

Notes

6



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SOCIAL GROUP

In the previous lesson, we have learnt about concepts like society, community, association and institutions. It must be clear by now that these terms refer to groupings that help us to make sense of how human beings live. However, we use the term social group specifically to convey how people live with each other as a coherent whole. Social groups are the basic units where human beings live, lead their life and enter into meaningful interactions. Sociologists use this concept in understanding the functioning of human societies.

You must have realized that human beings living in society, do not lead an isolated life. They need to have people around them with whom they can share their problems, ideas and experiences. They look for human company. Therefore, human beings are social animals. They live in society. But we have said earlier that society is 'abstract'. It can not be seen, it can only be realized through the existence and operation of various social norms, which regulate and orient individual behaviour. Therefore, the question before us is: if we can not 'see' society what meaning does it convey to us? It is in this context that the concept of 'group' assumes significance.

OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- define the concept of social group;
- understand the characteristics of social group;
- understand the types of social groups and
- distinguish group from society, institution and community.



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6.1 WHAT IS A GROUP?

A social group is simply a number of people who interact with each other on a regular basis. It establishes social relationships among social beings. Groups are units of society, having all characteristics of the society, except for the fact that groups are concrete entities. We live in groups such as family; we belong to groups like lineage and clan and the like. Therefore, sociologists have also described sociology as a science of social groups. Persons in all societies, in fact are always involved in several forms of interaction (having meaning and purpose). These interactions appear in collectivity as well as these interactions take place between persons having collectivity linked identity. These identities play an important role in forming social groups.

6.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF A SOCIAL GROUP

From the above description and definition of the social group the following characteristics may be pointed out:

1. **Number of person :** At least two persons have to be there in a group.
2. **Membership Consciousness:** Each member is conscious of his or her membership in his or her group.
3. **Organised structure:** Every group is structurally organised.
4. **Interaction with a meaning and purpose:** Interaction takes place between members with definite meaning and purpose.
5. **Sense of belongingness :** There is a 'we' feeling in a group.
6. **Common goals and interests :** Members of a group often share common goals and work together for their realisation, e.g. members of a cricket club are bound with each other to play the game of cricket to win a match.
7. **Group norms:** Each group has its own rules or norms, which the members are expected to follow.
8. **Comparative enduring character:** Each group possesses relative permanency
9. **Nomenclature:** Largely each group is known by a name.
10. **Specific culture likes language and symbols:** Each group possesses specific rules of behaviour, specific styles of interaction and language and symbols to communicate.
11. **Reciprocal Relations:** The members of a group are reciprocally related to



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each other. For example in a family, all the members are bound with each other through bonds of kinship.

6.3 SOME RELATED TERMS

To understand social group, we have to know about some related terms, which are as follows:

Collectivity – It is an aggregate of people, having lack of interactions, for instance, the people going on the road may be an example of collectivity.

Crowd – It is an aggregate of people at a certain point of time; for example, we often see number of people getting collected to watch a street play being performed in our neighbourhood. This collection forms a crowd. Crowds could be of two types i.e.

Active crowd: people clapping upon seeing some interesting episode during the time they watched the play.

Passive crowd: Number of people shopping in the local market.

Category – It is an aggregate of people possessing some common features, e.g. same sex or same income.

Now, let us see how a social group differs from these above terms.

A social group is an organised aggregate of individuals having membership consciousness united without any specificity of purpose. However, it is much more enduring than a crowd, a category and like. It has all the characteristics of “a society” but through this concept we refer to the society in a concrete way. **It is a collection of social beings, which are bound to each other through social relations.** Groups are called ‘social bricks’ by some sociologists. This means that like bricks, groups build society.

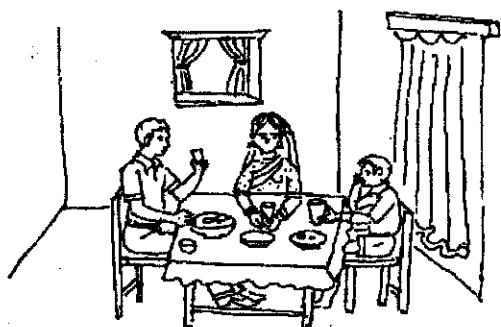


Fig.1: A Family Group



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Every human being is a member of one or more than one group like family, peer group, a club and neighbourhood, etc. Within each group human beings, interact. Sometimes they have common objects and they participate in similar activities. For example, a cricket team is one type of group and a political party is another type of group. Group activities always follow some rules and norms whose knowledge is shared by every member. A social group is an entity where you clearly watch how individuals interact with each other. Members of a group are aware of their activities, and they share a common consciousness of their joint interaction.

A social group is a dynamic entity.

