

3. Basic Concepts in Sociology

3.1 Society

3.2 Community

3.3 Social Group

3.4 Social Status, Social Role, Social Norms

Introduction

Sociology is a very complex social science as it studies each and every social phenomena. At the same time, concepts in Sociology are not very easy to understand because they are abstract in nature. For example, society, community, family, interaction, conflict, culture, class, alienation, discrimination, structure, functions, etc. In this chapter we are going to learn some basic concepts in Sociology.

3.1 Society

According to Aristotle, 'man is a social animal'. He cannot live without society. Man is subjected to some elemental and derived needs which he can only satisfy within the framework of an organisation. Therefore, the collectivity which man has created during the long course of his evolution is known as society. In society we find a definite order of mutual behaviour and relations. Hence, when individuals enter into social relations, society is formed.

The term 'society' is the most fundamental one in Sociology. It is derived from the Latin word 'socius' which means companionship or friendship. George Simmel has given importance to 'Sociability'. It is an indication that we

always live in the company of other people.

The word 'society' is a very broad and known word and it is used frequently or in day-to-day life by people. For example, Arya Samaj, Tribal Society, Mahila Samaj, Co-operative Society, industrial society etc. Sociology is a science of society and hence it is necessary to understand its exact meaning. Many a times the word society is used to denote an 'association', 'organisation' or 'group'. For example, 'People's Education Society', Deccan Education Society, Ideal Housing Society etc. However, such an interpretation of society is not accepted in Sociology. In Sociology, we use the term 'society' with a specific meaning, with some kind of scientific thinking behind it. Just as physical sciences use distinct terminology, Sociology also uses distinct terms.

In this context, let us see the following important definitions of society.

3.1.1 Definitions

1. **MacIver and Page:** "Society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions of controls of human behaviour and of liberties."
2. **Oxford Dictionary:** "The aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community".
3. **Morris Ginsberg:** "A society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behaviour which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or



differ from them in behaviour.”

Sociologists feel that the most important component of society is social relationships among people. Society therefore is defined as a system of social relationships. Not every relationship is social. For a relationship to be social, certain conditions must exist:

- i) **The condition of mutual awareness:** The persons involved in the social relationship must be aware or conscious of each other.
- ii) **There must be some form of reciprocity:** Reciprocity should be between the individuals concerned.

For example, two people running in the opposite direction are aware of each other. The first condition of mutual awareness for a social relationship is satisfied. When one of them greets each other and the other responds, the second condition of reciprocity is also met and a social relationship is said to exist between the two. It is not necessary that the reciprocity is positive or friendly; it can also be conflicting.



Social Relations

3.1.2 Characteristics of Society

The characteristics of society as given by MacIver are as follows:

- (i) **Society includes likeness:** The principle of likeness is essential for society. People have similarities with regard to their needs, aims, ideals, values, outlook towards life and so on. MacIver said, “Society means likeness.” Social relationships exist among those who are alike to some degree in body and mind and who are able to sense this uniformity. Examples of similarities: belief in God, follow some code of conduct, speak the same language, live in families, have basic needs like food, shelter and clothing, etc.
- (ii) **Society includes difference:** Along with the likeness, society is also based on differences. It is an important factor for a healthy society. To satisfy different types of needs in society, different type of personalities are essential. These differences are based on sex, age, physical strength, intelligence, talent, personality and unequal possessions of material objects and wealth.
- (iii) **Interdependence:** In society, one depends upon the other for the satisfaction of one’s needs. One group, one nation, one community depends upon the other for its development. There is interdependence in family groups also. Different types of social relationships are required for the existence of society.
- (iv) **Co-operation:** According to Gisbert, ‘Co-operation is the most elementary process of social life without which the existence of a society is



impossible'. People may have direct or indirect, kinds of cooperation.

(v) **Normative nature:** Social behaviour of people is evaluated by a mechanism of social control in society. These controlling means are known as norms. Norms always attempt to control misbehaviour or the acts which are deemed harmful to society. In this context, norms try to protect society.

(vi) **Society is dynamic:** No society is static. Every society changes and changes continuously. Old customs, traditions, values, norms and institutions changes are replaced by new customs, traditions, values, norms and institutions.

