

1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 01 (Class XI)
Module Name/Title	Social Groups-concept, features, Types – Part 1
Module Id	kesy_10201
Pre-requisites	Definition and Scope of Sociology
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Basic concepts<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Groups: Quasi groupsb. Types of Groups-Primary & Secondaryc. Community and Society or Associationd. In groups & out groupse. Reference groupsf. Peer groups
Keywords	Social institutions, Sociological thinking, Society, Culture, Group and society

2. Development Team

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Introduction

Sociology is academic study of society. The central task of sociology is to explore the interplay of society and the individual. Individuals do not float freely in society but are part of collective bodies, groups or communities like the family, tribe, caste, class, clan, nation. A **social group** consists of two or more people who interact on a regular basis and share a sense of unity, purpose and common identity. According to Morris Ginsberg society as 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.

In this chapter, we will attempt to understand the kinds of groups individuals form, different kinds of unequal orders, stratification systems within which, individuals and groups are placed, the way social control operates, the roles that individuals have and play, and the status they occupy.

In other words we are beginning to explore how society itself functions. Is it harmonious or conflict ridden? Are status and roles fixed? How is social control exercised? What kinds of inequalities exist? The question however remains as to why do we need specific terms and concepts to understand this. Why does sociology need to have a special set of terms when we use terms like status and roles or social control anyway in our everyday life?

For a discipline such as, say, nuclear physics that deals with matters unknown to most people and for which no word exists in common speech, it seems obvious that a **discipline must develop a terminology**. However, terminology is possibly even more important for sociology, just because its subject matter is familiar and just because words do exist to denote it. We are so well acquainted with the social institutions that surround us that we cannot see them clearly and precisely (Berger 1976:25).

For example we may feel that since we live in families we know all about families. This would be conflating or equating sociological knowledge with common sense knowledge or naturalistic explanation. But **Common sense is the general knowledge** that most people possess on the basis of their experience and interaction in everyday life. Common sense is an individual's innate ability to understand and assess the things they see, experience and hear around them on a regular basis. Whereas **Sociology** is a method of inquiry that engages in systematic study of society by testing beliefs against evidence.

But how sociologists understand societies differs from the common sense understanding of a lay man. You may ask a genuine question that what is the difference between common sense and sociological understanding? unlike common sense sociology as an academic study involves

1. Asking distinct questions which are sociological in nature. Such as what are types of families, what are functions of families etc.
2. While answering these questions sociologist engage in research
3. While doing research sociologist apply concepts and test various sociological theories.
4. They provide explanations about the societies and also challenge taken-for-granted world around us.

We also know that how sociology as a discipline has an element of biography or history in it. If we look at the origin of the discipline then we will find that certain material and intellectual developments in 18th century shaped the sociological perspective as well as its concerns. Likewise sociological concepts too have a story to tell. Many of the concepts reflect the concern of social thinkers to understand and map the social changes that the shift from pre-modern to modern entailed. For instance sociologists observed that simple, small scale and traditional societies were more marked by close, often face-to-face interaction. And modern, large scale societies by formal interaction. They therefore **distinguished primary from secondary groups**, community from society or association. Other concepts like stratification reflect the concern that sociologists had in understanding the structured inequalities between groups in society.

Concepts are building block of any discipline. They help us to understand and explain society or our subject matter in any discipline. There are different kinds of concepts and ideas in sociology. And sociology itself is marked by different ways of understanding society and looking at dramatic social changes that the modern period brought about. **Concepts are theoretical tools in any academic discipline. They are categories or models used to define or identify social phenomena. They tend to list significant features of a particular phenomenon, such as caste, class, social**

change etc, and help us to come on to a consensus in the process of generation of knowledge.

We have seen how even in the early stage of sociology's emergence there were contrary and contesting understandings of society. If for Karl Marx class and conflict were key concepts to understand society, social change and structure of society, then social solidarity and collective conscience were key terms used by Emile Durkheim to understand the same society. In the Post-World War II period sociology was greatly influenced by the structural functionalists who found society essentially harmonious. They found it useful to compare society to an organism where different parts have a function to play for the maintenance of the whole. Others, in particular the conflict theorists influenced by Marxism saw society as essentially conflict ridden.

Within sociology some tried to understand human behaviour by starting with the individual, i.e. **micro interaction**. Others began with macro structures such as class, caste, market, state or even community. Concepts such as status and role begin with the individual. Concepts such as social control or stratification begin from a larger context within which individuals are already placed.

