

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 : Politics-State & stateless, Religion-Features, Durkheim & Weber concept of religion, Education – Part 3
Module Id	kesy_10303
Pre-requisites	Concept of Sociology, Politics, Religion and Education
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To understand the importance and different perspectives of social institutions• The concept and meaning of Politics, Religion and Education.• Understand power and authority, state and stateless societies• The role, function and sociological theories of religion.• Importance of education and formal and informal systems of education.
Keywords	Social system, Power, Authority, Sacred, Profane, State societies, Stateless societies, Nation, Collective consciousness, Sovereignty, Citizenship rights

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Introduction

Herbert Spencer called **society a system**.

Now, what is a system? The term 'system' implies an orderly arrangement, an interrelationship of parts. In the arrangement, every part has a fixed place and definite role to play. The parts are bound by interaction. To understand the functioning of a system, for example the human body, one has to analyse and identify the sub-systems (e.g. circulatory, nervous, digestive, excretory systems etc.) and understand how these various subsystems enter into specific relations in the fulfillment of the organic function of the body.

Likewise, society may be viewed as a system of interrelated mutually dependent parts which cooperate to preserve a recognisable whole and to satisfy some purposes or goal. Social system may be described as an arrangement of social interactions based on shared norms and values. Individuals constitute it and each has place and function to perform within it.

It is Talcott Parsons who has given the concept of 'system' current in modern sociology. Social system refers to 'an orderly arrangement, an inter relationships of parts. In the arrangement, every part has a fixed place and definite role to play. The parts are bound by interaction.

A System thus signifies, a patterned relationship among constituent parts of a structure which is based on functional relations and which makes these parts actives and binds them into reality.

Society is a system of usages, authority and mutuality based on "We" feeling and likeness. Differences within the society are there. These are, however, subordinated to likeness. Interdependence and cooperation. It is bound by reciprocal awareness. It is essentially a pattern for imparting the social behaviour.

All social organisations are, therefore, 'social system', since they consist of interacting individuals. In the social system, each of the interacting individual has a function or role to perform in terms of the status he/she occupies in the system. For example, in the family parents, sons and daughters are required to perform certain socially recognised functions or roles.

Similarly, social organisations function within the frame work of a normative pattern. Thus, a social system presupposes a social structure consisting of various parts which are interrelated in such a way as to perform its functions. It is a comprehensive arrangement. It takes within its orbit all the diverse subsystems such as the economic, political, religious and education and their interrelation too.

Keeping this very thought in mind and having seen the role of economic Institution in the previous module, now let us look at the other essential components. To begin with, let us look at Political systems.

Political Institutions

Political institutions are concerned with the **distribution of power in society**. Two concepts, critical to the understanding of political institutions, are **power and authority**.

Power is the ability of individuals or groups to carry out their will even when opposed by others. It implies that those who hold power do so at the cost of others. There is a fixed amount of power in a society and if some wield power others do not. In other words, an individual or group does not hold power in isolation, they hold it in relation to others.

Looking **at some examples of power** which is fairly inclusive and extends from family elders assigning domestic duties to their children to principals enforcing discipline in school; from the General Manager of a factory distributing work among the executives to political leaders regulating programmes of their parties. The principal has power to maintain discipline in school. The president of a political party possesses power to expel a member from the party. In each case, an individual or group has power to the extent to which others abide by their will. In this sense, political activities or politics is concerned with 'power'.

Power, therefore,

- Is basically **relational**. It is not a personal property. It is exercised in relation to others.
- Is behavioral. It is subjected to measurement and comparison on the basis of influence.
- Is situational. In order to know it one must relate it to a specific situation. Power is known by the specific role of the power holder in a specific situation.

Robert Dahl in his book 'Modern Political Analysis' writes that "Power is that relation between persons by which one person compels or instigates the other to do something which otherwise they would not have done".

