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SOCIETY, COMMUNITY, ASSOCIATION & INSTITUTION

Sociology is a science of society which focuses on certain basic units to understand how human beings live and carry out their activities. These units provide the basis for understanding relationships between individual life and social processes. In this lesson, we shall discuss certain basic concepts used by sociologists to understand social life. These are :1) society; 2) community; 3) association; 4) institution.

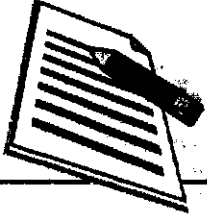
OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- understand the concepts and definition of society and community.
- state the similarities and differences between society and community.
- explain the concept of association and institution.
- state the distinction and relationship between association and institution.
- state the importance of these concepts in the study of social life.

5.1 WHAT IS SOCIETY?

Society is a term used in everyday life with a particular meaning. A layman often defines society as an aggregation or collection of individuals. But in sociology, the term is used in a different sense. It is not just a congregation or collectivity of several individuals. It refers to the sum total of the relationships existing between them. In terms of common sense, society is understood as a tangible object, where



as in sociology it refers to an intangible entity. It is a mental construct, which we realize in every day life but can not see it.

In their book on "Society", Mac Iver and Page define: "Society is a system of usages and procedures of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controlling of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever-changing, complex system, we call society. It is the web of social relationships. And it is always changing"

This definition reflects that society is a network of social relationships. An individual is related to others through the ties of kinship, marriage, neighbourhood, caste, occupation, religions, political parties, and peers (friends groups). Thus, an individual becomes part and parcel of several layer groups through these different multiple relationships. These relationships do not occur at random. Rather these are patterned. Therefore, sociologists define society as the pattern of social relationships formed through interaction of its members.

Attributes of Society

The collectivity of individual created society over a long period of time. Sociologists have identified certain attributes of society. They are:

1. Likeness and differentiation
 2. Inter-dependence;
 3. Co-operation and conflict; and
1. In the first place, there should be an aggregate of individuals who share the sense of **likeness**. No society can come into existence unless its members feel that they are like one another. Members of the family and kingroup, persons belonging to the same village or small town and members of the same caste generally have this feeling of likeness. However, the first likeness is that of physiognomy. Man along with other animals can not make a human society.

However, we can not say that society is not marked by differentiation. The members of a society differ from one another in terms of caste, class, occupation and education, etc. Even within the family, members differ from one another in terms of gender, age, personality, outlook and personal preferences. However, these differences complement each other in such a way that family stability is maintained. Similar principle is also applicable to wider society where the differences are subordinated to likeness, which is quite essential for maintaining social harmony.

2. **Inter-dependence** is another attribute of society. The members of a society depend on one another for its smooth functioning. In a traditional village or your neighbourhood, members of different caste groups depend on each other



Notes

in every day life. For example, washerman, carpenter, cobbler, ironsmith, bus conductor, Brahmin, sweeper are seen to be doing their own tasks yet depending upon each other. No individual can perform all functions on one's own. Therefore, individuals depend on each other to live smoothly in society.

3. **Co-operation** is another essential attribute of society. No society can come into existence or continue to persist unless the members co-operate with each other. Co-operation is obtained at every level of society such as inter-personal relationship like
- 1) between husband and wife and other family members;
 - 2) between neighbours; and
 - 3) at the level of wider society.
4. As you know that unless you co-operate with your brother and sister, you can not have your way in family matters. One the other hand, you also know that relationships also have an element of **conflict**. For example, you and your brother might like the shirt your parents have recently bought. You and your brother both argue to get it. However, your parents soon resolve the conflict. In the same way, co-operation and conflict mark relationships in society. Conflict as an essential attribute (feature) of society can also be explained in a wider sense. Groups can enter into conflicting relations if their interests are opposed to each other. The conflict between landlords and landless can be observed in this context. However, no doubt, co-operation is more important in all respects.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.1

Write answer in one sentence:

1. Define society.

2. Out of 'difference' and 'likeness' which one has greater importance for the survival of society.

3. Husband – wife form a social relationship. Do you agree with the statement?



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5.2 COMMUNITY

Society is an abstraction (notion, idea, thought) community is a concrete entity. According to sociologists, "whenever the members of any group, small or large, live together in such a way that they share the basic conditions of a common life, we call that group a community." Thus, a community refers to a group of individuals living in a geographical area. They share the same physical environment and the basic conditions of common living. A neighbourhood or a village are good examples of a community.

