

Revision Notes
Chapter 2
Terms, Concepts and their use in Sociology

- According to Sociologist, Peter Berger, terminology is possibly very important for sociology, because we are familiar with its subject matter and there already exist words to denote it.
- Every discipline has a certain set of terms and corresponding concepts that will help in learning and understanding the discipline clearly. Terms can be a word or phrase used to describe a thing or express a concept, especially in a branch of study. Concepts on the other hand is an abstract idea that helps to explain or conceptualize a term to gain better understanding of the subject matter of study.
- Terms will be universal in nature and everyone associated with the branch of study will be familiar with it. However, concepts can be of different kinds based on different ideas.
- Sociology as a discipline is marked by different ways of understanding society and abrupt social changes brought due to modernisation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLOGY

- We need specific terms and concepts to understand our divergent views about how and why society exists.
- The terms and concepts reflect the concern of social thinkers to understand and map the social changes.
- It reflects the concern that sociologists had in understanding the structured inequalities between groups and society.
- Terms and concepts act as tool of different ways to understand society.
- Sociology as a discipline allows coexistence of concepts that leads to divergence of views. For example, conflict theory versus the functionalist theory. This multiplicity of approaches is particularly acute in sociology. Or, how different thinkers explain society and its functioning.

SOCIAL GROUP



- Society is formed by human interaction. Humans interact, communicate and construct social collectivities. These collectivities are referred to as social groups and exist in every society.
- We have something in common with others in the same group, we identify with the group, and the group can create a sense of belonging for us. However, the types of groups that exist may differ from society to society.
- Thus, social group refers to a collection of continuously interacting persons who share common interest, culture, values and norms within a given society.
- According to Horton and Hunt “Social groups are aggregates or categories of people who have a consciousness of membership and of interaction”.
- A group is also different from a category. If you are in the same category as a person, you may share similar characteristics—like age, height, or you both wear glasses, but you may not interact or feel the sense of belonging.
- Aggregates can thus be defined as simply collections of people who are in the same place at the same time, but share no definite connection with one another. Passengers waiting at a railway station or airport or bus stop or a cinema audience are examples of aggregates. Such aggregates are often termed as quasi groups.

QUASI GROUPS

A quasi group can be defined as an aggregate or combination, which lacks structure or organisation, and whose members may be unaware, or less aware, of the existence of groupings. For example, social classes, status groups, age groups, gender groups can be quasi groups.

In due course of time and in specific circumstances such aggregates might take the form of a social group as sociologically defined. For example, people belonging to the same caste might come together to form a caste based political party. Such political parties will be referred to as social groups as members will be conscious of their interaction and belonging.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL GROUP AND QUASI GROUP

There is a thin line difference between quasi group and social group. A group of people can take the form of a quasi-group at some point and as a social group in specific circumstances. For instance, teenagers worrying about acne and pimples, teenagers in metropolitan cities,



etc. can be examples of quasi groups. However, in specific circumstances when the group of teenagers turns out to be studying in the same class, a group of common friends, etc., it becomes social groups.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL GROUPS

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

1. persistent interaction to provide continuity;
2. a stable pattern of these inter- actions;
3. a sense of belonging to identify with other members, i.e. each individual is conscious of the group itself and its own set of rules, rituals and symbols;
4. Shared interest
5. acceptance of common norms and values
6. a definable structure

TYPES OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Different sociologists have classified social groups differently. In their classifications they take different criterion into account.

Primary Group and Secondary Group on basis of size/type of relationship

It is the most well known classification given by Cooley on the basis of size and type of relationship shared among its members.

Primary Group	Secondary Group
1. Primary group is small of people.	1. Secondary group is relatively large in size.
2. It is characterized by intimate, face to face, and emotional relationships.	2. It is marked by formal, and impersonal relationships.
3. For example, family and peer group	3. For example, Club, Residents Welfare Association

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification can thus be defined as the existence of structured inequalities between groups in society, in terms of their access to material or symbolic rewards. Ogburn and



Nimkoff defines social stratification as “The process by which individuals and groups are ranked in more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification”.

Society can be seen as consisting of ‘strata’ in a hierarchy, with the more favoured at the top and the less privileged near the bottom. Stratification has a crucial place in the organisation of society. Every aspect of the life of every individual and household is affected by stratification. Opportunities for health, security, educational success, fulfilment in work and political influence are all unequally distributed in systematic ways.