But how is this 'power' applied to achieve its aim? Why do people comply with others' commands? Answers to these questions could be found with reference to a related concept of '**authority**'. Power is exercised through authority. Authority is that form of power, which is accepted as legitimate, that is, as right and just. It is institutionalized because it is based on legitimacy. People in general accept the power

of those in authority as they consider their control to be fair and justified. For example, the authority of the father in a family, authority of a captain on a ship, authority of elders in a village, authority of leaders in a political party, authority of rulers in a state etc. are various aspects of authority.

Having understood the concept of power and authority let us now look at its role in “Stateless” and “State” society.

Stateless Society

So...what are stateless society and How is order maintained in stateless society, without a modern governmental apparatus?

- A stateless society is a [society](#) that is **not governed by a state**, has no government.
- In stateless societies, there is little [concentration](#) of [authority](#); most positions of authority that do exist are very limited in [power](#) and are generally not permanently held positions;
- There was instead the balanced opposition between parts; cross-cutting alliances, based on kinship, marriage and residence; rites and ceremonies involving the participation of friends and foes.
- Thus, social bodies that resolved disputes through predefined rules tended to be small.
- Stateless societies are highly variable in economic organization and cultural practices.
- While stateless societies were the norm in human prehistory, few stateless societies exist today; almost the entire global population resides within the jurisdiction of a [sovereign state](#). In some regions, nominal state authorities may be very weak and wield [little or no actual power](#). Over the course of history most stateless peoples have been [integrated into the state-based societies around them](#).

Then what is a State?

There were two views/ perspectives on the concept of state :-----

The **functionalist perspective** which sees the state as representing the interests of all sections of society.

The **conflict perspective** which sees the state as representing the dominant sections of society

But, let us look at the general definition and features of a State----

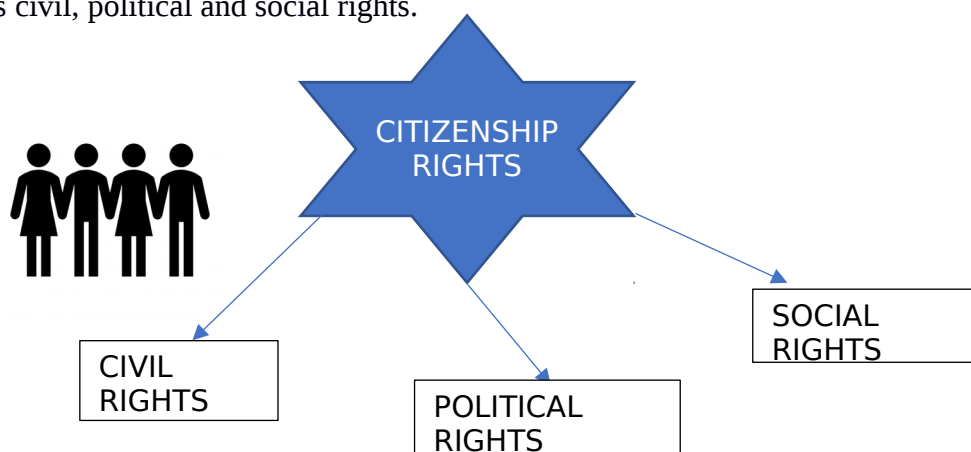
- A **state** exists where **there is a political apparatus of government** (institutions like a parliament or congress, plus civil service officials) ruling over a given territory.
- Government authority is backed by a legal system and by the capacity to use military force to implement its policies.
- These states are defined by **sovereignty, citizenship** and, most often, ideas of **nationalism**.

Let us understand each component:

What is Sovereignty? It refers to the undisputed political rule of a state over a given territorial area. The sovereign state was not at first one in which citizenship carried with it rights of political participation. These were achieved largely through struggles, which limited the power of monarchs, or actively overthrew them.

Example----The French Revolution and our own Indian independence struggle are two instances of such movements.

