

UNIT – 2

STUDYING HUMAN SOCIETY

Lesson Structure

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2.1. Introduction :

Human beings as social beings, express their nature by creating and re-creating an organization which guides and controls their behavior in myriad ways. This organization, society, liberates and limits the activities of men, sets up standards for them to follow and maintain. Whatever the imperfections and tyrannies it has exhibited in human history, it is a necessary condition of every fulfillment of life. Society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behavior and of liberties. This complex system we call society, is the web of social relationships. And it is always changing.

Social relationships are as varied as society is complex. The relations of voter to candidate, mother to child, employee to employer, friend to friend, are but a few of the varying types. The generality of the concept of "social" is borne out when we note the almost countless terms our language employs to name the many kinds of social relationships between men. Some of them we label

"economic," some "political," some "personal," some "impersonal," some "friendly," some "antagonistic," and so on.

From our definition it should be clear that society is not limited to human beings. There are animal societies of many degrees. The remarkable social organizations of the insects, such as the ant, the bee, the hornet, are known to most school children. Among all higher animals at least there is a very definite society, arising out of the requirements of their nature and the conditions involved in the perpetuation of their species. As above defined, there may be society also between animals of different species, as between a man and a horse or dog or, say, between sheep and their shepherd dog. Our concern is with society among the human species.

2.2 Man as a social animal :

We have still to mention the fundamental attribute, fundamental beyond even the sense of likeness, on which society depends. It was expressed by Aristotle when he said that man was a social animal. It is evident in man's reflection on society ever since the beginning of recorded thought that it was not good for man to be alone. Man is dependent on society for protection, comfort, nurture, education, equipment, opportunity and the multitude of definite services which society provides. He is dependent on society for the content of his thoughts, his dreams, his aspirations, even many of his maladies of mind and body. His birth in society brings with it the absolute need of society itself.

2.3 Related Primary Concepts :

(i) **Community**—The first of our primary concepts is that of community. Let us begin with examples; it is the term we apply to a pioneer settlement, a village, a city, a tribe, or a nation. Wherever the members of any group, small or large, live together in such a way that they share, not this or that particular interest, but the basic conditions of a common life, we call that group a community. The mark of a community is that one's life may be lived wholly within it. One cannot live wholly within a business organization or a church, one can live wholly within a tribe or a city. The basic criterion of community, then, is that all of one's social relationships may be found within it.

(ii) **Associations**—Associations are groups formed as means of pursuing ends. There are three ways in which men seek the fulfilment of their ends. First, they may act independently, each following his own way without thought of his fellows or their actions. However, seemingly desirable, this unsocial way has narrow limitations wherever men live together. Second, they may seek them through conflict with one another, each striving to wrest from the others the objects that he prizes. But this method, if not channelled strictly by regulation, is precarious and wasteful and is opposed to the very existence of society. Third, they may seek fulfilment by cooperating with other men live with him.

(iii) **Institutions**—Institutions are defined as established forms of procedure. It is sometimes the practice to refer to anything which is socially established as an institution. This broad usage is illustrated, for example, by H. E. Barnes' comprehensive study in which he describes social institutions as "the social structure and machinery through which human society organizes, directs, and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs." According to this understanding, the family and the state, no less than marriage and government, are institutions. But we shall gain a clearer view of the social structure if we make a distinction between institutions and associations. In this book we shall always mean by institutions the established forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity.

2.4 Environment and Human Society :

In this section we are concerned with manner and degree in which the various aspects of environment affect the social life of man. Humans are not attached to the soil like plants, but they are no less dependent on and responsive to environment. Human beings are usually capable of passing from one environment to another as well as of changing the conditions of a given environment to suit their own purposes. But they are not on that account more independent of the kind of environment in which they live. The correspondence of life and environment is amply illustrated in the case of social groups. Just as every region of a country is in some respects different from other, so also are the inhabitants of each region. An inhabitant of the Ozarks or of the Kentucky mountains thinks and feels differently from a New Yorker, just as a New Englander differs from a prairie dweller. Common observation tells us that as people change from country to city, from agriculture to industry, from mountain to plain, from hot to temperate climates, they become adjusted to the new conditions, undergoing a process of change as their environment changes. The revelation of the manner in which the environment moulds and is itself modified by the life of the group is one of the chief achievements of the social science.