5.2.1 Characteristic of Community

- (i) Community refers to an aggregate of individuals.
- (ii) It is associated with a locality.
- (iii) The members of the community have strong community sentiments or a sense of belongingness or we feeling.
- (iv) Community as a group of people is created spontaneously over a long period of time
- (v) Therefore, it has more permanence or endurance than those groups which are created with a purpose.
- (vi) Community serves wider ends
- (vii) A community is usually associated with a specific name

5.2.2 Similarity Between Society and Community

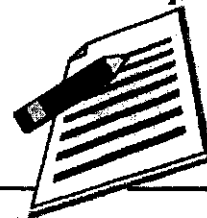
- i) Both are spontaneously created social groups, but a community can also be created with a specific interest in mind
- ii) Both serve wider ends.
- iii) Members of both have a sense of belongingness.

5.2.3 Differences Between Society and Community

Society

1. It includes every relation, which is established between people. They go beyond territorial boundaries.

For example, Indians spread across the world feel that they are part of Indian society, demarcation of boundary is meaningless here.



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2. Sense of belongingness is there, but it is less pronounced than in case of community.
3. Society is an abstract mental construct.

Community

1. Usually associated with a definite territory.

For example, Indians inhabiting Southhall in London could be called an Indian community of Southhall.

2. Sense of belongingness is stronger.

They feel close to each other. They react more sharply if any criticism is directed towards them as member of that community.

3. Community is a concrete entity.

However, it can be said that though there are similarities and differences between them, in reality both are inter-connected.

5.2.4 Types of Communities

One of the German sociologists F. Tonnies had used two terms *Gemeinschaft*, which means community and *Gesellschaft* means association to refer to different types of human groupings found in human societies. There are many types of communities, out of those four could be clearly identified. These are as follows

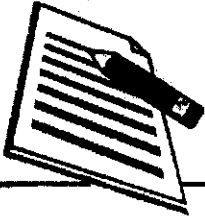
- (i) village or rural
- (ii) city or urban
- (iii) nation
- (iv) world

However, it can be said that though there are similarities and differences between them, in reality both are inter-twined.

5.2.5 Community Life in India

India has been a country made up of village communities. These communities, historically, were characterized by:

- (i) Agriculture base of economy;
- (ii) Peace and simplicity;
- (iii) Tradition and custom bound conduct



Notes

- (iv) Poverty and illiteracy
- (v) traditional panchayati structures
- (vi) caste based division of labour and inter-dependence

Under the impact of British rule, population explosion, education, modernization and industrialization, etc., traditional community structures have weakened. 'We-feeling' has been diluted to large extent. Influence of traditions and customs on the life of individuals has also undergone change. Village communities have no longer remained isolated in Indian context. Today even remote villages are connected to the world through different channels of communication like media, transport and market forces.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.2

Put a tick mark against the right answer:

1. Which of the following is an element of difference between community and society?

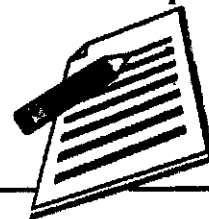
a) definite locality	b) a group of people
c) likeness of interest	d) sentiment of oneness
2. Select the correct characteristics of community from the following.

a) abstract	b) dynamic
c) concrete	d) none of the above
3. Which of the following is not an example of community?

a) city	b) village
c) town	d) none of them

5.3 ASSOCIATION

An association is a group of people, who come together and get organised for fulfillment of specific goals or purpose. Sometimes limited number of goals exist behind such organizations. For example, you may have seen the working of Mohalla Sudhar Samities, or cricket club in your neighbourhood. There are also many other such associations like voluntary associations, music club and trade unions.



