

## 1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 01 (Class XI, Semester - 1)
Module Name/Title	Understanding social institutions – Part 1
Module Id	kesy_10301
Pre-requisites	Sociology, basic concepts, & social institutions
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Social institutions – family, marriage</li><li>2. Family and its functions and kinship</li><li>3. Variation in family forms</li><li>4. The institution of marriage</li></ol>
Keywords	Family, Functions of family, Role of social institutions

## 2. Development Team

Role	Name	Affiliation
National MOOC Coordinator (NMC)	Prof. Amarendra P. Behera	CIET, NCERT, New Delhi
Program Coordinator	Dr. Mohd. Mamur Ali	CIET, NCERT, New Delhi
Course Coordinator (CC) / PI	Dr. Sheetal Sharma	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Subject Matter Expert (SME)	Ms. Shyamala Rao	Ramjas Convent School, Pusa Road, New Delhi
Review Team	Ms. Seema Banerjee	Laxman Public School, Sarav Priya Vihar, New Delhi

---

## Introduction

This chapter is titled as understanding social institutions. In this chapter we will try to understand what are social institutions and discuss some examples of types of social institutions.

While understanding what is sociology and what do sociologists study, we have attempted to understand basic subject matter of our discipline called as sociology. Sociology is about the interaction of the individual and society. Everyone in this society as an individual occupies a place or location in society. Each one of us has a status and a role or roles, but these are not simply what we as individuals choose. They are not like roles a film actor may or may not opt to do. There are social institutions that constrain and control, punish and reward. They could be 'macro' social institutions like the state or 'micro' ones like the family. Here in this chapter we are introduced to social institutions, and also to how sociology/social anthropology studies them. This chapter puts forth a very brief idea of some of the central areas where important social institutions are located namely: (i) family, marriage and kinship; (ii) politics; (iii) economics; (iv) religion; and (v) education.

In the broadest sense, an institution is something that works according to rules established or at least acknowledged by law or by custom. And whose regular and continuous operation cannot be understood without taking those rules into account. Institutions impose constraints on individuals. They also provide him/her with opportunities. Most commonly accepted definition of a social institution is that, "A **social institution** consists of a group of people who have come together for a common purpose. These **institutions** are a part of the **social** order of society and they govern behavior and expectations of individuals". Social institutions can be defined as a 'broad goal-oriented behavior, which is firmly established'.

Social institutions regulate an individual's behaviour in a society. Social institutions establish the patterns of relationship and the ethical conduct that an individual is supposed to follow within a particular relationship pattern. Modern societies cannot exist without the presence of social institutions.

An institution can also be viewed as an end in itself. Indeed people have viewed family, religion, state or even education as an end in itself.

---

## **Activity 1**

Think of examples of how people sacrifice for family, for religion or for the state.

We have already seen that there are conflicting and different understandings of concepts within sociology. We have also been introduced to the functionalist and conflict perspective, and seen how differently they saw the same thing, for instance, stratification or social control. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are different forms of understanding of social institutions as well.

A functionalist view understands social institutions as a complex set of social norms, beliefs, values and role relationships that arise in response to the needs of society. Social institutions exist to satisfy social needs. Accordingly we find informal and formal social institutions in societies. Institutions such as family and religion are examples of informal social institutions while law and (formal) education are formal social institutions.

A conflict view holds that all individuals are not placed equally in society. All social institutions whether familial, religious, political, economic, legal or educational will operate in the interest of the dominant sections of society be it class, caste, tribe or gender. The dominant social section not only dominates political and economic institutions but also ensures that the ruling class ideas become the ruling ideas of a society. This is very different from the idea that there are general needs of a society.

As you go about reading this chapter, see whether you can think of examples to show how social institutions constrain and also offer opportunities to individuals. Notice whether they impact different sections of society unequally. For instance, we could ask, “How does the family constrain as well provide opportunities to men and women?” Or “How do political or legal institutions affect the privileged and dispossessed?”