FORMS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

SLAVERY

Slavery is the extreme form of inequality in which some individuals are literally owned by others. The Greeks and Romans kept slaves as soldiers, servants, labourers and even civil servants. The Romans captured slaves from present day Britain, France and Germany. Slave armies were kept by the Ottomans and Egyptians. As a formal institution slavery has at present been eradicated. However, there are still instances of its existence found in numerous forms in many corner of the world.

CASTE AS A SYSTEM OF STRATIFICATION

1. Your social position is determined by the caste you are born in. You cannot change your caste.
2. Caste dictates the type of work an individual can do and doesn't allow occupational mobility.
3. Caste endogamy is practiced with regard to marriages. An individual can marry only within his/her own caste.
4. Caste determines one's social relationship. Social interaction is restricted by caste.
5. There is restriction in terms of food and food sharing.

CLASS AS A SYSTEM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Class system is different from the other forms of stratification in four main aspects.

1. The boundaries between class groups is not as clear cut as in the caste system.
2. Class status can be achieved and is not ascribed.



3. The class stratification is mainly based on inequalities with regard to possession of economic resources.

4. The process of inequality operates through large scale impersonal association of the members.

STATUS AND ROLE

Status: It refers to the position an individual occupies in a group or in society. Each status has certain defined rights and duties assigned to it. Examples of status- Doctor, mother, teacher etc.

Status is of two types: Ascribed Status and Achieved Status

	Achieved Status		Ascribed Status
1.	It is achieved by an individual on merit and effort.	1.	It is assigned to us on the basis of birth, biological inheritance, parents' status etc.
2.	It is based on individual's choice.	2.	A person does not choose this status.
3.	It can change qualifications, income etc.	3.	It is difficult to change status.
4.	It plays an important role in modern societies.	4.	It plays an important role in traditional societies.
	Eg. Class		Eg. Caste

MULTIPLE STATUS AND STATUS PROGRESSION

In a modern complex society such as ours, an individual may occupy multiple statuses during the course of his/her life. This is sociologically termed as status set. For example, you as a school student may be a student to your teacher, a customer to your grocer, a passenger to the bus driver, a brother or sister to your sibling and a patient to the doctor.

Individuals also acquire different status at various stages of life. This is called a status



sequence for it refers to the status, which is attained in succession or sequence at various stages of life. For example, a son becomes a father, a grandfather, and then great grandfather and so on.

STATUS AND PRESTIGE

Status and prestige are interconnected terms. Every status is accorded certain rights and values. Values are attached to the social position, rather than to the person who occupies it or to his/her performance or to his/her actions. The kind of value attached to the status or to the office is called prestige.

ROLE AND ROLE PLAYING

A role is the dynamic or the behavioural aspect of status. People perform their roles according to social expectations associated with the status that he/she occupies. This is referred to as role taking or role playing. Thus, roles are played in accordance with the status. For example, a child learns to behave in accordance with how her behaviour will be seen and judged by others.

ROLE CONFLICT

When there is incompatibility among roles corresponding to multiple statuses, it is referred to as role conflict. It occurs when contrary expectations arise from two or more roles to be performed.

SOCIAL CONTROL

Social control refers to the various means used by a society to bring its recalcitrant or unruly members back into line. It is the social process, techniques and strategies by which the behaviours of individuals or a group are regulated.

It can be the use of force to regulate the behaviour of the individuals or enforcement of values in the individual to maintain order in society.

MEANS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Social control may be informal or formal.



FORMAL MEANS

When the codified, systematic and other formal mechanism of control is used, it is known as formal social control. There are agencies and mechanism of formal social control, for example, law and the state. In a modern society formal mechanisms and agencies of social control are emphasised.

INFORMAL MEANS

In every society there is another type of social control that is known as informal social control. It is personal, unofficial and uncoded. They include smiles, making faces, body language, frowns, criticism, ridicule, laughter etc. There can be great variations in their use within the same society. In day-to-day life they are quite effective. However, in some cases informal methods of social control may not be adequate in enforcing conformity or obedience.

There are various agencies of informal social control such as family, religion, kinship, etc.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Social control can be both positive and negative through sanctions. A sanction is a mode of reward or punishment that reinforces socially expected forms of behaviour. Members of societies can be rewarded for good and expected behaviour. On the other hand, negative sanctions are also used to enforce rules and to restrain deviance.

DEVIANCE

Deviance refers to modes of action, which do not conform to the norms or values held by most of the members of a group or society. What is regarded as 'deviant' is as widely variable as the norms and values that distinguish different cultures and subcultures. Likewise, ideas of deviance are challenged and change from one period to another.

For example, a woman choosing to become an astronaut may be considered deviant at one time, and be applauded at another time even in the same society.