The relationship between the physical environment and social phenomena has been of particular interest to two groups of American sociologists in recent decades. First, an "ecological school" has developed, stimulated by the investigations of the Late R. E. Park and of E. W. Burgess at the University of Chicago. Human or social ecology, finding suggestive analogies in plant and animal ecology, has been particularly interested in the social and cultural phenomena associated with various urban areas. Focusing upon the social effects of locality, the ecologists have elaborated the operating process,—competition and co-operation, centralization and decentralization specialization and segregation, invasion and succession—that mark the structuring of rural as well as urban communities. Their findings add considerably to our understanding of the "spatial" aspects of social life.

The positional focus of human ecology is repeated, though with a different emphasis, in the more recent "regional school" of American sociology. The regionalists, under the leadership of Howard W. Odum and his colleagues at the University of North Carolina, focus on of the potential as well as the actual interaction between man's physical environment and man's social life. Thus the United States today is found to be divided into several "natural" regions, each possessing geographical and social conditions that can be integrated, it is claimed, into a balanced way of life

2. 4.1 Three Levels of Adaptation to the Environment

We frequently hear or read the expression "man adapts himself to his environment" used in such a way as to imply that there is one fundamental form or mode of adaptation. We shall observe that, like the term "individuality," the term "adaptation" may be employed in a physical, a biological, and a social reference. [1] Physical Adaptation: Purely physical adaptation occurs whether we will it or not and it is independent of our strivings and our aims. [2] Biological Adaptation: By adaptation in the biological sense we mean that a particular form of life is fitted to survive or to prosper under the conditions of the environment. [3] Social Adaptation: The concept of social adaptation reveals an extension of the biological use. Social adaptation, however, always involves some standard of values. It is a conditional adaptation. Various sociologists speak of the process of adjustment or of accommodation, though the latter term has sometimes been used to stress the adaptation of the social being to the given conditions rather than the adaptation of the conditions to the social being.

2.5 Groups in Human Society :

Man's life is, to an enormous extent, a group life. He/she not only lives in groups and continuously creates with his fellows new groups, but he also develops a variety of verbal symbols with which to identify them. By group we mean any collection of human beings who are brought into social relationships with one another. Social relationships involve, as we have seen, some degree of reciprocity between those related, some measure of mutual awareness is reflected in the attitudes of the members of the group. On the basis of this criterion, many of those divisions of a population that are sometimes named social groups, as the people of a certain age or income level or intelligence range, are more properly thought of as statistical aggregates.

Systematic study requires that we distinguish between the broad types of grouping that permeate the social structure. One such type is the primary group, the intimate face-to face collectivity. A contrasting type is the large-scale association, the great impersonal organizations of man.

2.5.1 The Primary Group

The primary groups are the nucleus of all social organization. The simplest, the first, the most universal of all forms of association is that in which a small number of persons meet "face to face" for companionship, mutual aid, the discussion of some question that concerns them all or the discovery and execution of some common policy. The face-to-face group is the nucleus of all organization, and as we shall see, is found in some form within the most complex systems. It is the unit cell of the social structure. The primary group as a free-functioning unit is illustrated by the play group, the group of friends, the gossip group, the partnership, the local brotherhood, the study group, the gang, the tribal council. From this free form we may distinguish groups which are a part of a larger organization.