What is Citizenship rights? **Citizenship** is the status of a person recognized under the custom or law as being a legal member of a sovereign state or part of a nation. A person may have multiple citizenships and a person who does not have citizenship of any state is said to be stateless. Rights given to citizens is Citizenship rights. It includes civil, political and social rights.



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- **Civil rights** involve the freedom of individuals to live where they choose; freedom of speech and religion; the right to own property; and the right to equal justice before the law.
 - **Political rights** include the right to participate in elections and to stand for public office. In most countries governments were reluctant to admit the principle of universal franchise. In the early years not only women, but a large section of the male population was excluded as holding a certain amount of property was an eligibility criterion. Women had to wait longer for the vote.
 - **Social rights** concern the prerogative of every individual to enjoy a certain minimum standard of economic welfare and security. They include such rights as health benefits, unemployment allowance, setting of minimum level of wages. The broadening of social or welfare rights led to **the welfare state**, which was established in Western societies since the Second World War.

What is a welfare state? The **welfare state** is a concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the social and economic well-being of its citizens. It is based on the principles of [equality of opportunity](#), equitable [distribution of wealth](#), and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. Modern welfare states include Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands,^[3] as well as the [Nordic countries](#), such as Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland.

States of the erstwhile socialist countries had far-reaching provision in this sector. In most developing countries, this was virtually non-existent. All over the world today these social rights are being attacked as liabilities on the state and hindrances to economic growth.

Nation and state---

But what is “nation”? Benedict Anderson came up with perhaps the most famous definition; he sees it as an imagined community, because most of its members never personally met each other. This community is envisioned as both limited (by its borders) and sovereign (having the ability to self-govern). Border control is one mechanism of maintaining national identity by “protecting” the nation from dissolution in other cultures. In many cases immigrants are seen as another, against which the nation defines itself.

Nationalism, on the other hand, can be defined as a set of symbols and beliefs providing the sense of being part of a single political community. Thus, individuals feel a sense of pride and belonging, in being 'British', 'Indian', 'Indonesian' or 'French'. Probably people have always felt some kind of identity with social groups of one form or another — for example, their family, clan or religious community.

Nationalism, however, only made its appearance with the development of the modern state. Contemporary world is marked both by a rapid expansion of the global market as well as intense nationalist feelings and conflicts.

Thus, the state has four essential elements:

1. **Population**--- No state can be imagined without the people, as there must be some to rule and others to be ruled. The people constitute its "personal basis".
2. **Territory**---- People cannot constitute a state, unless they inhabit in a definite territory. When they reside permanently in a fixed place, they develop a community of interests and a sense of unity. It becomes easy to organise them into a political unit and control them. So the state requires a fixed territory, with clearly demarcated boundaries over which it exercises undisputed authority. Territory is its "material basis".
3. **Government** ---- Government is the important- indeed, indispensable machinery by means of which the state maintains its existence, carries on its functions and realises its policies and objectives. A community of persons does not form a state unless it is organised by an established government. Government usually consists of three branches: the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Their respective functions are legislation, administration and adjudication. The particular form of government depends upon the nature of the state which in turn depends upon the political habits and character of the people.
4. **Sovereignty**--- The fourth essential element of the state is sovereignty. It is that important element which distinguishes the state from all other associations. The word 'Sovereignty' denotes supreme and final legal authority and beyond which no further legal power exists.

Conclusion

Sociology has thus always been interested in the broader study of power, not just with the formal apparatus of government. It has been interested in the distribution of power between parties, between classes, between castes, and between communities based on race, language and religion. Its focus is not just on what may be called specifically political association, such as state legislatures, town councils and political parties but also associations such as schools, banks and religious institutions whose aims are not primarily political. The scope of sociology has been wide. Its range has extended from the study of international movements (such as women or environmental) to village factions.

Religion

What is religion?

In Layman's term religion is the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.