3.2 Community

The term 'community' denotes almost uniformly and permanently shared lives of people over a region. A community is always considered in relation to a physical environment or territory. As MacIver and Page have stated, "The community possesses a distinctively territorial character. It implies a common soil as well as shared way of life."

When a group of people live in a definite territory to fulfill their common objectives and needs we call it a 'community'. People living in a community establish their social relationships, they have love and affection towards each other and bear a sense of belonging.

3.2.1 Definitions

1. **Bogardus E.S.:** "A community is a social group with some degree of 'we feeling' and living in given area."
2. **Oxford Dictionary:** "A group of people living in the same place or

having a particular characteristic in common."

3. **George Lundberg:** "Community is a human population living within a limited geographical area and carrying on a common interdependent life."

Community therefore includes:

- (i) Common area
- (ii) Common interests
- (iii) Common interdependent life
- (iv) Sense of 'we-feeling'

3.2.2 Elements of community

MacIver has stated two major bases of community: (i) Locality (ii) Community sentiment.

- (i) **Locality:** A community is a territorial group. It always occupies some geographical area. It has its own definite territorial boundaries. Locality is the physical basis of community. The nomadic community also has locality though they have changing habitation. A group of people form a community only when they begin to reside in a definite locality.

Living together helps people to develop social contacts. Togetherness also gives people protection, safety and security. It helps members to fulfill their common interests. People living in one locality develop solidarity. Locality continues to be a basic factor of community life.

- (ii) **Community Sentiment:** Community sentiment means a shared sense of belonging. Members must be aware of staying together and sharing common interests. People living in a community must have awareness of sharing a way of life. Due to this community



sentiment, individuals are emotionally attached to their community.

ACTIVITY - 1

Visit a rural, tribal or urban community and speak to 3-5 people and find out about their work, families, customs, beliefs etc. Write a report or make a short film on your mobile phone. Present your findings in your class.

3.3 Social Group

To the common person, the term 'social group' would mean any collection of individuals. This term is loosely used. Sometimes, the term social group is used to refer to the entire human group and sometimes, it is used to mean a small group which consists of two individuals. The concept of social group is very important. Human beings are social animals and hence have always lived in social groups. Humans everywhere live in close association with other humans. From birth, people have always lived in social groups and it is through group life that they learn to be social beings. It is through group life that we are able to satisfy various needs.

3.3.1 Definitions

1. **Ogburn and Nimkoff:** "Whenever two or more individuals come together and influence one another, they may be said to constitute a social group."
2. **Oxford Dictionary:** "A number of individuals associated or aggregated together to a greater or lesser degree, either because they share certain features, as class, ethnicity, etc., or because they are bound together by patterns of interactions."

3. **MacIver and Page:** "By group we mean any collection of human beings who are brought into human relationships with one another."

Thus, social groups indicate:

- (i) Number of people with same goals and expectations
- (ii) Regular social interaction
- (iii) Common characteristics



Social Group

3.3.2 Characteristics of social group

- (i) A social group consists of two or more persons. Without individuals there can be no group. The smallest group comprises a minimum of two individuals. e.g. two friends, wife and husband.
- (ii) Social interaction is the essential basis of group life. Social group is a system of social interaction.
- (iii) Group life involves mutual awareness.
- (iv) 'We feeling' promotes group unity. It also leads to collective consciousness.
- (v) Groups are formed for the fulfilment of certain common interests. For example, political groups, religious groups, caste groups, sports groups.
- (vi) Each group has its own norms, rules (written or unwritten), to regulate the behaviour of its members.



- (vii) Social groups are dynamic in nature. This means that social groups change from time to time.

3.3.3 Types of Social Group

Here, we are going to understand the diverse nature of social groups by studying various classifications of groups given by different sociologists.

- 1. In-Group and Out-Group:** An In-Group can be defined as any group or category to which people feel they belong. It comprises everyone who is regarded as 'we' or 'us'. The In-Group may be as narrow as one's family or as broad as an entire society. The very existence of an In-Group implies that there is an 'Out-group'. In short, an 'Out-Group' is a group or category to which people feel they do not belong.

