



Notes

**7**



331en07

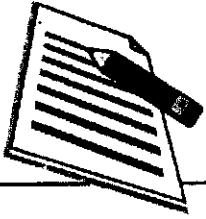
## **SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL SYSTEM**

**I**n a high school, the students change every year; some students pass out and have entered a new class. A new student gets transferred from another school; someone drops out, being unable to continue study because of financial difficulties, but the school as a social system continues to survive. We tend to take most patterns of behavior (brushing our teeth, eating breakfast, going to school) so much for granted that we usually do not pay much attention to them. But it is precisely these activities that provide clues to the structure of human societies. If we examine our daily lives, we will see the extent to which social structure influences our behavior. Our schools or employers determine when we should sleep or wake up; or when we should eat or take rest from work or studies. Most often, our parents and the demands of the job market help to shape our goals or success in life.

### **OBJECTIVES**

After reading the lesson you will be able to:

- define social structure;
- explain their chief characteristics;
- describe the bases of social structure (need, role and status);
- explain the meaning of social system; and
- explain the meaning of the structure of social system.



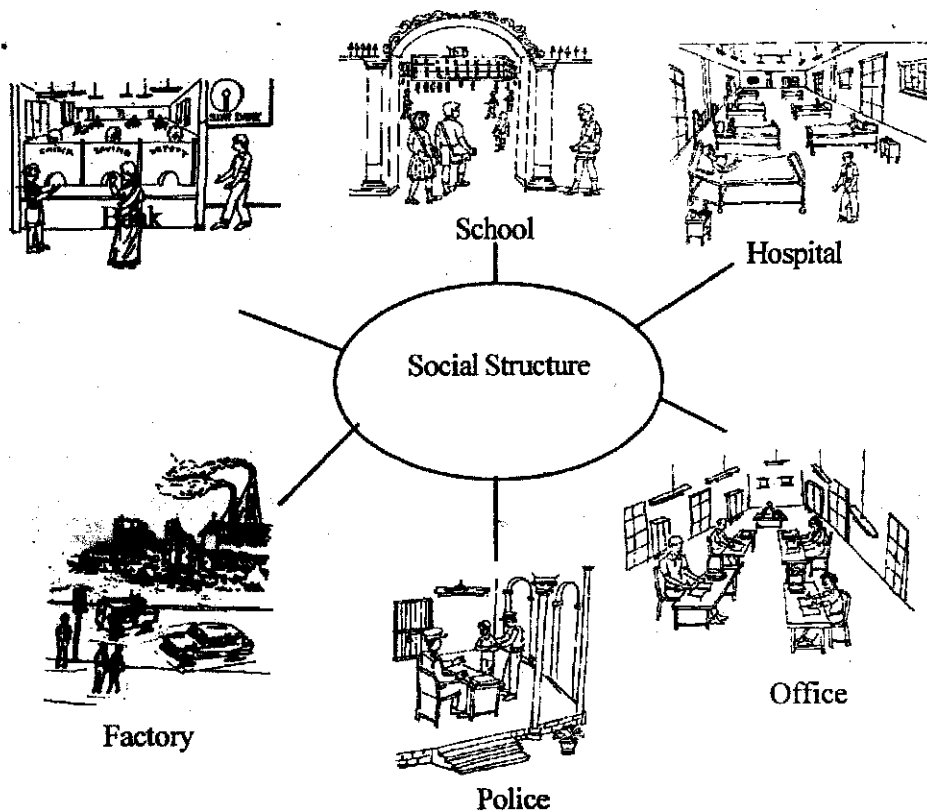
Notes

## 7.1 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

### 7.1.1 Definition of Social Structure

Social structure allows performing most of the activities of everyday life with some efficiency. It spares us from hundreds the humans perform of all those little jobs that would otherwise have to be performed before every small act, and it also gives groups and societies a degree of stability and continuity. Social structure is basically the social reality, which influences our daily life. Or, in other words, social structure is the way a society is organized into expected relationships. Social system is closely related to social structure. Every society or group has a system. Without a system no unit can function. However, we have to remember that in sociology, there is no single agreed definition of social structure. Any particular definition of social structure is the particular sociologist's way of looking at reality. Many thinkers have discussed the concept from many different points of view. Some sociologists explain and classify social structure on the basis of social values. Some other sociologists explain the achievement of goals in any structure like family or school or army as the every soul of social structure. Sociologists have often included the study of associations, institutions, and groups, in the analysis of social structure. Simply put, the term structure refers to the way the parts of anything relate to one another. That is to say, 'structure' means an ordered arrangement of parts. In other words, it is a stable internal relationship among its parts. Structure refers generally to an arrangement, which, in some way, restricts or directs human behaviour. Sociologically speaking, therefore, structure refers to the patterns of organization, which dictate human behaviour. It also puts constraints on certain kinds of human behaviour.