The important point is that **these classifications and types** that we discuss in sociology help us and are the **tools through which we can understand reality**. They are keys to open locks to understand society. They are entry points in our understanding, not the final answer. But what if the key becomes rusted or bent or does not fit the lock, or fits in with effort? In such situations we need to change or modify the key. In sociology we both use and also constantly interrogate or question the concepts and categories.

Very often there is considerable unease about the coexistence of different kinds of definitions or concepts or even just different views about the same social entity. For example conflict theory versus the functionalist theory. This multiplicity of approaches is particularly acute in sociology. And it cannot but be otherwise. For society itself is diverse.

Activity 1

Choose any one of the following topics for class discussion :

' democracy is a help or hindrance to development

' gender equality makes for a more harmonious or more divisive society

' punishments or greater discussion are the best way to resolve conflicts.

Think of other topics.

What kind of differences emerged? Do they reflect different visions of what a good society ought to be like? Do they reflect different notions of the human being?

In our discussion on the various terms you will notice how there is divergence of views. And how this very debate and discussion of differences helps us understand society.

Social Groups and Society

Sociology is the study of human social life. A defining feature of human life is that humans interact, communicate and construct social collectivities. The comparative and historical perspective of sociology brings home two apparently innocuous facts. The first that in **every society whether ancient or feudal or modern, Asian or European or African human groups and collectivities exist**. The second that the types of groups and collectivities are different in different societies.

Groups are fundamental blocks of any society. They are seen as most enduring and stable social units. Belonging to a group is important for an individual and existence of a group is important for society. Family, village, clans, castes, class, are all examples of groups. The members of a group share certain characteristics, such as purpose, goal, identity, values, beliefs etc. there is a sense of identity and attachment associated with the group. The common thread that runs through the group and binds the members of a group together helps in maintaining social solidarity, which is essential for the maintenance of social system.

Any gathering of people does not necessarily constitute a social group. Aggregates are simply collections of people who are in the same place at the same time, but share no definite connection with one another. Passengers waiting at a railway station or airport or bus stop or a cinema audience are examples of aggregates. Such aggregates are

often termed as quasi groups. But there is a possibility that they can become a group if due to circumstances they are bound together by same reason or purpose.

A quasi group is an aggregate or combination, which lacks structure or organisation, and whose members may be unaware, or less aware, of the existence of groupings. Social classes, status groups, age and gender groups, crowds can be seen as examples of quasi groups. As these examples suggest quasi groups may well become social groups in time and in specific circumstances. For example, individuals belonging to a particular social class or caste or community may not be organised as a collective body. They may be yet to be infused with a sense of “we” feeling. But class and caste have over a period of time given rise to political parties. Likewise people of different communities in India have over the long anti-colonial struggle developed an identity as a collectivity and group — a nation with a shared past and a common future. The women’s movement brought about the idea of women’s groups and organisation. All these examples draw attention to how social groups emerge, change and get modified.

A social group can be said to have at least the following characteristics :

- (i) persistent interaction to provide continuity;
- (ii) a stable pattern of these inter- actions;
- (iii) a sense of belonging to identify with other members, i.e. each individual is conscious of the group itself and its own set of rules, rituals and symbols;
- (iv) shared interest;
- (v) acceptance of common norms and values;
- (vi) a definable structure.

Social structure here refers to patterns of regular and repetitive interaction between individuals or groups. A social group thus refers to a collection of continuously interacting persons who share common interest, culture, values and norms within a given society.

Activity 2

Find out a name that is relevant under each heading.

CASTE :- An anti caste movement A caste based political party

CLASS :- A class based movement A class based political party

WOMEN :- A women's movement A women's organisation

TRIBE :- A tribal movement A tribe/tribes based political party

VILLAGERS :- An environmental movement An environmental organisation

Discuss whether they were all social groups to start with and if some were not, then at what point can one apply the term social group to them, using the term as sociologically understood.

Activity 3

Discuss the age group of teenagers. Is it a quasi group or social group? Were ideas about 'teenage' and 'teenagers' as a special phase in life always there? In traditional societies how was the entry of children into adulthood marked? In contemporary times do marketing strategies and advertisement have anything to do with the strengthening or weakening of this group/quasi group? Identify an advertisement that targets teenagers or pre-teens. Read the section on stratification and discuss how teenage may mean very different life experiences for the poor and rich, for the upper and lower class, for the discriminated and privileged caste.

Types of Groups

Sociologists and social anthropologists have categorised groups into different types. What you will be struck with however is that there is a pattern in the typology. In most cases they contrast the manner in which people form groups in traditional and small scale societies to that of modern and large scale societies. As mentioned earlier, they were struck by the difference between close, intimate, face-to-face interaction in traditional societies and impersonal, detached, distant interaction in modern societies. However a complete contrast is probably not an accurate description of reality.