## **Family, Marriage And Kinship**

Family is universally present. No other social institution appears more universal, inevitable and unchanging than family. Perhaps no other social entity appears more ‘natural’ than the family. Family is the basic unit of social organisation, and one can not imagine society and social organisation without the presence of this basic unit of society, i.e. family. Often we are prone to assume that all families are like the ones we live in. Sociology and social anthropology have over many decades, conducted field research across cultures to show how the institutions of

---

family, marriage and kinship are important in all societies and yet their character is different in different societies. They have also shown how the family (the private sphere) is linked to economic, political, cultural and educational (the public) spheres. This relationship between family and other social institutions also helps us to understand the relationship between sociology and other disciplines.

According to the functionalists family performs a very significant role in our lives, which contribute to society's basic needs and helps perpetuate social order. The functionalist perspective argues that modern industrial societies function best if women look after the family and men earn the family livelihood. In India studies however suggest that families need not become nuclear in an industrial pattern of economy (Singh 1993: 83). This is but one example to show how trends based on experiences of one society cannot necessarily be generalised.

As Family is universal in nature and is primary and basic social unit it is limited in size. What are the main functions of a family in society? Let us look at these:

- Main agency of primary socialisation
- Offers emotional strength and social rootedness/identity
- Stabilisation of adult personality
- Transmission/perpetuation and maintenance of culture
- Social regulation

The nuclear family is seen as the unit best equipped to handle the demands of industrial society by the functionalists. In such a family one adult can work outside home while the second adult cares for the home and children. In practical terms, this specialisation of roles within the nuclear family involves the husband adopting the 'instrumental' role as breadwinner, and the wife assuming the 'affective', emotional role in domestic settings (Giddens 2001). This vision is questionable not just because it is gender unjust but because empirical studies across cultures and history show that it is untrue. Indeed, as you will see in the discussion on work and economy how in contemporary industries like the garment export, women form a large part of the labour force. Such a separation also suggests that men are necessarily the heads of households. This is not necessarily true as the box which is given below shows.

---

## Variation in Family Forms

A central debate in India has been about the shift from nuclear family to joint families. We have already seen how sociology questions common sense impressions. The fact is that nuclear families have always existed in India particularly among deprived castes and classes.

The sociologist A.M. Shah remarks that in post-independent India the joint family has steadily increased. The contributing factor is the increasing life expectancy in India according to him. It has increased from 32.5 – 55.4 years for men and from 31.7– 55.7 years for women during the period 1941– 50 to 1981 - 85. Life expectancy in India has increased by more than 10 years in the past two decades. In 2015, life expectancy at birth was 68.3 years in India which breaks down to 66.9 years for men and 69.9 for women, which gives India a World Life Expectancy ranking of 123. As per statistics in 2015, Kerala has the highest overall life expectancy at birth, at 74.9 years–72 for men and 77.8 for women.

Male-Female ratio of expectation of life at birth (in years) for India over the years

Year	Expectation of life at birth (in years)		
	Male	Female	Male-Female Ratio
1901-1911	22.6	23.3	0.970
1911-1921	19.4	20.9	0.928
1921-1931	26.9	26.6	1.011
1931-1941	32.1	31.4	1.022
1941-1951	32.4	31.7	1.022
1951-1961	41.9	40.6	1.032
1961-1971	46.4	44.7	1.038
1970-1975	50.5	49.0	1.031
1976-1980	52.5	52.1	1.008
1981-1985	55.4	55.7	0.995
1987-1991 <sup>a</sup>	58.1	58.6	0.991
1991-1995 <sup>a</sup>	59.7	60.9	0.980
1995-1999	60.8	62.5	1.973
2015	66.9	69.9	

Source : Office of the Registrar General India

a : Excludes Jammu & Kashmir

Notes : Figures for 1901-11 to 1961-71 are based on Census Actuaries Reports and for

---

1970-75 onwards are based on the estimates from Sample Registration System.

Consequently, the proportion of aged people (60 years and above) in the total population has increased.

“We have to ask” writes Shah, “in what kind of household do these elderly people live? I submit, most of them live in joint household” (Shah 1998).