Social structure refers to the way the units of a group or a society relate to one another. According to some sociologists, social structure is the term applied to the particular arrangement of the inter-related institutions, agencies and social patterns as well as the statuses and roles which each person assumes in the groups. It may be said that social structure refers to the overall composition of a society. Its units are groups, institutions, associations and organizations. As we know all men and women relate themselves to each other and they establish a structural form; it may be a group, an association or an organization. Social structure is made up of these structural forms through which society functions. Actually, this structure is there before we come into the world. It has influenced many a generation before us. It shapes our behaviour and attitude in a continuous process. This process, in turn, is closely related to our status or position within the structure of society.



Notes

The meaning of social structure can be easily understood if we take an example of the organic structure of body. Body is an arrangement of different parts like hands, legs, mouth, nose and ears, etc. The body works through these inter-dependent and inter-related parts. Social structure also consists of many parts like families, schools, factories, offices, non-governmental organizations, jails, police and hospitals etc.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.1

Tick mark the correct answer:

1. Social structure refers to:
  - a. statuses and roles
  - b. a value
  - c. the way the units of a group or a society relate to one another.



Notes

2. Which of the following is a unit of the social structure?
  - a. a status
  - b. an organization
  - c. all of the above
3. An organization means
  - a. co-ordination of social relationships
  - b. co-ordination of parts
  - c. certain positions

## 7.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Social structure is created from the inter-relationship and organization of human beings, who are organized for pursuing certain common objectives and aims. To fulfill the aim, social structure must be based upon certain principles. They are as follows

- 1) **Normative system:** Normative system renders the society with the ideals and values. The institutions and associations are inter-related according to these norms. The individuals perform their roles in accordance with the accepted norms of society. For instance, old age home is not still that widespread in our society as it is in America. The difference lies in the normative structure, which inculcates different values. In Indian value system, sending a senior citizen to old age home is not quite a welcome concept compared to American society. Consequently, differences can be seen in the social structure of these two societies.
- 2) **Position system:** Position system refers to statuses and roles of the individuals. The desires and aspirations of the individual are varied. Proper functioning of social structure depends upon proper assignment of roles and statuses. For example, when you hear the word **status** you are likely to think of **position**. In sociology, status refers to the position that an individual occupies. That position may have a great deal of prestige, as in the case of a judge or doctor, or it may carry less prestige, as may be the case with a bus conductor. In addition, all of us occupy several positions at the same time. You may be simultaneously a son or a daughter and a student. Obviously, your statuses change as your particular positions change in life and society.
- 3) **Sanction system:** For the proper enforcement of norms, every society has a sanction system. It may also be understood from the perspective rewards



Notes

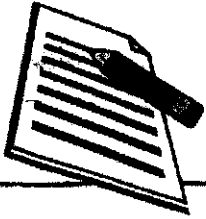
and punishments or penalties a society prescribes. The co-ordination of different parts of the social structure depends upon the conformity to social norms. Non-conformists are generally punished. But non-conformity is also an essential feature of society, otherwise there would be no change. This is the striking contradiction of social process. The stability of social structure depends upon the effectiveness of the sanction system, which tells a great deal about the social and political environment of the country. For instance, in India, at present, there is a hotly debated issue of the death penalty for rape. It is especially after Gujarat riots where many incidents of rape have been reported and also in the backdrop of the steep rising rates of rape in India. This debate has become hotter. Sanctions can be either negative or positive. Getting an A in sociology is a positive sanction, getting an F is a negative one. Getting a raise in your job is a positive sanction, being fired is a negative one.

- 4) **A system of anticipated response:** Everyday we hear the words like “work ethics”, or see the play cards, which read – “city is yours, keep it clean”. All are supposed to be the functions of a system of anticipated responses. The anticipated response system calls upon the individuals to participate in the social system. It points to the fact that individuals must realize their duties and should make efforts to fulfill them. Depending on this, a social structure can work successfully.