Religion has been a subject of study and reflection for a very long time. The sociological study of religion is different from a religious or theological study of religion in many ways---

- One, it conducts **empirical studies** of how religions actually function in society and its relationship to other institutions. The empirical method means that the sociologist does not have a judgmental approach to religious phenomena
- Two, it uses a **comparative method**. The comparative method is important because in a sense it brings all societies on level with each other. It helps to study without bias and prejudice.
- Three, it **investigates religious beliefs**, practices and institutions in relation to other aspects of society and culture.

The **sociological perspective** means that religious life can be made intelligible only by relating it to domestic life, economic life and political life. Religion exists in all known societies, although religious beliefs and practices vary from culture to culture.

Characteristics that all religions seem to share are:

- It has a **set of symbols**, invoking feelings of reverence or awe-- ritual acts are oriented towards religious symbols, they are usually seen as quite distinct from the habits and procedures of ordinary life. For example--Lighting a candle or diya to honour the divine differs completely in its significance from doing so simply to light a room

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- **rituals or ceremonies;** --- The rituals associated with religion are very diverse. Ritual acts may include praying, chanting, singing, eating certain kinds of food (or refraining from doing so), fasting on certain days, and so on.
 - **a community of believers.** ---- Religious rituals are often carried out by an individual in his/her personal everyday life. But all religions also involve ceremonials practised collectively by believers. Regular ceremonials normally occur in special places — churches, mosques, temples, shrines. Religion is about the sacred realm. Members of different religions do different things before entering a sacred realm. For example, covering one's head, or not covering one's head, taking off shoes, or wearing particular kind of clothes, etc. What is common to them all is the feeling of awe, recognition and respect for a sacred places or situations.

The view of religion in classical sociology

Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber had very complex and developed theories about the nature and effects of religion.

Here we will consider Emile Durkheim and Max Weber for whom Religion was considered to be an extremely important social variable.

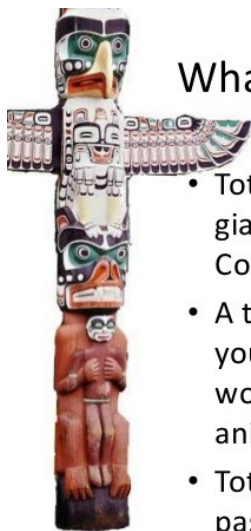


Emile Durkheim, was deeply interested in the problem of what held complex modern societies together. **Religion, he argued, was an expression of social cohesion.** He was interested in **understanding the sacred realm which every society distinguishes from the profane.** In most cases, the **sacred includes an element of the supernatural.** Often the sacred quality of a tree or a temple comes with the belief that it is **sacred precisely because there is some supernatural force behind it.** However, it is important to keep in mind that

some religions like early Buddhism and Confucianism had no conception of the supernatural, but did allow sufficient reverence for things and persons which they considered sacred.

In the fieldwork that led to his famous **Elementary Forms of Religious Life**, Durkheim, a secular Frenchman, looked at anthropological data of Indigenous Australians. His underlying interest was **to understand the basic forms of religious life for all societies. In Elementary Forms, Durkheim argues that the totems the Aborigines venerate are expressions of their own conceptions of society itself.** This is true not only for the Aborigines, he argues, but for all societies.

What are Totems? A **totem** is a spirit being, sacred object, or symbol that serves as an emblem of a group of people, such as a family, clan, lineage, or tribe. For eg: look at this image:



What is a totem pole?

- Totem poles were carved out of giant cedar trees by the Northwest Coastal Indians.
- A totem pole is kind of like a book you could read, but instead of using words it uses symbols of animals/birds.
- Totem poles were used as a way of passing down stories.



Religion, for Durkheim, is not "imaginary". Religion is very real; it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. Further he adds, we express ourselves religiously in groups, which for Durkheim makes the symbolic power greater. **Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness**, which is the fusion of all individual consciousnesses, which then creates a reality of its own.

What is collective consciousness for Durkheim?