William Sumner differentiates between these two groups. In-Group simply means 'we group' and Out-Group means 'they-group'. The members of an in-group identify themselves with one another and have a sense of belongingness to the group. Members of an in-group sometimes feel antagonistic to, or are threatened by another group, especially if the group is perceived as being different culturally or racially. Sociologists identify these as out-group or they-group. An out-group is defined by the individual in relation to one's in-group. An out-group consists of those persons towards whom we feel a sense of indifference, avoidance, disgust, competition or conflict. However, the distinction between

in-group and out-group is a matter of situational definition.

2. Voluntary and Involuntary Group:

Charles Elwood has given this classification. According to him, voluntary groups include political parties, trade unions, youth organisations, cultural associations etc. Involuntary groups include groups like family, caste, race etc.

Voluntary group membership is based on deliberate choice. The members may join or resign from the said group. There is no compulsion to become a member or to stay in the group for a long time. For example, a professional group.

An Involuntary Group is a group in which membership is based on birth or compulsion, rather than on choice. For example, caste, religious group, race etc.

Voluntary Group	Involuntary Group
Membership is based on choice	Membership is based on birth.
Leaving the membership is also voluntary	One cannot leave the membership or it may be difficult to leave the group
Examples: Political parties, Trade unions, Youth organisation, Cultural association	Examples: Family, Caste, Race



3. Small and Large Group: George Simmel has introduced this classification. Size is the basis of this classification.

Small groups include ‘Dyad’, ‘Triad’ and other small groups. Large groups represent, racial groups, nation and other big associations.

The term small group is used to refer to a group small enough for all members to interact simultaneously, that is, to talk with one another or at least be acquainted. Certain primary groups such as families, may also be classified as small groups. We may think of small groups as being informal.

Small Group	Large Group
Informal in nature and unpatterned	Formal in nature and patterned
Based on informal nature of interaction	Based on formal nature of interaction
There is personal interaction	Personal interaction is difficult
Small in size	Large in size
Examples – Family, Dyad-Triad, Kin group	Examples – Race, Nation, State, University

The German sociologist **George Simmel** is credited as the first sociologist to emphasise the importance of interaction processes within groups. Reflecting on group’s size, Simmel suggested that smaller groups have distinctive qualities and patterns of interaction which inevitably disappear

as they expand in size.

The smallest of all social groups is the ‘Dyad’ or two-member group. A married couple is an example of a dyad. When a married couple has their first child the Dyad becomes a “Triad”; that is, a three-member family or a small group of three persons.

4. Primary and Secondary Group: Social groups may also be divided into primary and secondary groups. On the basis of nature and quality of social interaction, groups are classified as primary and secondary. The groups in which individuals work through mutual cooperation and are very closely related are called primary groups. Family is the best example of a primary group. As society develops, the number of secondary groups also increase. In secondary groups, mutual relations of persons are not very close. Commercial companies, labour unions etc. are examples of such groups.

(1) Primary Group

Charles Horton Cooley coined the term ‘Primary Group’ in 1909, in his book ‘Social Organisation’, to refer to a small group characterised by intimate, face-to-face interaction and cooperation. Primary groups play an important role both in the socialization process and in the development of roles and status. Indeed, primary groups can be instrumental in a person’s day-to-day life. Family, close friends’ circle, neighbours are primary groups. This group is based on informal relations. Social life begins through this group.



Characteristics of Primary Group

- (i) **Physical proximity:** This is essential for a primary group. It is on account of physical proximity that family and neighbourhood are primary groups.
- (ii) **Smallness of the group:** It is necessary that the size of the primary group should be limited. Smallness of the group brings out the close relations among its members.
- (iii) **Permanence of relationship:** Permanent close relations create more solidarity among the members.
- (iv) **Face-to-face relationship:** Primary group is based on closeness. In such a group, face-to-face relations creates greater closeness. It is useful for maintaining group stability.
- (v) **Similar objectives and goals:** There is similarity or uniformity of objectives, goals among the members of primary groups. The members respect each other and share all kinds of feelings also.
- (vi) **The relationship is an end in itself:** The relationship in a primary group is not a means to fulfill any kind of objective. It is an end in itself. The relations in this group are very natural.
- (vii) **Informal control:** There is no formal control over its members. It is conventional and based on emotional bonds.



Primary Group

Along with all the above characteristics, primary groups also possess features like personal relations, inclusive relations, spontaneous relations and relative permanence in its nature.