This again is a broad generalisation. But in the spirit of the sociological perspective, it cautions us against blindly believing a common sense impression that the joint family is fast eroding. And alerts us to the need for careful comparative and empirical studies.

Studies have shown how diverse family forms are found in different societies. With regard to the rule of residence, some societies are matrilineal in their marriage and family customs while others are patrilineal. In the first case, the newly married couple stays with the woman’s parents, whereas in the second case the couple lives with the man’s parents. A patriarchal family structure exists where the men exercise authority and dominance, and matriarchy where the women play a major role in decision-making in the family. While matrilineal societies exist, the same cannot be claimed about patriarchal societies.

#### Female headed households

When men migrate to urban areas, women have to plough and manage the agricultural fields. Many a time they become the sole providers of their families. Such households are known as female headed households. Widowhood too might create such familial arrangement. Or it may happen when men get remarried and stop sending remittance to their wives, children and other dependents. In such a situation, women have to ensure the maintenance of the family. Among the Kolams, a tribal community in south-eastern Maharashtra and northern Andhra Pradesh, a female headed household is an accepted norm.

#### **Families are Linked to other Social Spheres and Families Change**

Often in our everyday life we look at the family as distinct and separate from other spheres such as the economic or political. However, as you will see for yourself the family, the household, its structure and norms are closely linked to the rest of society. An interesting example is that of the unintended consequences of the German unification. During the post-unification period in the 1990s Germany witnessed a rapid decline in marriage because the new

---

German state withdrew all the protection and welfare schemes which were provided to the families prior to the unification. With growing sense of economic insecurity people responded by refusing to marry. This can also be understood as a case of unintended consequence.

Family and kinship are thus subject to change and transformation due to macro economic processes but the direction of change need not always be similar for all countries and regions. Moreover, change does not mean the complete erosion of previous norms and structure. Change and continuity co-exist.

Let us also understand the concept of kinship.

Kinship is one of the basic social institutions like family. Kins are the people who are related to each other either by bond of blood, or marriage. **Kinship** is a family relationship. **Kinship** is the web of social relationships that form an important part of the lives of most humans in most societies. Kinship has important role to play in society. The people related to each other through blood or through marriage create special groups, such as family, joint family, extended family, clans etc. The relationship between the kins is governed by set of kinship rules that prescribe particular behaviour among relatives. Family, marriage and kinship are complementary to each other. The structure, function and purpose of both these institutions may vary from society to society, but they are present in all the societies. They are universal.

### **How gendered is the family?**

The belief is that the male child will support the parents in the old age and the female child will leave on marriage results in families investing more in a male child. Despite the biological fact that a female baby has better chances of survival than a male baby the rate of infant mortality among female children is higher in comparison to male children in lower age group in India.

### **Activity 2**

A Telegu expression states: 'Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard'. Find out other such sayings that are contrary. Discuss how popular sayings reflect the social arrangement of a society.

Sex ratio in India between 1901 - 2011

Year	Sex Ratio
------	-----------

---

1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	926
2001	927*
2016	944

\* In 2001 the sex ratio of girls in 0-6 group was enumerated as 927

The incidence of female foeticide has led to a sudden decline in the sex ratio. The child sex ratio has declined from 934 per thousand males in 1991 to 927 in 2001. The percentage of decline in the child sex ratio is more alarming. The situation of prosperous states like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra and western Uttar Pradesh is all the more grave. In Punjab the child sex ratio has declined to 793 girls per 1,000 boys. In some of the districts of Punjab and Haryana it has fallen below 700.

### **Activiy 3**

Find out about the different ways that different societies go about finding marriage partners.

### **The Institution of Marriage**

Marriage is a universal human institution or social institution that forms the foundation of a family. It is an institution that is regarded as sacred and permanent and involves clearly defined set of mutual rights and obligations. Historically marriage has been found to exist in a wide variety of forms in different societies. It has also been found to perform differing functions. Indeed, the manner in which marriage partners are arranged reveals an astonishing variety of modes and customs.