2.5.2 The Great Associations :

The nature and significance of the great associations. We now turn to a type of social group of such special significance in modern society. Where life is relatively simple, as in a primitive community or in a frontier settlement, or where for any reason the area of effective communication is small, the face-to-face group suffices for most purposes. But where society expands, another kind of association grows, necessarily, be large-scale organization with its impersonal or secondary relationships and its specialization of functions. Interests become differentiated. It is no longer localized and no longer controllable by the local group. The members are too numerous and too scattered to conduct their business through face-to-face relationships. The large-scale organization is marked by formality and mechanical regulation. There is concentration of direction as well as division of labour. The average member occupies both an active and a -passive role, and the two are not easy to reconcile. As in the state he is both citizen and subject, so in degree he is in every great association. The passive role bulks more largely the greater the association grows, and thus the members are apt to feel that its elaborate machinery lies wholly outside themselves, beyond the area of their control.

2.6 Family as Social Group :

The Family : The family is by far the most important primary group in society. Historically it has been transformed from a more or less self-contained unity into a definite and limited organization of minimum size, consisting primarily of the original contracting parties. On the other hand, it continues to serve as a total community for the lives born within it, gradually relinquishing .this character as

they grow toward adulthood. *The family is a group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children. It may include collateral or subsidiary relationships, but it is constituted by the living together of mates, forming with their offspring a distinctive unity.* This unity has certain common characteristics everywhere in human society, of which the following five are particularly significant: (1) a mating relationship, (2) a form of marriage or other institutional arrangement in accordance with which the mating relation is established and maintained, (3) a system of nomenclature, involving also a mode of reckoning descent, (4) some economic provision shared by the members of the group but having especial reference to the economic needs associated with childbearing and child rearing, and, generally, (5) a common habitation home, or household, which, however, may not be exclusive to the family group. While these five conditions are so universal as to seem essential to the very nature of the family, they may be met in extremely different ways.

Seemingly every possible variety of family arrangement is found somewhere in human society, and hundreds of volumes describing man's various family-ways attest to our interest in the subject.

2.6.1 The Mating Relationship

The mating relation may be lifelong or of shorter duration. It may, as with us, take the institutional form of monogamy, which may be strict or modified by subsidiary sex relationships. It may be polygamous, involving either polygyny, the most highly regarded arrangement in many communities, or polyandry, an infrequent, and unpopular variety. Even what seems a form of group marriage has been found in one or two 'primitive societies. A society may, in fact, recognize more than one of these varieties, as among the Tibetans, where the economically depressed practice polyandry; the better off, monogamy; and some of the wealthy nobles, polygyny.

2.6.2 Selection of Mates :

Wives (or husbands) may be selected by parents or by the elders, or the choice may be left to the wishes of the individuals concerned. It may be socially compulsory to marry within a group to which one belongs ('endogamy') or else to marry into another group ('exogamy'). Some forms of both barriers are everywhere found. But there are widely differing prescriptions as to the prohibited degrees of relationship within which one may not marry.

2.6.3 Reckoning Descent

Descent may be reckoned through the male line (patrilineal) or through the female line (matrilineal). Both systems have been used successfully, and though there is more difficulty in establishing the fact of biological paternity, many groups have shifted from the matrilineal to the patrilineal form. On the other hand, a few peoples have shifted in the opposite direction.

2.6.4 Form Of The Family Circle

Among some peoples the husband joins his wife's relatives and among others the wife joins her husband's, the residence in the former case being termed matrilineal and in the latter patrilineal. There are even instances where there are annual alternations between the patrilineal and the matrilineal abodes.

2.7. The Community :

We depicted the community as the most inclusive grouping of man, marked by the possibility for the individual member to live his life wholly within it. We explained that the community need not be self-sufficient, and in fact is decreasingly so as civilization becomes more interdependent. And we

briefly examined the two bases of all communities, the occupation of a territorial area and the shared possession of a community sentiment.

2.7.1 The Community as Concentration

Areas of higher congestion of population in some degree, but by no means wholly, correspond with regions of the earth marked by certain physiographic conditions. In some regions, such as the prairie plains, it seems geographically accidental that there should be stray settlements of people, here a village and there a town. Even when we examine the variations in soil conditions or other natural resources and the natural facilities for communication and for the amenities of living, we fail to find a consistent correlation between geographical conditions and human habitation. In the discussion of the physical environment and its relation to the social life of man in earlier days, we took account of the fact that geography sets broad limits within which there may develop a wide variety of civilizational complexes.

