

11th Sociology

Chapter 3

Understanding Social Institutions

An institution is something that works according to rules established or at least acknowledged by law or by custom. Thus, “an established and structured pattern of behaviour or of relationships that is accepted as a fundamental part of a culture” can be referred to as social institutions. There are social institutions that constrain and control, punish and reward. Social institutions can be macro like the state or micro like the family.

FAMILY

- According to Burgess and Locke, "A group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household, interacting and inter-communicating with each other in their respective social rites of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister, creating a common culture."
- Family is the most natural social entity that appears to be universal and unchanging. It is important in all societies yet different in characteristics in different societies.
- The private sphere of family is also linked to economic, political, cultural and educational entity in the public sphere.
- According to the functionalists “the family performs important tasks, which contribute to society’s basic needs and helps perpetuate social order”.
- The functionalist perspective argues that modern industrial societies function best if women look after the family and men earn the family livelihood.
- According to the functionalist perspective, the nuclear family is seen as the unit best equipped to handle the demands of industrial society. They believe that in such families one adult can work outside home while the second adult cares for the home and children.

Characteristics of a Family

1. A mating relationship: A family comes into existence when a man and a woman establish a mating relation between them.
2. A form of marriage: A family requires a home, a householder, for its living. Without a dwelling place the task of child bearing and child rearing cannot be adequately performed.
3. A system of nomenclature: Every family is known by a name and has its own system of reckoning descent. Descent may be reckoned through the male line or through the female line. Usually the wife goes and joins her husband's family in a patriarchal system and vice-versa in a matriarchal system.
4. An economic provision: Every family needs an economic provision to satisfy the economic needs. The head of the family carries on a certain profession and earns money to maintain the family.

Thus it can be said that family is a biological unit employing institutionalised sex relationship between husband and wife. It is based on the fact of production and nurture of the child is its important function. It is a universal institution found in every era and in every society.

Functions of Family

According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, the functions of family can be divided into the following categories:

1. Affectional functions
2. Economic functions
3. Recreational functions
4. Protective functions
5. Religious functions
6. Educational functions

- **Essential Functions**

1. Satisfaction of sex needs: This is the first essential function which the family performs. Satisfaction of sex instincts brings the desire of life from the partnership among male and female. The modern family satisfies this instinct to a much greater degree than the traditional family. In the earlier traditional families the sexual act was almost always

combined with reproduction and the fear of pregnancy and as a result prevented satisfaction. But in the modern family the invention of contraceptives and use of other birth control measures, places the concerned couple in a better position as it allows for satisfaction of sex instincts without fear of conception.

2. **Production and rearing of children:** The inevitable result of a sexual union is procreation. The task of race perpetuation has always been an important function of the family. It is an institution par excellence for the production and rearing of children. The function of child rearing is better performed today than in the past because now more skill and knowledge are devoted to the care of the unborn and the newborn child.
3. **Provision of a home:** The desire for home is a powerful incentive for a man and a woman to marriage. Man after the hard toil of the day returns home where in the midst of his wife and children he sheds off his fatigue. Though in modern times there are many hotels and clubs which also provide recreation to man, but the joy a man gets within the congenial circle of his wife, parents and children stands far above the momentary pleasure which is provided by clubs and hotels. In spite of these other recreative agencies, the home is still the heaven and sanctuary where its members find comfort and affection.

- **Non-essential functions**

The non-essential functions of a family are the following.

1. **Economic:** The family serves as an economic unit. In the pre-industrial, tribal and agrarian societies unit of production is the family. All members of the family equally contribute to the family occupation, such as cultivation, craft, cottage-industry, cattle-rearing etc. The family provides economic security to its members and looks after their primary needs such as food, security, clothing, shelter and also nurses them in unfavourable conditions.
2. **Religious:** Family is a centre for the religious learning as the children learn from their parents various religious virtues. The religious and moral training of children have always been bound with the home. Though formal religious education starts in the earliest years of schooling, the family still furnishes the matrix of religious idea, attitudes, and practices. It is in the family that the basic notions of God, morality and salvation are acquired during childhood.
3. **Education:** The child learns the first letter under the guidance of the parents. The joint family was the center for vocational education as the children from the early childhood

were associated with family tasks. The modern family has delegated the task of vocational education to technical institutes and colleges.

Classification of family

- Studies have shown that diverse family forms are found in different societies on the basis of the following rules:

Rule of residence

With regard to the rule of residence, family form can either be matrilineal or patrilineal. In the first case, the newly married couple stays with the woman's parents, whereas in the second case the couple lives with the man's parents.

Rule of inheritance and lineage

With regard to the rule of inheritance and lineage, the family form can be matrilineal or matrilineal. In the first case, the inheritance rights are passed down from mother to daughter and lineage is traced from the mother's side.

In the second case, the inheritance rights are passed down from father to son and lineage is traced from the father's side.

Rule of authority and dominance

With regard to the rule of authority and dominance, the family form can be patriarchal or matriarchal.

A patriarchal family structure exists where the men exercise authority and dominance, and matriarchy where the women play a major role in decision-making in the family.

Marriage

Marriage can be defined as a socially acknowledged and approved sexual union between two adult individuals. When two people marry, they become kin to one another. The marriage bond also, however, connects together a wider range of people.