New members join and old members leave thus changing the composition of the group. A group may also become smaller or bigger depending upon changing circumstances. Sometimes the purpose for which a group was formed also gets altered and new changes are brought into the group to allow flexibility. Sometimes a group is formed for specific purposes, then it becomes an association but in most cases, its goals remain diffused.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.1

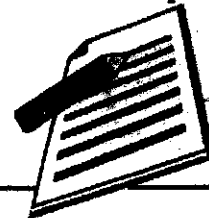
Write answer in one sentence:

- a. What do you understand by a social group

- b. Can groups be called 'social bricks'. If so, why?

- c. Do you agree with the statement that society is made up of groups.

- d. Give an example of group.



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6.4 TYPES OF GROUPS

A society is made up of groups, they are of various types and they are both similar and different from each other. In order to understand the types of social groups, sociologists classify them in various ways. Some groups form naturally like children acquiring natural membership in family as a group. Other types of group are formed as a part of some chance developments such as formation of a cricket club which different individuals may form and become its members. We also need to keep in mind that each person is a member of various groups in society. However, there are some groups which fall within a private social sphere of an individual like family and kingroup, etc., while others are part of public life of the person for example membership of a club and a political party, etc.

**FAMILY AS AN ASSOCIATION IS A GROUP WHEREAS
AS AN INSTITUTION FAMILY IS NOT A GROUP**

Some sociologists had suggested that size be taken as criteria for classifying groups. For example, even two people form a group, which is called a *dyad*, husband and wife form a group. On the other hand, we have other types of groups like *triad* that include three people and others, which consist of large number of people, an example being a youth club.

A German Sociologist, F. Tonnies has talked of two major types of groups into:

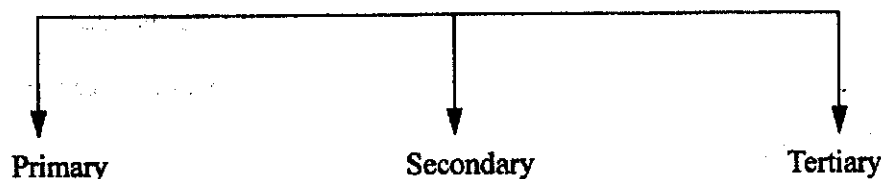
Gemeinschaft i.e. 'community' and

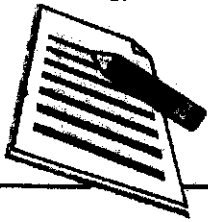
Gesellschaft i.e. 'association'.

Based on the presence or absence of formal rules, groups could be defined as **formal or informal group** e.g. family is an informal group while school is a formal group.

Groups have been classified into primary, secondary and tertiary, based on the nature of contacts.

GROUPS





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6.4.1 Primary Group

Where there is face to face contact and intimate relationship such as in a family or in a small village. Primary group and other groups (recently known as secondary groups) are parts of basic concepts. The primary group is an important component of social structure of any society. External features of primary groups are :

- Small size;
- face to face interaction; and
- physical proximity

Whereas internal features of primary groups are.

- we feeling
- altruism –good will for the group
- spontaneous growth
- enduring character
- relations as ends and as means .
- dominance of informal social norms and inter-personal relations with emotional bondage

6.4.2 Secondary Group

Where relations are impersonal, face to face contact is not present, it is called a secondary group, e.g. a political party, caste and trade unions.

The external features of secondary group are:

- Large in size-Red cross society consists of members from all over the world
- Indirect relation-The members communicate with each other by indirect means, i.e. letter, fax and telephone, etc.
- Goal-oriented-The main function of this group is to fulfill a specific need.
- Impersonal relation-The members need not meet face to face and still perform their job.
- Option of membership- membership is not compulsory. One can become a member of Rotary club or Red Cross society.



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Distinction between Primary and Secondary Groups

FEATURES	Primary Group	Secondary Group
Size	Small	Large
Duration of Interaction	Persists overtime	Short-lived
Nature of proximity	High ; face to face	Low
Nature of interests	Diffused	Specific
Nature of relationship	Close	Impersonal
Found more in	Rural society	Urban society

6.4.3 Tertiary Group

These groups comprise of many groups having similar characters and the contact or interaction is only notional in character e.g. Confederation of labour unions which comprise large number of unions.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.2

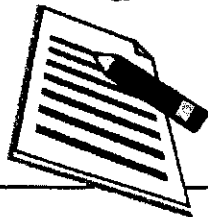
Write answer in one sentence:

1. Write the three classifications of groups based on nature of contacts.
2. In which type of group do you find face to face relations?
3. In what type of group a political party comes?

6.5 STRUCTURE OF THE GROUPS

The following is the classification of groups depending upon its structure.

Horizontal Group: Horizontal group is that organised aggregate of individuals (members) who interact without giving significance to hierarchy. For example, a group of friends or peer groups.