2.7.2 The External Structure of the Community

Every community reveals an external structural character. A country is not simply a number of towns and cities scattered over a delimited territory: it has its metropolis, its capital, its functionally specialized regions and cities, and the network of connections between them. The city is not simply an aggregate of households or families, but a system or pattern into which the units-families, occupations, specializations of all kinds-are fitted.

2.7.3 Community Sentiment: Its Psychological Configuration

The nature and basis of community sentiment. Wherever human beings are thrown together, separated in whole or in part from the world outside so that they must live their lives in one another's company, we can observe the effects of those social impulses which bring men all over the earth into communities; in other words, the formation of community sentiment. In the more permanent communities the same influences work more profoundly, rooted in the historical conditions which have created the cultural values of every territorial group. Community sentiment is developed by the socialization process itself, by education in the largest sense, working through prescription and authority, social esteem or disfavour, until habits and conformities become the ground of loyalties and convictions. The land the members occupy together is, for them much more than a portion of the earth's surface-it is their "home," enriched by past association and present experience. The sense of what they have in common—memories and traditions, customs and institutions—shapes and defines the general need of men to live together.

There are many ranges and degrees of community in modern society. Today none of us belongs to one inclusive community, but to nearer and wider communities at the same time. Moreover, our sense of attachment to our different communities varies from one to another and from time to time.

2.8 City, Country and Region :

One of the broadest and most revealing of all social contrasts is exhibited by the differences of urban and rural life. This contrast is one of social environment. It is also one that permits us to distinguish between two broad types of community organization. The city is an environment created by society, in which for the purposes of community living many aspects of the natural environment are modified or entirely eliminated. Under rural conditions social attitudes and social institutions present characteristic differences from those developed within the city. Most of the writers of the regionalist school have as an important goal, the integration of and balance between urban and rural

life. Before examining the work of this school, therefore, we must clarify this contrast. The comparison itself is beset with difficulties.

Urban and rural a matter of degree: For many centuries city and country have been the two most recognizable general types of human habitation. But between the two there is no sharp demarcation to tell where city ends and country begins. Scattered farmsteads pass imperceptibly into villages, villages into towns. A mansion set in the forest or a suburban home in the country or a hotel on the mountaintop is usually essentially urban in character. Rural and urban depict modes of community life, not simply geographical location. A comparison of city and country faces the further difficulty that the phenomena compared do not stay constant. On the one hand, the country itself becomes increasingly urbanized under the impact of the city and, on the other, cities tend to grow at the expense of the country, in large measure through migration from the country—both of these processes marking especially our own civilization. In the latter process the city comes to include a much larger proportion of country-bred residents than the country does of those bred in the city. Here two factors are significant.

2.8.1 The Rural Community

In rural life, where the family is relatively dominant and self-contained, a group responsibility prevails that tends to be more and more dissolved in the growth of the city. In the comparative absence of other forms of relationships, the patriarchal type of family tends to persist, imposing greater control over its members. The status of the individual is likely to be the status of his family. Property is likely to be thought of as a family possession. Family opinion develops about most matters of interest and is apt to permeate all its members. Generally there is less individual questioning and rebellion. Marriage itself is a duty to the family, a responsibility of the individual for the maintenance of its name and property, often determined by the family for its members, as to whether and whom the individual should marry

2.8.2 The Urban Community

Social control in the city, especially when the community reaches the dimensions of the modern metropolis, reflects the multiplicity of social contacts, the diversity of social codes, and the predominance of secondary relationships that mark the complex society. Regulation itself becomes in large part the activity of specialized associations, including the agencies of the impersonal law. Police and courts and teachers and social workers tend to take over the regulatory functions of the family head or the family circle. If the city dweller's rights are trespassed or if his child is criminally delinquent or if he has offended the legal code, most likely the judge and the law will decide the issue. On the other hand, his deviations from the norms of conduct, sexual and otherwise, may pass unnoticed, relatively unchecked by gossip or opinion, in the impersonalized urban world.