---

## **Forms of Marriage**

Marriage has a large variety of forms. These forms can be identified on the basis of the number of partners and rules governing who can marry whom. In terms of the number of partners that can legitimately enter into matrimony, we have two forms of marriage, namely, monogamy and polygamy. Monogamy restricts the individual to one spouse at a time. Under this system, at any given time a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband. Even where polygamy is permitted, in actual practice, monogamy is more widely prevalent.

In many societies, individuals are permitted to marry again, often on the death of the first spouse or after divorce. But they cannot have more than one spouse at one and the same time. Such monogamous marriages are termed serial monogamy. Remarriages on the death of a wife have been a norm for men for the most part. But as all of you are aware that the right for upper caste Hindu widows was denied and that the campaign for widow remarriage was a major issue in the 19th century reform movements. What you are probably less aware is that today in modern India nearly 10 per cent of all women and 55 per cent of women over fifty years are widows (Chen 2000:353).

Polygamy denotes marriage to more than one mate at one time and takes the form of either: Polygyny (one husband with two or more wives) or Polyandry (one wife with two or more husbands). Usually where economic conditions are harsh, polyandry may be one response of society, since in such situations a single male cannot adequately support a wife and children. Also, extreme poverty conditions pressurise a group to limit its population.

### **The Matter of Arranging Marriages: Rules and Prescriptions**

In some societies, the decisions regarding mate selection are made by parents/relatives; in some other societies individuals are relatively free to choose their own mates.

### **Rules of Endogamy and Exogamy**

In some societies these restrictions are subtle, while in some others, individuals who can or cannot be married, are more explicitly and specifically defined. Forms of marriage based on rules governing eligibility/ ineligibility of mates is classified as endogamy and exogamy.

Endogamy requires an individual to marry within a culturally defined group of which he or she is already a member, as for example, caste. Exogamy, the reverse of endogamy, requires the

---

individual to marry outside of his/her own group. Endogamy and exogamy are in reference to certain kinship units, such as, clan, caste and racial, ethnic or religious groupings. In India, village exogamy is practised in certain parts of north India. Village exogamy ensured that daughters were married into families from villages far away from home. This arrangement ensured smooth transition and adjustment of the bride into the affinal home without interference of her kinsmen. The geographical distance plus the unequal relationship in the patrilineal system ensured that married daughters did not get to see their parents too often. Thus parting from natal home was a sad occasion and is the theme of folk songs, which depict the pain of departure.

Father, we are like flocks of bird

We shall fly away; Our flight will be long,

We know not to which,

Region we will go.

Father, my palanquin cannot

Pass through your palace,

(because the door is too small) Daughter, I shall remove a brick

(to enlarge the passage for your palanquin),

You must go to your home.

Rock-a-bye-baby, combs in your pretty hair,

The bridegroom will come soon and take you away

The drums beat loudly, the shehnai is playing softly

A stranger's son has come to fetch me Come my playmates, come with our toys

Let us play, for I shall never play again

When I go off to the strangers' house.

#### **Activity 4**

Collect different wedding songs and discuss how they reflect the social dynamics of marriages and of gender relations.

#### **Activity 5**

Have you ever seen matrimonial advertisements? Divide your class into groups and look at different newspapers, magazines and the internet. Discuss your findings. Do you think

---

endogamy is still the prevalent norm? How does it help you to understand choice in marriage? More importantly, what kind of changes in society does it reflect?

### **Defining Some Basic Concepts, Particularly those of Family, Kinship and Marriage**

A family is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility for caring for children. Kinship ties are connections between individuals, established either through marriage or through the lines of descent that connect blood relatives (mothers, fathers, siblings, offspring, etc.) Marriage can be defined as a socially acknowledged and approved sexual union between two adult individuals. When two people marry, they become kin to one another. The marriage bond also, however, connects together a wider range of people. Parents, brothers, sisters and other blood relatives become relatives of the partner through marriage. The family of birth is called family of orientation and the family in which a person is married is called the family of procreation. The kin who are related through “blood” are called consanguinal kin while the kin who are related through marriage are called affines. As we move on to the next section on work and economic institutions, you will notice how the family and economic life are closely interconnected.