criteria they used to classify societies.

Émile Durkheim's Classification: Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

Durkheim's classification of societies is primarily based on the nature of social solidarity, the bonds that hold society together and create social cohesion. He identified two main types of solidarity, which correspond to different stages of societal development:

1. Mechanical Solidarity:

This type of solidarity is characteristic of traditional, pre-industrial, and smaller-scale societies. It is based on similarity, homogeneity, and a strong collective consciousness. Individuals in these societies share similar beliefs, values, experiences, occupations, and lifestyles. The division of labor is minimal. Individuals perform similar tasks and have a broad range of skills. There is little specialization. Individualism is weak. The collective consciousness is strong and pervasive, dominating individual thoughts and actions. Individuals are tightly bound by shared norms and traditions. Repressive law is dominant. Deviations from the collective norms are seen as threats to the social order and are met with harsh, punitive sanctions aimed at reaffirming the collective values. Social change is slow and limited. The strong collective consciousness and resistance to deviation make significant societal transformations difficult.

Key Characteristics of Societies with Mechanical Solidarity:

- Homogeneity: Members are alike in many aspects.
- Strong Collective Consciousness: Shared beliefs and values are deeply ingrained and widely held.
- Limited Individual Freedom: Individual expression and deviation are discouraged.



- Emphasis on Tradition and Custom: Social life is governed by established norms and practices.
- Repressive Justice: Focus on punishing offenders to reinforce collective values.

2. Organic Solidarity:

This type of solidarity is characteristic of modern, industrial, and larger-scale societies. It is based on interdependence and specialization arising from a complex division of labor. Individuals perform highly specialized tasks and rely on others for their needs. The division of labor is highly complex and extensive. Individuals have specialized roles and skills, leading to interdependence as they rely on each other for goods and services. Individualism is more pronounced. While social norms still exist, the complex division of labor allows for greater individual differences in beliefs, values, and lifestyles. Individuals are bound together by their functional interdependence. Restitutive law becomes more dominant. Deviations are seen as breaches of contract or disruptions to the social order that need to be repaired or compensated for. The focus shifts from punishment to restoring social equilibrium. Social change is more rapid and dynamic. The greater tolerance for individual differences and the interconnectedness of the complex system make societies more adaptable to change.

Key Characteristics of Societies with Organic Solidarity:

- Heterogeneity: Members are different in many aspects due to specialization.
- Weaker, More Abstract Collective Consciousness: Shared beliefs are less pervasive and more general.
- Greater Individual Freedom: Individuals have more autonomy in their thoughts and actions.
- Emphasis on Individual Rights and Laws: Formal laws and contracts regulate social interactions.
- Restitutive Justice: Focus on repairing harm and restoring social order.

Spencer's Classification of Society

Herbert Spencer, influenced by evolutionary biology, classified societies based on their primary mode of social organization and the nature of their relationships with other societies. He identified two ideal types:

1. Militant Society:

Primary Goal of this society is survival through conquest and defense. The society is organized around military needs and hierarchical structures. It is characterized



by centralized authority, strict hierarchy, and coercive control. Individuals are subservient to the state, and their roles are largely determined by their position in the military or its support systems. Individualism is suppressed. The needs of the state and the military take precedence over individual desires and freedoms. Social life is highly regulated through strict rules, customs, and laws enforced by a powerful central authority. It is primarily focused on self-sufficiency and resource acquisition through conquest. There is limited specialization and trade. Emphasis is laid on patriotism, obedience, discipline, and the glorification of war and military prowess. Examples: Ancient Sparta, early feudal societies focused on warfare.

Key Characteristics of Militant Societies:

- Centralized Government: Strong, authoritarian rule.
- Hierarchical Structure: Clear lines of authority and obedience.
- Coercive Control: Use of force and strict regulation.
- Suppressed Individualism: Emphasis on collective needs and state power.
- Military Emphasis: War and defense are central to social organization.

2. Industrial Society: Primary Goal in this society is survival through production and exchange. The society is organized around economic activities and voluntary cooperation. It is characterized by decentralized authority, greater individual freedom, and voluntary cooperation. Individuals pursue their own interests within a framework of laws and contracts. Individualism is highly valued and encouraged. Individuals have more autonomy in their choices, occupations, and lifestyles. Social life is regulated primarily through voluntary agreements, contracts, and laws that protect individual rights and facilitate exchange. Coercion is minimized. It is based on a complex division of labor, specialization, and extensive trade both within and between societies. Production is geared towards meeting diverse individual needs and wants. Emphasis is on individual liberty, voluntary cooperation, economic productivity, innovation, and peaceful relations with other societies. Examples: Modern capitalist societies with developed economies and democratic political systems.

Key Characteristics of Industrial Societies:

- Decentralized Government: Limited state intervention, protection of individual rights.
- Voluntary Cooperation: Social interactions based on mutual agreement and contracts.
- Emphasis on Individual Liberty: Freedom of thought, expression, and economic activity.
- Complex Division of Labor: High specialization and interdependence.
- Economic Productivity: Focus on production, innovation, and trade.



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