2.9 Social Class and Caste :

The meaning of social class : Communities are socially stratified in various ways. The sex division is always of major sociological significance, and division into age groups may be, as is often the case in primitive society, a predominant 'Characteristic of the internal structure of the community. But the principal type of social stratification, especially in the more developed civilizations, is seen in the phenomenon of class. Social classes, like the community itself, are more or less spontaneous formations, expressive of social attitudes. They are not, like associations or like "political classes," simply instrumentalities for the furtherance of particular interests. The class system, emanates from

and profoundly influences the whole mode of life and thought, within the community.

A social class is a portion of a community marked off from the rest by social status. A system or structure of social classes involves, first, a hierarchy of status groups, second, the recognition of the superior-inferior stratification, and, finally, some degree of permanency of the structure. Social class as a distinct status group provides us with a precise concept, which is generally applicable to any system of class stratification, wherever it is found. It regards those social differentiations, arising out of language, locality, function, or specialization, as significant class phenomena only when they become closely associated with a status hierarchy.

2.10. Caste System: Caste as Unchangeable Status :

When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot in life, without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste. By far the most significant example of a caste system is the one incorporated in Hindu society. "Every Hindu necessarily belongs to the caste of his parents and in that caste he inevitably remains. No accumulation of wealth and no exercise of talents can alter his caste status; and marriage outside his caste is prohibited or severely discouraged." Although there are some exceptions to the fixity of this order based on heredity and exogamy, and although whole castes sometimes shift position in the social structure, caste remains an almost complete barrier to individual mobility, except within the caste itself. In principle there is an absolute and permanent stratification of the community.

The strata are kept apart by the exclusion of the lower from the more intimate forms of social intercourse with the higher, and especially by the ban on intermarriage, by the observances of obeisance due from the lower to the higher, and by the reservation of honorific ceremonies, functions, and occupations to the higher while certain despised offices are relegated to the lower. In India, with the multitudinous caste compartments in the Hindu system, the higher caste groups—at the top the Brahman and next in order the *Kshatriya* and *Vaisya*—are thought of as beings of different clay from the low-caste group of the *Sudras*, while still further beyond these are the "outcastes" or "untouchables," whose very presence has been traditionally considered a defilement to the rest, who are still thought to pollute food and water by their touch, and who in some regions are not permitted to approach the neighbourhood of the high-caste Hindu. The idea of defilement is common in every caste system and reveals most clearly how caste prevents common participation of the various groups in the communal life.

2.11. Ethnic and Racial Group :

Those divisions of the community that are often discussed in sociological literature under such headings as "race," "minority groups," and "ethnic groups," with the frequent addition of the term "problems." The use of these terms is understandable in view of the fact that these lines of separation over and over again prevent the fulfilment of common interests and frustrate the satisfactory realization of the individual life.

The complexity of the problem: In the isolated societies of "primitive" life, solidified by ties of kin and place, the social differentiation, is of a relatively simple type, based usually upon sex, age, and such occupational differences as comprise the social division of labor. But in modern complex society each person belongs to one or more divisions of the population set apart from the rest by nationality, background or by unique cultural customs or by religious observance or by physical traits or, more commonly, by combinations of these factors. These "ethnic" or "racial" differences not only

frequently become the basis for a distinctive type of social group, as we shall see, but they often mix with or merge into the other types of social group. This greatly complicates the problem of analyzing ethnic and racial groups as such.