(2) Secondary Group

The term 'secondary group' refers to a formal, impersonal group. This group is exactly the opposite of the primary group and totally different in nature. For example, nation, political party and trade union etc. There is limited proximity and closeness among members in secondary groups.

Dressler and Willis have defined secondary group as follows:

“A group in which the relationship among the members is relatively impersonal is called secondary group.”

Characteristics of secondary group

- (i) **Large size:** It is large in size. Membership is large and unlimited when compared to primary groups.
- (ii) **Indirect relations:** The relations among its members are normally indirect. The relations are based on letters, phone, e-mail, WhatsApp etc. Indirect relations are because the members may be spread over distant places.



- (iii) **Impersonal relations:** Persons in secondary groups may not be known to each other personally. Due to its large size, there is limited personal interaction. According to Horton and Hunt, 'Secondary groups are goal-oriented'.
- (iv) **Deliberate establishment:** As a 'Special Interest Group' secondary groups are intentionally formed to fulfill the objectives of its members.
- (v) **Formal relations:** The relations of members of secondary group are formal in nature. They are based on rules, laws, functioning etc.

Primary Group	Secondary Group
Intimate, face-to-face relations	Distant relationship
Mutual cooperation is the base	Mutual cooperation is difficult
Instrumental in a person's day-to-day life	Non-instrumental in a person's day-to-day life
Informal relations	Formal relations
Physical proximity	Physical distance
Small in size	Large in size
Permanence of relationship	Not long lasting nor permanent
Identity is the end	Deliberately established for ends
Relationship is an end-in-itself	Relationship is a means to an end
Informal control	Formal control
Examples: Family, Neighborhood, Peer group, Kin group	Examples: Nation, State, Commercial Companies, Labour Union

ACTIVITY - 2

Prepare a photo essay on interactions observed within primary and secondary groups. Students should go around in their neighbouring localities and capture with their devices (like mobiles), the interaction patterns based on characteristics of various types of groups.

How to write a photo essay?

Visit this link <http://www.collectivelens.com/blog/creating-photo-essay/>

Reference group

In Sociology the concept of reference group is given by **Robert Merton**. According to Robert Merton, individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy a social role to which an individual aspires. Reference groups are groups that people refer to when evaluating their qualities, circumstances, attitudes, values and behaviours. Thus, a reference group is a group to which we compare ourselves. We use reference groups in order to guide our behaviour and attitudes and to help us identify social norms. A group that we have been a part of in the past or of which we will be a part in the future, can also serve as a reference group. A married person may still look to her/his single friends as a reference group, even though this is a group that she/he no longer belongs to. It is important to note that a majority of us rely on multiple reference groups. Reference Groups are of two types: Informal and Formal reference groups.

Most reference groups are informal



reference groups. Group members interact at a very personal level. Examples of informal reference groups include: family, peer groups.

Formal reference groups have a specific goal or mission. They also have a specific structure and positions of authority. Examples of formal reference groups include Labour Unions, Supreme Court.

For more information on Reference Groups visit following links.

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/reference-group-in-sociology-definition-examples-types.html>

3.4 Social Status, Social Role, Social Norms

In every society social status, social role and social norms are correlated concepts. Every individual in society has a certain kind of status. We have to perform our role according to our status (position) in society. However, there are certain rules and regulations to control such roles and behaviours; these are known as social norms. Now we will consider three basic concepts as follows:

3.4.1 Social Status

Everyone has her/his own separate identity in society. This identity refers to one's position or status.

By social status we mean the position of a person in a social situation and relations. Generally, we say that the social status of a particular person is high and of some other person is low or inferior. We know the status of a person according to the prestige and power of that person

in society.

Definitions

1. **Ralph Linton** : “Status is the place in a particular system which a certain individual occupies at a particular time.”
2. **Oxford Dictionary** : “The official classification given to a person, country, or organization, determining their rights or responsibilities.”
3. **Talcott Parsons** : “A status is the positional aspect of the role.”

It is clear from the above definitions that status is a relative term. Within our society, a person can occupy the status of a President of a nation, Vice-Chancellor of a University, District Collector, Bank Manager, labour leader, teacher, parent, soldier, student, daughter etc. Hence, a person occupies different types of status at a different place. For example, a parent at home may occupy the status of teacher in school, or as customer in a market, or a citizen of the nation and so on.