Notes

5.3.1 Characteristics of Association

- i) It consists of a group of individuals.
- ii) The people are organized.
- iii) There are certain rules and regulations for the conduct of activities of association
- iv) These people carry out activities to attain certain specific goals.

5.3.2 Differences between Society, Community and Association

Society and community

1. They are spontaneously created social grouping.
2. Both have more endurance, continuity and have a long past.
3. Society as a system of social relationship can exist.
4. Function through customs, tradition and unwritten laws.

Association

1. People organize with a particular purpose in mind.
2. May be short-lived.
3. Importance is attached to the group members and specificity of the goal.
4. Mostly functions through written laws and rules.

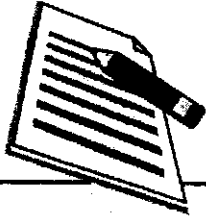
INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.3

- a) Which of the following is an example of an association.

i) Indian society	ii) The Brahmin caste
iii) Ladies club	iv) Group of hippies
- b) One of the important distinctions between society and association is that the latter has:

i) Unwritten rules	ii) written rules
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- c) Which of the following has territorial basis?

i) Society	ii) Community
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- iii) Association iv) Group
- d) Which of the following is created by people for a specific goal?
- i) Association ii) Society iii) Community

5.4 INSTITUTION

Do you remember that we had earlier tried to distinguish between the general and the sociological meaning of society. Similarly, when it comes to the concept of institution, we have two sets of meanings.

- i) By institution, people generally mean an organisation, for example people call hospitals and schools as institutions.
- ii) However, in sociology the meaning of institution is different. Here, this term is used to understand the ways of doing things.

Institutions refer to established codes of conduct for carrying out group activities. They refer to a set of rules and procedures, which provide guidelines for human activities. Institutions are blueprints for human action. Have you ever realized that why do you go to church/temple/mosque for worship. In fact, people unconsciously imbibe codes of conduct for worship, which the religious institutions lay down in society. You can not see them but they are there which provide do's and don'ts for your behaviour.

In every organization there are certain usages, rules and procedures. These forms of procedures are called institutions. These are recognized and accepted by society and they regulate the relations between individuals and group. If the rules and procedures are called institutions, then the individuals themselves belong to associations. Therefore, one of the differences between institution and association is that if former represents the rules or procedures the latter refers to the human component.

Husband and wife both form a family which is an example of an association. They have children and continue to fulfill social duties. But how does family function? This depends largely in terms of the institutional structure of society which provides meaning for what are the ways of doing things. Therefore, the conduct of members of family towards each other follows a pattern, which you observe in other families too. For instance how parents behave with children and vice versa. Now you can understand that how school is both an association and an institution. That is to say school comes into existence with specific goals but function and role of school in



society is that of an institution. It means that through school, we imbibe do's and don'ts of society.

Therefore, through these examples we find that associations usually have forms and can take concrete shape. However, institutions do not have concrete forms. They are abstractions.

According to some sociologists, institutions are basic constituents of any society. They are found in all cultures and in all societies. Some of the institutions are basic to the survival of any society. Some sociologists call them primary institutions. There are six primary institutions found in all societies. They are:

- (i) Economic institutions (e.g. agriculture, industry or any other occupation);
- (ii) Social institutions (e.g. family, marriage and kinship)
- (iii) Political institutions.
- (iv) Education or socialization
- (v) Religion; and
- (vi) Expressive institutions such as music, dance, fine arts and literature, etc.