“Race” as a sociological category: Another difficulty confronting the student of ethnic and racial relations is the confused and misleading use so frequently made of the term “race.” A race is often thought of as a group biologically different because it represents a common and distinctive heredity. But strictly there are no pure races in this sense. The most we can discover, are characteristic physical types prevailing in some regions of considerable size. We may call ‘these types “races,” but we cannot regard them as the product of an exclusive heredity, since some in-mixture of outside stocks is found in every large group.

2.12. Social Change :

Social Structure is subject to incessant change, growing, decaying, finding renewal, accommodating itself to extremely variant conditions and suffering vast modifications in the course of time. Its contemporaneous aspect holds and hides the secret of its past. We know its nature, as we know the nature of the living person, only in the comprehension of it through a time-span. Its meaning is never revealed in any moment of its existence, but, finally and fully, only in the whole process through which it passes. To understand the social structure we must therefore view it in the historical process, seeking continuity, observing also how differences emerge. We must, in other words, discover the direction of change, or all is meaningless. That is why the principle of evolution becomes of supreme significance. In other fields of science the principle of evolution has become the most important clue to the discovery of order in the endless processes of change

2.13. Studying Patterns of Change :

Since change is so incessant, so hard to predict, and so manifold, we must, if we are to grasp it at all, seek to discover some kind of order in the change itself. The first thing to notice is that different subjects of change have their own particular ways of undergoing change. The basic conditions to which social change is responsive. The latter must be explained as a process contingent on the interaction of numerous factors. Any instance of social change is, in other words, the resultant of a specific and probably unique conjuncture of a considerable diversity of conditions.

2.13.1 The Multiplicity of Factors

Suppose we are seeking to explain a crime wave, an increase of suicide, a new religious movement, an outbreak of class strife. Without a change in attitudes these phenomena could not occur, and thus we must take cognizance of cultural trends in our explanation. But the change of attitude is in some sense responsive to the manner in which the interests and drives of men are affected by changes in the conditions under which they are pursued, and thus we must admit into our explanation the economic and technological and political aspects of the total situation in which the phenomenon occurs. And behind these again may lie changes in the human material-organic changes responsive perhaps to new conditions of work, to new stresses, to variations of diet, to the biological factors affecting energy, vitality, mortality, to varying degrees and types of adjustment to the physical environment.

2.13.2 Problems of the Quantitative Method

The danger of assuming that the methods of quantitative science are applicable arises from the

fact that the problem itself is, in an important respect unlike the problems with which physical science deals. We cannot apply a similar experiment to a large number of social instances, as one puts a toxin in the blood of guinea pigs. We cannot isolate a single factor x and then introduce it to a total situation to observe and estimate the degree of change in the total situation. It is quite certain that there is no mechanical solution. By no assiduous collection of instances, by no computation of coefficients of correlation, can we ever measure the contribution of each co-operative factor.

Collection and computation serve their own important purposes, but quantitative methods yield only quantitative results. Here we are not dealing with like units of homogeneous forces which combine to produce a total. The service of statistical methods in the study of social causation is to prepare the way, to reveal more precisely the nature of the factors involved, to isolate quantitative indices of aspects of the situation, and to show the degree of their coherence or non-coherence. But these quantitative indices are merely evidences of an interaction which they' do not explain; they are not the dynamic factors of which we are in quest. Like all scientists, the social scientist seeks causes, seeks to explain the "why" of change. His search in the social realm is one that must be guided by the questions, How are the elements related? How do they combine?

2.14 Questions for Exercise:

1. Discuss Groups in Human Society.
2. What do you understand by "Man as a Social Animal" ?
3. What is the importance of Environment in Human Society ?
4. How Family is related to Social Group ?

2.15 Suggested Readings:

1. Kingsley Davis : Human Society, The Mac millan and co. New York. 1959.
2. Maciver & Page : Society & Introductory Analysis, Macmillan (India), 1974.
3. Lenski & Lenski : Human Societies- An Introduction to Macrosociology, Macgrawhill Book Company, Newyork, 1972
4. Bottommore. T.B. 1972 : Sociology: A guide to problems and literature. Bombay :George Allen and Unwin (India)

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