Types of status

Ralph Linton has given two types of status on the basis of given status and achieved status.

1. **Ascribed status**: It is assigned to a person by society. Generally this assignment takes place at birth. It is determined on the basis of age, sex, kinship, race etc. These determinants are biological in origin but are significant mainly because of the social meanings that they have in our culture.
2. **Achieved status**: It is attained by a person largely through her or his own



effort. On the basis of a person's unique talent it is achieved. It appears in different fields in society such as politics, sports, education, and industry.

Ascribed Status	Achieved Status
It is based on birth	Obtained on merit or effort by an individual
Related with individual's biological factors such as age, sex and kinship relations	Individuals intelligence, skill, ambition, merit, effort are the bases of this status
Absence of mobility as it is static in nature	It is more mobile in nature
Less significant in modern society	More important in modern society

3.4.2 Social Role

The functional aspect of status is known as 'role'. It is also a behavioural aspect of duties which are associated with a status. When a person behaves in accordance with one's position in society, it is termed as 'role'. Hence, status and role are complementary to each other. Status and role are two sides of the same coin.

Definitions of role

1. **Ralph Linton:** "A role represents the dynamic aspect of position."
2. **Ely Chinoy:** "Role is the pattern of behaviour expected or required of persons who occupy a particular status."
3. **Oxford Dictionary:** "The function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation."

Role Related Concepts

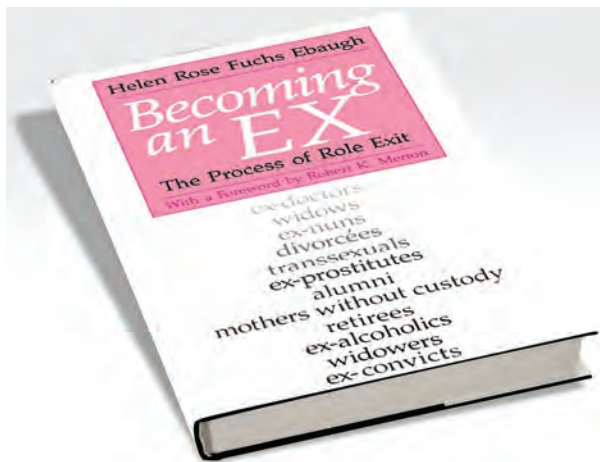
- (1) **Role performance:** The way a person actually plays one's role in a situation.
- (2) **Role set:** A set of roles (a role complex) that centres around a particular social status. For example, a University professor frequently gets involved in teaching, research, consultancy, administration, publishing, examining etc.
- (3) **Role strain:** A feeling of difficulty or stress in fulfilling the demands of one's role obligations.



Role Strain

- (4) **Role conflict:** Incompatibility between two or more roles that an individual is expected to perform in a given situation. For example, the role of a working women, who also manages the home.
- (5) **Role exit:** According to **Helen Rose**, role exit is a process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity, in order to establish a new role and identity.





Role Exit

ACTIVITY - 3

Conduct a role-playing exercise in your class to understand the concepts of role conflict and role strain.

For example: Working women performing various roles inside and outside the home.

3.4.3 Social Norms

No society and no social group can exist without norms. Norms have made possible the orderly social intercourse of people in society. Everywhere, norms serve the individual as a guide for conduct. They are generally known as 'standards of group behaviour'. The word norm is used to represent folkways, mores, laws, customs etc. It is related to conformity in society. Conformity gives stability to society and creates peace and order in society. Basically, society itself is a normative system.

Definitions

1. **Sherif and Sherif** : "Social Norm is standardised generalisations concerning expected modes of behaviour".

2. **Harry Johnson** : "A norm is an abstract pattern, held in the mind that sets certain limits for behaviours".

3. **Light and Keller** : "Norms are the guidelines people follow in their relations with one another".

Types of Norms

(1) **Folkways**: The term was first used by **William Sumner** in 1906. According to him, "folkways are the recognised ways of behaving and acting in society". For example, eating using one's fingers, eating with chopsticks, eating with fork and spoon; different ways of wearing a sari.

(2) **Mores**: According to **William Sumner**, mores are "popular habits and traditions when they include a judgement that are conducive to social welfare and when they exert a coercion on an individual to conform to them". Mores are more rigid than folkways. for e.g. sexual relations before marriage are not permitted.