Collective Conscience

- **Collective conscience** is a collection of beliefs, ideas, and sentiments shared by members of a community. Basically, a shared sense of reality, morality, and identity based in common/shared experiences.
- **Socialization:** Teaches individuals the norms and expectations of the group.
- We internalize these expectations and habituate to the obligations and customs of the group.



Relationship of religion with other social institutions

Studying religion sociologically, let us look at the relationship of religion with other social institutions. Religion has had a very **close relationship with power and politics**. For instance, periodically in history there have been religious movements for social change, like various anti-caste movements or movements against gender discrimination.

Religion is not just a matter of the private belief of an individual but it also has a public character. And, it is this public character of religion, which has an important bearing on other institutions of society. Classical sociologists believed that as societies modernised, religion would become less influential over the various spheres of life. The concept **secularisation** describes this process. However, Contemporary events suggest a persisting role of religion various aspects of society. Even in, traditional societies, religion has and does always play a central part in social life. Religious symbols and rituals are often integrated with the material and artistic culture of society.

Why do you think this is so?

A pioneering work by **Max Weber (1864-1920)** demonstrates how sociology looks at religion in its relationship to other aspects of social and economic behaviour.



Max
Weber

Weber argues that **Calvinism (a branch of Protestant Christianity) exerted an important influence on the emergence and growth of capitalism as a mode of economic organisation.** The Calvinists believed that the world was created for the glory of God, meaning that any work in this world had to be done for His glory, making even mundane works, acts of worship.

More importantly, the **Calvinists also believed** in the **concept of predestination**, which meant that whether one will go to heaven or hell was pre-ordained. Since there was no way of knowing whether one has been assigned heaven or hell, people sought to look for signs of God's will in this world, in their own occupations. Thus, if a person in whatever profession, was consistent and successful in his or her work, it was interpreted as a sign of God's happiness. The money earned was not to be used for worldly consumption; rather the ethics of Calvinism was to live frugally. This meant that investment became something like a holy creed. At the heart of capitalism is the concept of investment, which is about investing capital to make more goods, which create more profit, which in turn creates more capital. Thus, **Weber could argue that religion**, in this case Calvinism, does have **an influence on economic development.**

Conclusion

To conclude, Religion thus, cannot be studied as a separate entity. Social forces always and invariably influence religious institutions. **Political debates, economic situations and gender norms will always influence religious behaviour.**

On the other hand, religious norms also influence and sometimes even determine social understanding. Women constitute half of the world's population. Sociologically therefore it becomes important to ask what relationship this vast segment of human population has with religion. **Religion thus, is an important part of society and is inextricably tied to other parts.** It is thus the task of sociologists to unravel these various interconnections. Today, many extraneous factors have affected the traditional lives of the religious specialists. The most important of these are the growth of new employment and educational opportunities in Nasik. for example, after Independence, the way of life of the priests has been changing fast. Now the sons and daughters are sent to school, and are trained for jobs other than traditional ones. Like all places of pilgrimage, Nasik also gave rise to supplementary centres around religious activities. It was a normal routine for a pilgrim to take home the sacred water of the Godavari in a copper pot. The coppersmiths provided these wares. The pilgrims also bought

wares, which they took home to be distributed as gifts among their relatives and friends. For long Nasik was known for its proficient craftsmen in brass, copper and silver... Since the demand for their wares is intermittent and uncertain, hence, not all of the adult males can be supported by this occupation... Many craftsmen have entered industry and business-both small and large scale (Acharya 1974: 399-401).

Education

Education is a lifelong process, involving both formal and informal institutions of learning.

What is the difference between Formal and Informal education?