### 7.2.1 Meaning of Social Organization

The concept of social structure embraces the concept of social organization. Social structure is concerned with the principal forms of social organization, that is, types of groups, associations and institutions. Now let us see what the term organization means. The term organization means an arrangement of persons or parts. Thus, churches, colleges, play groups and political parties are examples of organization. In all these cases, there is an arrangement of persons or parts, which are inter-related or inter-dependent. We may take an example of educational institution or college. A college includes the principal, professors, clerks and students etc. It is nothing but an arrangement of parts or persons. Everyone has to perform a role and at the same time a co-ordination of social relationships exists.

There are many kinds of organizations. A state is called a political organization because it is concerned with political matters. A factory is called an economic organization because it is concerned with production and distribution of goods. A church is a religious organization and takes care of the spiritual issues. All these are the organizations of society. The words ‘organization’ and ‘social structure’ are closely related. But the two concepts lay emphasis on two different points. Organization asserts on the co-ordination of social relationships, while social structure includes positions and some rules along with social relationships.



Notes

## INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.2

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the brackets:

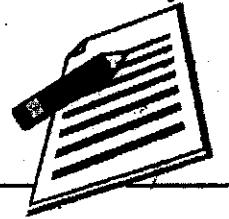
- Role means \_\_\_\_\_ behaviour (assigned, expected, definite)
- The positions an individual has in society is called \_\_\_\_\_ (rank, positions, status)
- The members of a social structure are inter-related for pursuing a common \_\_\_\_\_ (goal, rule, law)
- The stability of social structure depends upon the effectiveness of \_\_\_\_\_ system. (sanction, positive, negative)
- Being an elderly woman, an orphan child, a doctor, a lawyer is a \_\_\_\_\_. (status, need, value)

## 7.3 THE BASES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

We have discussed earlier that social structure deals with the inter-connectedness of parts. As a result, the society is able to function in a harmonious manner. Institutions, associations, groups, organizations and communities are all parts of social structure.

To understand the function of social structure, let us analyze its bases.

- 1) Need to pursue a goal** - The main constituent of social structure is human being. Human beings have diverse attitudes and interests. Social structure develops on the basis of inter-relationship between its constituent parts. A pursuit of common goal lies at the root of such inter-relationship. For instance, family or kinship system is a part of the social structure. Here all members are inter-related to each other for realizing the family happiness.
- 2) Preparedness to accept one's role and status** - Every social structure bestows to its members a fixed status and a role accordingly. A status is simply a socially defined position in a group or society. A role is the behavior expected of someone with a given status in a group or society. A status may carry with it many related roles. English teachers are expected not only to teach English but also to meet anxious parents, advise interested students in their drama endeavour and also order books for the library. Statuses and roles are determined by customs, traditions and conventions of society. These statuses give birth to different institutions, agencies, and patterns. When inter-



Notes

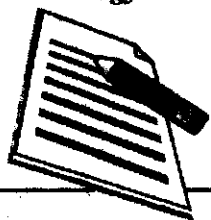
related and organized in a particular manner, all these build the social structure of a society. In a social structure, every human being is allocated a particular status and role. With the death of the individual, there is no change in the status and role itself. The new incumbent who succeeds the deceased person is to perform the same role in accordance with the same status. If the status is new (e.g. the status of a divorced single woman in Indian society), the roles that go with it may have to be worked out. The roles connected with new statuses are usually slowly being defined through the actions of those people now occupying the new statuses.

- 3) **Norms and mores** - Norms are the socially approved ways of behaviour. Norms define the role of an individual. Thus, norms play a very important role in allocating certain roles and position to the members of the social structure. This helps to make it sustained and stable. A family may have its specific norms. An educational institution has its own norms. All this help to maintain the inter-relationship of social structure. For instance, in a family, father has to perform his role; similarly mother and children have to perform certain roles. But important differences can be seen in the performance of roles by family members in Indian society and those of its American counterpart. In Indian family structure, usually mother is the key person to take care of all the family members, while in an American family, it is self-help for all the family members, including children. Furthermore, the role expectation, i.e. society's definition of the way a role ought to be played, does not always match the role performance, i.e. the way in which a person actually plays a role. In the course of social interaction, role conflict occurs when opposing demands are made on an individual by two or more roles. For instance, in a male-dominated society, a woman who goes out to work often suffers from role conflict between the demands of her mother's role and her worker's role.