They are found in all human societies

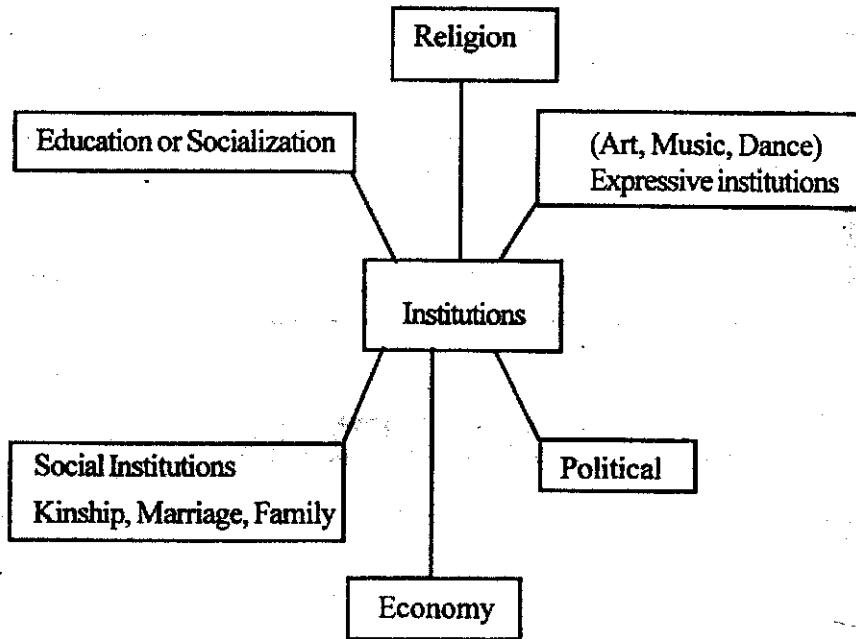


Fig . 2

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**Notes**

Finally we can say that institutions lay down standard procedures of social living in all societies and cultures

INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.4

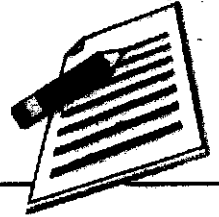
1. Identify an example of institution from the following:
 - (i) Cricket club
 - (ii) Hospital
 - (iii) Jail
 - (iv) Religion
2. Tick the correct choice from the following Institutions represent
 - (i) Rule and procedures
 - (ii) Human aspect
 - (iii) Concrete
3. Institution regulates the social life. Do you agree with the statement or not? Yes/No
4. Tick the correct choices.

Following are examples of institutions and associations

 - (i) School
 - (ii) Political party
 - (iii) Family
 - (iv) Family and Cricket club

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Society is a web of social relationships.
- Society is a mental construct.
- Likeness, inter-dependence, co-operation and conflict are attributes of society.
- Community is a group living in a particular geographical area.



Notes

- Members of a community have a strong sense of belongingness.
- Unlike society, community is a concrete entity.
- Association is a group of people organised for the fulfillment of specific goals.
- Association functions through certain rules and regulations.
- Institution refers to establish codes of conduct for carrying out-group activities.

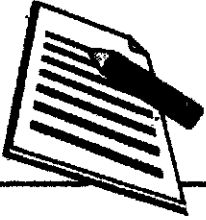
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1. Abstraction – Idea derived from concrete to intangible forms.
2. Social relationship – relation between two or more individuals in society.
3. Pattern – occurrence of repetitive nature.
4. Pre-requisites – things required before creation.
5. Social harmony – Peace maintained between groups of society.
6. Co-operation – helping and sharing between individuals and groups.
7. Likeness – Similarities.
8. Awareness – realization, consciousness.
9. Inter-dependence – dependence between individuals and groups for various purposes.
10. Customs – certain rules and norms laid down by society for the conduct of its members.
11. Unwritten – social norms, not codified but exist to be conformed by people in society.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Was society created overnight? Describe in your own words.
2. Distinguish between society and community.
3. What is the difference between association and community?



Notes

4. What are primary institutions? Explain with the help of examples.
5. Give an example of society and describe its pre requisites in 100-200 words.



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

5.1

1. Society is a web of social relations. 2. Likeness 3. Yes

5.2

1. a 2. b 3. b and c

5.3

- a) iii & iv b) (ii) c) (ii) d) (i)

5.4

1. (iv) 2. (i) 3. Yes 4. iv



SUGGESTED READINGS

R. M. MacIver and C. H. Page : Society (1983)
Anthony Giddens : Sociology (1998)
H. M. Johnson : Sociology (1983)