Different types of marriages

Monogamy restricts the individual to one spouse at a time. Under this system, at any given time a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband.

In many societies, individuals are permitted to marry again, often on the death of the first spouse or after divorce. But they cannot have more than one spouse at one and the same time. Such monogamous marriages are termed serial monogamy.

Polygamy denotes marriage to more than one mate at one time and takes the form of either Polygyny (one husband with two or more wives) or Polyandry (one wife with two or more husbands).

Usually where economic conditions are harsh, polyandry may be one response of society, since in such situations a single male cannot adequately support a wife and children. Also, extreme poverty conditions pressurise a group to limit its population.

Kinship

- Kinship ties are connections between individuals, established either through marriage or through the lines of descent that connect blood relatives (mothers, fathers, siblings, offspring, etc.)
- When two people marry, they become kin to one another. The marriage bond also, however, connects together a wider range of people. Parents, brothers, sisters and other blood relatives become relatives of the partner through marriage.
- One develops two types of kin connections.
 - The kin who are related through “blood” are called consanguinal kin while the kin who are related through marriage are called affines.

❖ **Social Institutions**

- The functionalist view holds that a social institution is a complex set of social norms, beliefs, values and role relationships that arise in response to needs of the society.
- The conflict view believes that social institutions are oriented to serve the interests of dominant social groups and their ideas.
- Social institutions can be formal and informal.
- The five spheres of social institutions are education, economics, politics, religion and marriage, kinship and family

❖ **Characteristics of Social Institutions**

- Institutions consist of a concept (idea, notion, doctrine, interest) and structure. They are abstract.
- Institutions exist to discipline and regulate human behaviour.
- Institutions are recognised and established and have a permanent and binding character.

❖ **Marriage, family and kinship**

• **Family**

- People having blood relations and living under one roof for a long period of time are known as family. Families exist in all societies but with different characteristics.
- The family performs important tasks, contributes to basic social needs and perpetuates social order according to functionalists.
- Nuclear families are prominently visible in industrial societies. However, there are exceptions in societies like India.
- Family and kinship ties are subject to change and transformation due to macro-economic processes but the pattern of change varies among countries and regions.

• **Marriage**

- Marriage is a ritual through which two people of opposite sex are socially acknowledged and approved to be life partners.
- On the basis of criteria of selection of mate, marriages are divided into endogamy, that is, selection of the mate from the group of the individual and exogamy, that is, selection of the mate from outside the group of the individual.
- Kinship is the connection between individuals, established either through marriage or through the lines of descent that connect blood relatives.
- Consanguinal kin are related through birth while affines are related through marriage.

- The family of birth is called the family of orientation and the family in which a person is married is called the family of procreation.

❖ **Economics**

- Work is the carrying out of paid or unpaid task that requires mental and physical labour to achieve the production of goods and services to cater to human needs.
- In modern times, work has become more complicated, specialised and has a more complex division of labour as compared to earlier societies.
- The nature of work has been considerably transformed in modern societies due to economic interdependence, mass production and change in location and duration of work.
- The competition between different firms and countries has increased due to globalisation. Over the decades, there has been a shift towards flexible production and decentralisation of work.

❖ **Politics**

- Politics is concerned with the distribution of power in the society.
- Power is the ability of individuals or groups to carry out their will even when opposed by others. Power is exercised through legitimate authority.
- The stateless societies function through cross-cutting alliances, based upon kinship, marriage and residence.
- The modern states are defined by sovereignty, citizenship and nationalism. They function through the apparatus of the government and provide civil, political and social rights to their citizens.
- The broadening of social and welfare rights has led to the notion of the welfare state.
- Sociology studies the distribution of power among castes, communities and classes in a broad manner.

❖ **Religion**

- Religion is an institution having a set of symbols, rituals and ceremonies and a community of believers.
- It is closely associated with power as it has a public character and inextricably linked to other social institutions.
- An example of impact of religion upon economic behaviour was the relation between Calvinism and capitalism, according to Weber.
- Sociologists believed that the influence of religion would decrease through modernisation and secularisation of societies.

❖ **Education**

- Education is a life-long process that involves formal and informal institutions of learning.
- Informal institutions of learning include the family, neighbourhood and society.
- Schooling provides formal learning to individuals and promotes uniformity, standardised aspirations and universalistic values.
- Education maintains and renews the social structure according to functionalists while it is a stratifying agent for conflict theorists.

❖ **Important Terms and Definitions**

- **Citizen:** A member of a political society, who enjoys rights and exercises the duties of state.
- **Division of Labour:** The specialisation of work tasks, in which the individuals carry out specific functions according to their role in the society.
- **Gender:** The social differentiation between males and females.
- **Ideology:** Shared ideas or beliefs, of the individuals in a group to regulate the appropriate functions in a society.
- **Legitimacy:** The belief that a particular political order is just and valid.
- **Monogamy:** A marriage involving one husband and one wife alone.
- **Polygamy:** A marriage involving more than one mate at one time.
- **Polyandry:** A marriage when more than one man is married to a woman.
- **Polygyny:** A marriage when more than one woman is married to a man.
- **Service Industries:** Industries involved in the production of services, such as the travel industry.
- **State Society:** A society which comprises of a formal governing body.
- **Stateless Society:** A society which lacks the formal governing body.
- **Sovereignty:** The undisputed political rule of a state over a given territorial area.