

SOCIETY

Introduction

In a general sense, ‘society’ is a universal condition of human life. Society has been the central theoretical object of much European anthropology, especially British social anthropology, so that any history of anthropological theoretical use of the term swiftly becomes a history of anthropological theory.

The idea of a society in anthropology generally refers to a human group having some of the following properties: territoriality; recruitment primarily by sexual reproduction of its members; having institutional organizations; and cultural distinctiveness.

It is a fact that all anthropologists do not agree that society always refers to social groupings or collectivity. The term, ‘society’ has been approached differently by different anthropologists-

Zinsberg argued that- “a society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or modes of the behavior which mark them from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behavior.”

MacIver opined that- “society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of control of human behavior and liberties. This everchanging complex system is called society. It is the web of social relationship.”

The above two opinions of society reflects a difference- Zinsberg indicated the notion of a society as a collection of individuals with specific kinds of relations and behavior. On the contrary MacIver holds the view of a society as a dynamic system of social relationships.

In a most general sense, society is a humanly created organization or system of interrelationships that connects individuals in a common culture. Humans create their interactions, and once created the products of those interactions have the ability or power to act back upon humans to determine or constrain action.

The Fundamental Characteristics of Society

- Society is a network of relationships.
- Society is based on social interactions.
- There is a sense of mutual awareness among the members of a society.

A Brief Typology of Society

Society can be divided into multiple categories on the basis of economic strategies, religious ideology, geographical territory, language and so on. For a very brief outlook, the types of society on the basis of economic strategy are discussed below.

- **Hunting Gathering Society:**

The members of hunting and gathering societies primarily survive by hunting animals, fishing, and gathering plants. To survive, early human societies completely depended upon their immediate environment. When the animals left the area, the plants died, or the rivers dried up, the society had to relocate to an area where resources were plentiful.

- **Pastoral Society:**

Members of pastoral societies pasture animals for food and transportation. Pastoral societies still exist today, primarily in the desert lands of North Africa where horticulture and manufacturing are not possible. Domesticating animals allows for a more manageable food supply than do hunting and gathering. Hence, pastoral societies are able to produce a surplus of goods, which makes storing food for future use a possibility.

- **Horticultural Society:**

Unlike pastoral societies that rely on domesticating animals, horticultural societies rely on cultivating fruits, vegetables, and plants. These societies first appeared in different parts of the planet about the same time as pastoral societies. Horticultural societies occasionally produced a surplus, which

permitted storage as well as the emergence of other professions not related to the survival of the society.

- Agricultural Society:

Agricultural societies use technological advances to cultivate crops (especially grains like wheat, rice, corn, and barley) over a large area. Increases in food supplies then led to larger populations than in earlier communities. This meant a greater surplus, which resulted in towns that became centers of trade supporting various rulers, educators, craftspeople, merchants, and religious leaders who did not have to worry about locating nourishment. Greater degrees of social stratification appeared in agricultural societies.

- Industrial Society:

Industrial societies are based on using machines (particularly fuel-driven ones) to produce goods. As productivity increased, means of transportation improved to better facilitate the transfer of products from place to place. Great wealth was attained by the few who owned factories, and the “masses” found jobs working in the factories. Industrialization brought about changes in almost every aspect of society.

- Post Industrial Society:

Sociologists note that with the advent of the computer microchip, the world is witnessing a technological revolution. This revolution is creating a postindustrial society based on information, knowledge, and the selling of services. That is, rather than being driven by the factory production of goods, society is being shaped by the human mind, aided by computer technology.

SOCIAL GROUP

Introduction

In anthropology, group is usually defined as a collection of humans, who share certain characteristics, interact with one another, accept expectations and obligations as members of the group, and share a common identity. A social group is a kind of social organization. Social groups are generally small organizations composed of individual tied together in personal relation.

Gillin and Gillin opined that- “ a social group, thus, grows out of and requires a situation which permits meaningful response between the individuals involved, common focusing of attention on common stimuli and interest and the development of certain drives, motivation or emotions.”

We can exemplify the opinion of Gillin and Gillin as- if one brings a small collection of strangers in a restricted place and environment, provide a common goal, and may be a few ground rules, a predictable flow of behavior will follow. Interaction between individuals is the basic requirement. At first, individuals will differently interact in sets of twos or threes while seeking to interact with those with whom they share something in common: i.e. interests, skills and cultural background. Relationships will develop within the small sets gradually and become small groups.

The Fundamental Characteristics of Social Group

Generally a social group reflects some fundamental Characteristics-

- Common motives and goals
- An accepted division of labor, i.e. roles
- Established status (social rank, dominance) relationships
- Accepted norms and values with reference to matters relevant to the group

A Brief Typology of Social Group

The most significant classification of social group was given by C.H. Cooley. Cooley classified social group into two categories-

- **Primary Groups-** consists of small groups with intimate, kin based relationships: families, for example. They commonly last for years. They are small and display face to face interaction.
- **Secondary Groups-** in contrast to primary groups, secondary groups are large groups whose relationships are formal and institutional. Some of them may last for years but some may disband after short a lifetime.

Muzafer Sherif introduced another social group, namely- **reference groups-** these are groups to which the individuals does not have real membership, but to which he conceptually relates her/himself, and from which he might accept goals and values as a part of her/his self identity.