Primary and Secondary Social Groups

According to Charles H. Cooley primary groups, are those groups that are characterized by intimate face-to-face association. These groups are fundamental in the development and continued adjustment of their members.

The groups to which we belong are not all of equal importance to us. Some groups tend to influence many aspects of our lives and bring us into personal association with others. The members of primary groups have a sense of belonging. Family, village and groups of friends are examples of primary groups. Charles Cooley identifies three basic primary groups, the family, the child's play group, and the neighborhoods or community among adults. These groups, he said, are almost universal in all societies, and at all points of time; they give to people their earliest and most complete experiences of social unity; they are instrumental in the development of the social life; and they promote the integration and sense of solidarity among of the members in the larger society.

Secondary groups are relatively large in size, maintain formal and impersonal relationships. The primary groups are person-oriented, whereas the secondary groups are goal oriented. Schools, government offices, hospitals, students' associations etc. are examples of secondary groups. Secondary groups are also called as special interest groups. Maclver and Page label them as great associations and according to them secondary groups have become almost inevitable part of our lives today. Secondary groups are formed because of the growing cultural complexity in the modern, urban, industrial societies.

Community and Society or Association

The idea of comparing and contrasting the old traditional and agrarian way of life with the new modern and urban one in terms of their different and contrasting social relationships and lifestyles, dates back to the writings of classical sociologists.

The term 'community' refers to human relationships that are highly personal, intimate and enduring, those where a person's involvement is considerable if not total, as in the family, with real friends or a close-knit group.

'Society' or 'association' refers to everything opposite of 'community', in particular the apparently impersonal, superficial and transitory relationships of modern urban life. Commerce and industry require a more calculating, rational and self-interested approach to one's dealings with others. We make contracts or agreements rather than getting to know one another. You may draw a parallel between the community with the primary group and the association with the secondary group.

Activity 4

Collect a copy of a memorandum of any association that you know of or can find out about for example a Resident Welfare Association, a women's association (Mahila Samiti), a Sports Club. You will find clear information about its goals, objectives, membership and other rules that govern it. Contrast this with a large family gathering. You may find that many a time that interaction among members of a formal group over time becomes closes and 'just like family and friends.' This brings home the point that concepts are not fixed and frozen entities. They are indeed keys or tools for understanding so- ciety and its changes.

In-Groups and Out-Groups

A sense of belonging marks an in- group. This feeling separates 'us' or 'we' from 'them' or 'they'. Children belonging to a particular school may form an 'in-group' as against those who do not belong to the school. Can you think of other such groups?

An out-group on the other hand is one to which the members of an in- group do not belong. The members of an out-group can face hostile reactions from the members of the in-group. Migrants are often considered as an out-group. However, even here the actual definition of who belongs and who does not, changes with time and social contexts.

Well known sociologist M.N. Srinivas observed while he was carrying out a census in Rampura in 1948 how distinctions were made between recent and later migrants. He writes:

I heard villagers use two expressions which I came to realise were significant: the recent immigrants were almost contemptuously described as *nenne monne bandavartu* ('came yesterday or the day before') while old immigrants were described as *arsheyinda bandavaru* ('came long ago') or *khadeem kulagalu* ('old lineages'), (Srinivas 1996:33).

Activity 5

Find out about the experience of immigrants in other countries. Or may be even from different parts of our own country.

You will find that relationships between groups change and modify. People once considered members of an out-group become in-group members. Can you find out about such processes in history?

Reference Group

For any group of people there are always other groups whom they look up to and aspire to be like. The groups whose lifestyles are emulated are known as reference groups. We do not belong to our reference groups but we do identify ourselves with that group. Reference groups are important sources of information about culture, lifestyle, aspiration and goal attainments.

In the colonial period many middle class Indians aspired to behave like proper Englishman. In that sense they could be seen as a reference group for the aspiring section. But this process was gendered, i.e. it had different implications for men and women. Often Indian men wanted to dress and dine like the British men but wanted the Indian women to remain 'Indian' in their ways. Or aspire to be a bit like the proper English woman but also not quite like her. Do you still find this valid today?

Peer Groups

This is a kind of primary group, usually formed between individuals who are either of similar age or who are in a common professional group. Peer pressure refers to the social pressure exerted by one's peers on what one ought to do or not.

Activity 6

Do your friends or others of your age group influence you? Are you concerned with their approval or disapproval about the way you dress, behave, the kind of music you like to listen to or the kind of films you prefer? Do you consider it to be social pressure? Discuss.