### INTENT QUESTIONS 7.3

Choose the correct answers:

1. The main constituent of social structure is
  - a. groups
  - b. institutions
  - c. human beings
2. A status is a
  - a. socially defined position in a group or society
  - b. socially defined behaviour expected of someone
  - c. all of the above



Notes

3. A role is
  - a. the behaviour expected of someone with a given status in a group or society
  - b. socially defined position in a group or society
  - c. none of the above

## 7.4 MEANING OF SOCIAL SYSTEM

It is necessary to understand the meaning of the word 'system' before analyzing the meaning of the term 'social system'. System means an orderly arrangement of constituent units. In brief, the main features of system are-

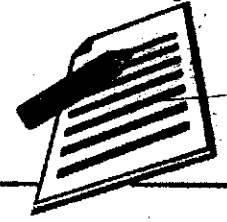
1. A system is made up of different parts.
2. There must be a systematic relationship between the parts.
3. Arrangement of these parts should create a pattern.
4. There is a functional relationship among the parts of a system.
5. All the parts create a new entity when they are functionally related.

After pursuing the meaning of system, we can now analyse the concept of social system. A **social system is an orderly and systematic arrangement of social interaction**. Social system is made up of a plurality of individuals. They interact with others according to shared norms and meaning within the social system. There are various sub-systems of a social system (like political system, religious system, economic system, etc.). They interact with each other according to shared norms and meanings within the social system.

### 7.4.1 Characteristics of Social System

- 1) Social system is based on the interaction of plurality of individuals.
- 2) The interaction must carry a meaning.
- 3) Social system is a unity. Here, various parts like institutions, customs, traditions, procedures and laws are arranged in an integrated manner.
- 4) There exists a functional relationship between parts of the social system. To understand this functional relationship, we can take example of a bicycle, which is made up of handle, two wheels, free wheel and chain, etc. But to move, the cycle wheels must be related to the free wheel and chain etc. It means parts are inter-dependent and interactive.
- 5) Social system is related with cultural system. Culture determines the nature of inter-relation and interaction.





Notes

- 6) Social system has an environmental aspect. It is related to a particular age, a definite territory and a particular society. Environment has an impact over whole activities of the life.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.4

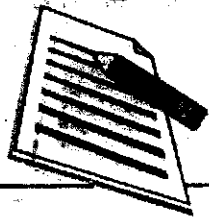
State whether the following statements are true or false:

1. Social system is not based on interaction.
2. Social system is unrelated to cultural system.
3. There is a functional relationship between the parts of a social system.

### 7.5 BASES OF SOCIAL SYSTEM

*To understand the meaning of social system, we also need to understand the bases of social system.*

- 1) **Belief and Knowledge:** Any proposition about any aspect of the universe that is accepted as true may be called a belief. Belief is the basis for social action.
- 2) **Sentiment:** Sentiments are closely related to beliefs. A sentiment denotes 'what we feel' about the world. Sentiments are the products of the experience and cultural training. Sentiment may be of various types, i.e. intellectual, ethical and religious, etc. Sentiments also have a background of historical and cultural legacy. As we know, it was the divide and rule policy of British which created such a strong and deadly religious sentiment among the Hindus and Muslims during the colonial times. Hindus had lived with Muslims for one thousand years without ever encountering a deadly and explosive situation as was the case during the British period.
- 3) **Goal or objective:** Objectives create social system. Members along with relevant social structures of a social system expect to accomplish a particular end or objective through appropriate interaction. The human needs, goals and ends determine the nature of social system. Primarily, human beings are united to accomplish the basic needs of life, e.g. food, clothing and shelter.
- 4) **Norms:** Norms are the standards for determining what is right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate in social relationships. Every social system possesses norms, which the individuals are obliged to observe.
- 5) **Status and Role:** In a social system each individual has a status. The status may be ascribed or achieved. The ascribed status is one, which is conferred



Notes

upon an individual by the group or society. It may be based on sex, age and caste, etc. The achieved status is one that an individual achieves by his own efforts. For instance, an individual may be of lower caste origin but may acquire a high status through a good economic achievement. We can also talk about an ascriptive-achieved status. For example, a scheduled caste I.A.S. officer combines both ascription and achievement elements in his status. In a social system, the individuals are expected to perform their roles in accordance with their statuses. The individuals may change but the statuses and roles remain unchanged.