- Formal education is recognized by the state as well as industry and people tend to get job opportunities on the basis of level of formal education they have achieved
- Informal education is not recognized by the state but is important in the overall development of the individual. This system of learning is mostly incidental and verbal and not structured like formal education
- The teachers in formal education receive formal training and given responsibility to teach based upon their competency
- Formal education takes place in classrooms while informal education takes place in life
- There is a specially designed curriculum in formal education while there is no curriculum and structure in informal education
- Family is an example of informal institution of learning while school is a formal institution of education, a step towards higher education and finally employment.

For some of us it may mean acquiring some necessary social skills. What is common in all cases is that **there is a felt need for education. Sociology understands this need as a process of transmission/communication of group heritage, common to all societies.**

There is a **qualitative distinction between simple societies and complex, modern societies.**

In **simple societies**, there was no need for formal schooling. Children learnt customs and the broader way of life by participating in activities with their adults.

In **complex societies**, there is an increasing economic division of labour, separation of work from home, need for specialised learning and skill attainment, rise of state systems, nations and complex set of symbols and ideas. **Modern societies rest on abstract universalistic values.** This is what distinguishes it from a **simple society** that depends on **particularistic values, based on family, kin, tribe, caste or religion.**

Schools in modern societies are designed to promote uniformity, standardised aspirations and universalistic values. There are many ways of doing this. For example, one can speak of 'uniform dress for school children'.

For Emile Durkheim, no society can survive without a 'common base-a certain number of ideas, sentiments and practices which education must inculcate in all children indiscriminately, to whatever social category they belong' (Durkheim 1956: 69). **Education should prepare the child for a special occupation, and enable the child to internalise the core values of society.**

The functionalist sociologist such as Emile Durkheim, thus speak in terms of general social needs and social norms.

For the functionalists,

- education maintains and renews the social structure, transmits and develops culture.
- The educational system is an important mechanism for the selection and allocation of the individuals in their future roles in the society.
- It is also regarded as the ground for proving one's ability and hence selective agency for different status according to their abilities.

For non-functionalist sociologists, like Karl Marx, perceive society as unequally differentiated, **education here functions as a main stratifying agent.** And at the same time the inequality of educational opportunity is also a product of social stratification.

Schooling, they feel, 'intensifies the existing divide between the elite and the masses.' Children going to privileged schools learn to be confident while children deprived of that may feel the opposite (Pathak 2002:151).

However, there are many more children who simply cannot attend school or drop out. For instance, during the cultivation season there is almost zero attendance from the SC and ST children. This is because, they all take some household responsibilities while the parents are out to work. And the girl children of these communities seldom attend school as they do various kinds of work that are both domestic and income generating. A 10-year-old girl picks dry cow dung to sell for example (Pratichi 2002:60). Very often, gender and caste discrimination impinges upon the chances of education.

Thus, the goal of Universal Elementary Education was given high priority in National Policy of Education 1986 and 1992.

Education policies in India:

Some of the landmarks in terms of educational policies have been :

1. Article 45 of our Constitution makes education free and compulsory for all children upto the age of 14 years.
2. The Kothari Commission of 1960 laid emphasis on universal enrolment and retention.
3. A National Education Policy was adopted in 1986 with thrust on vocational education & equal educational opportunities for deprived groups.
4. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan 1986 & 1992 laid emphasis on providing useful & relevant education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.
5. Right of Children to free and compulsory Education (RTE) Act (2010) states that every child in this age group of 6-14 years will be provided 8 years of elementary education in age appropriate class room in vicinity of the child's neighbourhood.

Government has made all out efforts, through its policies and programs, to implement the Directive of the Constitution of India to universalize elementary education for everyone. Since, education is a welfare function of the state, it is the government's duty to ensure education for each and every citizen of the Nation.

Conclusion

In the broadest sense, whether social, economic, political, religious or educational, 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. An institution can thus, also be viewed as an end in itself. Indeed, people have viewed the family, religion, state or even education as an end in itself. There are thus, different forms of understanding of social institutions, be it social, political, economic, religious or educational institutions.

A functionalist view understands social institutions as a complex set of social norms, beliefs, values and role relationship 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.