(3) **Law**: Law is an important and essential element of society. It is universal in nature and compulsory as well as common for all to follow.

Karl Manheim defined Law as "the body of rules, which are recognised, interpreted and applied to particular situation by the court of the state". Law is obligatory in a complex society.

There are two types of Laws :

(a) **Customary Law**: It is followed in tribal as well as in rural society. It is not in a written form but orally transmitted.

(b) Enacted Law: This law is in a written form. It is important as well as obligatory in a modern, complex and dynamic society. It is applicable to all persons in that particular society. e.g. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

In this chapter we have learnt about core sociological terms - society, community, group, status and role and social values and norms. Equipped with this clarity, you should be able to make sense of the next chapter which deals with significant social institutions.

ACTIVITY - 4

List out various folkways and mores that we find in our day-to-day lives.

SUMMARY

- It is very essential for beginners of sociology to study basic concepts in sociology.
- 'Man is a social animal' is stated by Aristotle.
- Society means a system of social relationships.
- Communities are small as well as large.
- MacIver has stated locality and community sentiment as the major bases of community.
- Community sentiment includes we-feeling, role-feeling and dependency-feeling.
- Social groups are the products of social interaction.
- The formation of social groups depends upon two or more person's involvement.
- There are different types of social groups.
- Primary and Secondary groups is a classification of social groups given by Charles Cooley.
- Social status is the position of a person in a social situation.
- Ascribed and achieved statuses are two major types of social status.
- The functional aspect of a status is known as role.
- Both, status and role are complementary to each other.
- Social norms refers to the 'standards of group behaviour'.
- The word norm is used to represent folkways, mores and laws.

EXERCISE

1. (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the statements.

- (1) Society is based on _____.
(cooperation, competition, conflict)
- (2) Villages are a part of ____ community.
(rural, city, metropolitan)

- (3) Family is an example of a ____ group.
(large, primary, formal)
- (4) Social status refers to ____ in a group.
(function, position, purpose)

1. (B) Correct the incorrect pair.

- (1) (i) Family - Voluntary group



- (ii) Caste - Involuntary group
- (iii) Village - Primary group
- (iv) Work place - Secondary group

1. (C) Identify the appropriate term from the given options.

Role, Folkways, Society

- (1) Punctuality in class is the duty of a student.
- (2) In many places in India, eating with hands is a common practice.

1. (D) Correct underlined words and complete the sentence.

- (1) Norms which can be applied in daily life are called law.
- (2) Family is an example of a/an voluntary group.

2. Write short notes.

- (1) Characteristics of society
- (2) Characteristics of primary groups
- (3) Types of norms

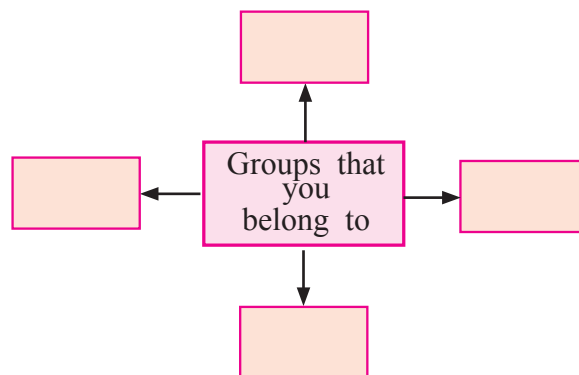
3. Write differences.

- (1) Primary group and Secondary group
- (2) Involuntary group and Voluntary group

4. Explain the following concepts with suitable examples.

- (1) Reference Group
- (2) Role Conflict

5. (A) Complete the concept map.



(B) State whether the following statements are True or False with reasons.

- (1) Society never changes.
- (2) People living in a community must have awareness of sharing a way of life.

6. Give your personal response.

- (1) Show how folkways, mores and laws may clash with each other.
- (2) Do you think that role conflict is inevitable in social life?

7. Answer the following question in detail (about 150-200 words).

Identify any two secondary groups of which you are a member. Discuss any four characteristics with reference to the groups that you have named.

ACTIVITY:

Identify any two groups that you belong to; one within your school or college, and one in your neighbourhood.

Compare their (a) group size (b) membership rules (c) organisation structure.