Vertical group: Vertical group refers to that organised aggregate of individuals (members) who interact with a conscious sense of hierarchy, for example class, caste and bureaucracy. In Indian society, castes are often organised in a vertical fashion.

In-groups and out-groups: A distinction has been made between **in-group** and **out-group** on the basis of feeling. **In-group** refers to that aggregate of members who interact with a sense of intra-group solidarity (solidarity within group). These members possess prejudices and superiority-inferiority complex toward several other groups, which are called 'outgroups.' In-groups always evaluate out-group based on own cultures. Therefore, superiority and inferiority dimensions occur. This consciousness is identified as '**ethno-centrism**'.

For example, in a village upper castes and lower castes are 'in groups' in themselves but for one another each becomes an **out-group**. In general sense **in groups** are called '**we- groups**' and **out groups** are known as '**they-groups**'.

Thus two groups differ on the basis of feelings.

Some sociologists distinguish between two types of groups based on the duration of contact i.e. **ephemeral group** or **chance group**. For example, a person who meets at a bus stop is an ephemeral group and the **enduring group** is one, which continues for a longer period of time, for example the peer group.

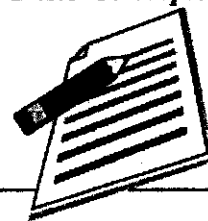
In sociological literature, we also come across a concept called **Reference Group**, which is used in contrast to membership group. While the latter refers to the group a person belongs to, the former is one whose norms and standards one emulates in his or her behaviour. It means that **reference group** is one which an individual looks up to as a model for his own actions and behaviour. He or she often wants to be a member of this group. For example, in a village, for a group of poor agricultural labourers, those having ownership of land constitute a reference group. Similarly for educated unemployed, salaried class constitutes a reference group.

Groups could also be of open and closed in nature.

Open groups are those where membership is voluntary and mobility of members is possible e.g. a soccer club

The group is an important factor in shaping the personality of individuals

In closed groups membership is restricted and mobility is relatively difficult e.g. a caste group.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.3

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from this section :

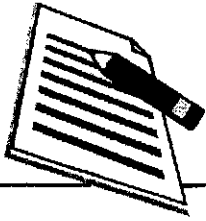
1. An example of Horizontal groups is _____ group
2. Case, class and bureaucracy are examples of _____ groups.
3. For uneducated unemployed, salaried class constitute a _____ group
4. In open groups mobility of members is _____.

6.6 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUP AND SOCIETY

Group	Society
A collection of human beings	A system of social relationship
An artificial creation	A spontaneous and natural growth
Group is organized	Society is loose collection of groups
Group may be temporary	Society is permanent
Group is a concrete aggregation	Society is an abstract concept of people
Group is marked by 'we feeling'	A sense of belongingness

6.7 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUP AND INSTITUTION

Group	Institution
• Group is a collection of people	It is a functioning entity based upon
• Group may be temporary	It is always permanent



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6.8 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUP AND COMMUNITY

Group	Community
• Group is created	It grows naturally and is also created
• Group may be formed for certain purposes	Community involves the whole life of its members
• Comparatively temporary	Comparatively permanent
• Group is a part of community	Community consists of many groups

Like this there are different forms of social group in which we all live to achieve something. It is a medium through which we learn culture, use culture and change culture.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.4

Tick mark (✓) the correct answer and put (X) against wrong answer

1. We-feeling marks primary group
2. Group is marked by a standard rules and norms.
3. Group consists of many communities.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Social groups refer to basic units where human beings live
- Groups are units of society, having all characteristics of society
- Every human being is a member of one or more than one group like family, peer group
- Group is an organised aggregate of individual.
- Each group has a sense of 'we feeling'

- There are face to face relations in primary groups
- Sociologists have identified many types of groups.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Distinguish between primary and secondary groups.
2. Describe the characteristics of a social group.
3. What is difference between **group and community**.
4. Describe in group and out group in your own words.

GLOSSARY

Altruism - sense for sacrifice for group interest

Hierarchy - unequal relation

Prejudices - biases



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

6.1

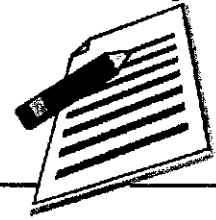
- i. Social groups refer about basic units where human beings live
- ii. yes
- iii. Yes
- iv. Family / political party or such

6.2

- i. Primary, Secondary, Tertiary
- ii. Primary group
- iii. Secondary

MODULE - I

Sociology-Basic Concepts



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6.3

i. peer

ii. vertical

iii. reference

iv. possible

6.4

i. ✓

ii. x

iii. x



SUGGESTED READINGS

R. M. MacIver and g. H Page : Society (1985)

T. B. Bottamore : Sociology (1972)

Anthony Giddens : Sociology (1993)

C. H. Cooley : Social Organisation (1909)

R. K. Merton : Social Theory and Social Structure (1968)