- 6) **Ranks:** Rank here is equivalent to 'standing'. It includes the importance an individual has for the system in which a rank is accorded to him. An individual is given a rank on the basis of two factors. One is the evaluation made of him and the other is his act in accordance with the norms of the system. For instance, a business corporate executive enjoys higher rank than a teacher in modern society, whereas in ancient times the teacher often enjoyed higher rank than even a king.
- 7) **Power:** Most of us often feel that even though we vote and send the politicians to power positions, we actually do not matter to them in case of many decisions. Power refers to the capacity to control and deprive others. State and policing systems are the expressions of such power.
- 8) **Sanction:** It refers to the rewards and penalties given out by the members of social system as device for inducing conformity to its norms and ends. Sanction can be positive or negative. The negative sanction is, for instance, the death penalty whereas positive sanction is any rehabilitative effort for the convict.
- 9) **Facility:** A facility has been defined as a means used to attain ends within the system. It is necessary that the individuals in a social system should be provided with adequate facilities to enable them to perform their roles efficiently. Facilities should not only exist but should also be realized. The goals or objectives of a social system are realized only through the utilization of facilities.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.5

State whether the following statements are true or false

1. Norms are the standards for determining what is right and wrong.
2. Rank is not equivalent to standing.
3. Power refers to the capacity to control and deprive others.

4. Sanction can only be negative.
5. Statuses are ascribed and achieved.

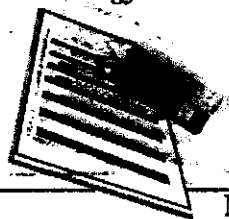


### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

- Social structure is the way a society is organized into expected relationships.
- Social structure is concerned with the principle forms of social organizations, that is types of groups, associations and institutions.
- Chief characteristics of social structure are normative system, positive system, system of sanctions and a system of anticipated responses.
- The bases of social structure are the need to pursue a goal, preparedness to accept one's role and status; norms and mores.
- System means an orderly arrangement of constituent parts.
- A social system is an orderly and systematic arrangement of social interaction.
- Characteristics of social system are based on the interaction of plurality of individuals.
- Social system is a unity. Its various parts like institutions, customs, traditions, procedures and laws are arranged in an integrated manner.
- Social system is related with cultural system and it has an environmental aspect too.
- The elements of social system are belief and knowledge, sentiment, goal or objective, norm, status and role, rank, power, sanction and facility.
- The structure of social system is based on the interaction of plurality of individuals.
- Social system relates to the functional aspect of social structure.
- Social structure is the way a society is organised into expected relationships.
- Social structure refers to the way the units of a group or a society are related to one another.
- Social structure is concerned with the principal forms of social organization, that is types of groups, associations and institutions.
- The words organization and social structure are closely related.

Notes





Notes

**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Describe in your own words what do you mean by social structure and social organisation.
2. Define the following concepts with examples (word limit 100 to 150)
  - a. Role, b. Status, c. Norm, d. Sanction, e. Power
3. Explain the chief characteristics of social system.
4. State the elements of social system.

**GLOSSARY**

- 1) Incumbent—person holding a particular office or position.
- 2) Deceased—person who has recently died.
- 3) Knowledge—Knowledge, as the dictionary meaning goes, is the specific information on a subject. In Sociology, there is a clear sub-division of Sociology of Knowledge. Its concern is with the relationship of knowledge to its social basis.
- 4) Mores—moral rules or ways of behaving that most members of a society believe are essential for maintaining standards of decency.
- 5) Ethic—the concern with what ought to be. Even though the notion of value-neutrality is concerned with social sciences or sciences, but social science investigation is also bound up with the ethical consideration.

**ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

- 7.1 1:C; 2:C; 3:A
- 7.2 a. Expected b. Status c. Goal  
d. Sanction e. Status f. Values
- 7.3 1. C; 2. A; 3. A
- 7.4 1. F; 2. F; 3. T
- 7.5 1. T; 2. F; 3. T; 4. F; 5. T