
Chapter 2

Terms, Concepts and Their Use in Sociology

❖ Terms and concepts

- Terms are important in sociology to precisely identify social institutions and distinguish them.
- Concepts reflect the concern of social thinkers to understand social changes.
- The two major concepts are the conflict perspective of Karl Marx and the functionalist perspective of thinkers like Emile Durkheim.

❖ Social Group

- A social group is a collection of continuously interacting persons who share common interests, culture, values and norms within a given society.
- The pattern of interactions is stable and takes place in a structured manner.
- **Social structure** is the pattern of regular and repetitive interaction between individuals and groups.

❖ Types of Social Groups

- **Primary Group:** In this group, the individual is connected to each other on the basis of cordial relations, face to face interaction and co-operation. It is person-oriented and small in size. Family, peer groups etc are best examples of primary social group.
- **Secondary Group:** In this group the individuals are connected to each other on the basis of formal and impersonal relationships. This group is relatively large in size and formed on the basis of a purpose. It is goal-oriented. Hospitals, offices are examples of secondary group.
- **In- Group:** This group has the feeling of belongingness.
- **Out Group:** The out group is considered to be the group that the individuals cannot relate with themselves and lacks feeling of belonging.
- **Reference group:** This is the group that the individual does not belong to but aspires to be like it.
- **Peer Group:** This group is formed between individuals of the same age group or common professional group.
- **Community:** It refers to personal, intimate and enduring human relationships with a considerable involvement of the individual.
- **Society:** It is impersonal, superficial and transitory in urban environment. The dealings between individuals are calculating, rational and motivated by self-interest.

❖ **Social Stratification**

- **Social stratification** is the existence of structured inequalities between groups in society in terms of their access to material or symbolic rewards. The upper strata dominate the lower strata.
- **Caste** is a form of social stratification on the basis of birth and later transformed on the basis of occupation.
- **Class** is a kind of social stratification that is formed on the basis of achieved status of its members and is generally stratified on the basis of their relation to means of production or access to life chances.

❖ **Status and Role**

- Status is the social position of an individual or a group with defined rights and duties in the society. It may be either ascribed involuntarily or achieved by personal ability.
- A role is the behavioural or dynamic aspect of status.

❖ **Social Control**

- Social control refers to the social processes, techniques and strategies used by the society to bring its recalcitrant or unruly members back into line to prevent social disorganisation and protect social integration.
- The functionalist perspective views social control as the use of force to regulate individual behaviour and enforce values and patterns.
- The conflict theorists view social control as a means to impose the will of dominant classes on the rest of the society.
- **Formal social control** refers to the use of codified, systematic and other formal mechanism of control. Law and state are the examples of agencies of formal social control.
- **Informal social control** is exercised by uncoded, unofficial and personal mechanisms of control. Family, kinship, religion are the examples of agencies of informal social control.
- Sanction is a mode of reward or punishment that reinforces socially expected behaviour.
- Deviance refers to modes of action that do not conform to social norms and values. The notion of deviant behaviour changes across space and time.

❖ **Important Terms and Definitions**

- **Conflict Theories:** A sociological perspective that focuses on competing interests, tensions or divisions present in human societies.
- **Functionalism:** A theoretical perspective based on the idea that social events can be best explained in terms of the functions they perform.
- **Natal:** It relates to the place or time of the birth of an individual.

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- **Norms:** Rules of behaviour which reflecting the cultural values by either prescribing a given type of behaviour or forbidding it.
 - **Sanctions:** A reward or punishment that regulates the social behavior of an individual.
 - **Sociology:** The study of human social life.
 - **Social Structure:** The patterns of regular interaction between individuals and groups.
 - **Status Sequence:** The status which is attained in succession at various stages of life.
 - **Ascribed Status:** The status given to a person from birth on the basis of his/her social group.
 - **Achieved Status:** The status occupied by a person on the basis of his/her achievements.