

In the Name of God

Unit 12: Rural Sociology

SOCIOLOGY AND RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Science is a body of organized and verified knowledge secured through scientific methods. Science has been classified into three types based on the nature of the subject matter; they are:

Physical science: This branch of science deals with inorganic matter i.e., the matter and energy having no reference to life. Examples are Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Astronomy, etc.

Biological science: This branch of science studies organic matter i.e., matter and energy having reference to life. Examples are Botany, Zoology, Entomology, Pathology, etc.

Social Science: This branch of science deals with social phenomena/social life. Examples are Economics, Political Science, Psychology, History, Ethics, Anthropology, Sociology, etc.

Social life or society is a complex phenomenon with a multitude of intricacies or phases or dimensions such as **economic, political, legal, educational, and cultural** and so on. All social sciences except sociology study social life or society focusing only on a particular dimension or phase of human life and thus they have become specialized social sciences. Thus, economics deals with economic activities such as **production, distribution and consumption** of goods and services. Political science studies political activities and institutions. History studies significant events and personages that have affected the flow of human life in a chronological order. **Psychology** studies development of human mind and its influence on human behaviours. **Anthropology** studies man in terms of physical, cultural and social characteristics. **Ethics** studies morals governing human behaviours. These social sciences give only a snap-shot picture of society from various angles of vision, not a comprehensive view of society in its totality. This kind of specialized knowledge about society could not help solving various problems of society. Hence, Auguste Comte, a French Philosopher and Sociologist felt the need of a general social science which should purview the society as a whole or as such or in its totality. This general social science was named as 'Sociology' by Auguste Comte in the year 1839 deriving it from Latin word '**Societus**' meaning 'Society', the Greek word 'Logos' meaning study or science. The etymological meaning of sociology is thus the 'Science of Society'. As Auguste Comte was responsible for sociology to come into being, he is popularly called the 'Father of Sociology'.

Sociology adopts **holistic approach** in the study of human society i.e., it studies all aspects of human life to generate a comprehensive knowledge in order to overcome problems of human life and society. This is why sociology is said to be a "social science par excellence".

Definitions:

1. 'Sociology is the study of human interactions and interrelations, their conditions and consequences' – M. Ginsberg.
2. 'Sociology is the study of social relationships, which are referred to as 'web of society' – MacIver.

3. 'Sociology is the study of interactions arising from the association of human beings.' - Gillin and Gillin.
4. 'Sociology is the scientific study of the structure of social life' – Young and Mack.

Although the definitions of Sociology vary in their focus, the common idea underlying them is that sociology is concerned with human relationships. Its subject matter is society rather than the individual, though the **individual** cannot be left out.

Since human life became complex, there was need for an in depth study of each aspect of human life. Thus, sociology has been further divided into different applied branches, namely; **Rural Sociology, Urban Sociology, Political Sociology, Educational Sociology**, etc.

RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Rural Sociology originated in the United States in 1908, when the then President T. Roosevelt constituted a commission called "**Country Life Commission**" in order to study and make suitable recommendations to overcome social problems which led to the decay of American rural society. This commission made a **scientific enquiry** into the causes and effects of social problems on rural life and made suitable recommendations for increasing **welfare** of rural people. This became the basis for emergence of rural sociology in the United States and it later extended to the other countries in the world.

The major portion of the world's population lives in villages and follows agriculture and **allied activities**. The way of life of rural people is deeply influenced by the rural environment. Thus, rural sociology being an applied branch of sociology analyses the way of life of rural people. M.N. Srinivas gave the concepts of Sanskritization, Westernization and Dominant Caste in the context of understanding Indian rural social life and thus he is called the pioneer of Indian Rural Sociology.

Definitions:

1. 'Rural sociology is the study of human relationships in rural environment.' – Bertrand.
2. 'Rural sociology is the scientific study of rural people in group relationships.' – E.M. Rogers.
3. 'Rural sociology is the scientific study of rural social relationships.' – Lynn smith.
4. 'Rural sociology is the study of laws governing rural life and development.' – A.R. Desai.

Although the definitions vary in their focus, the common idea underlying them is that rural sociology studies life and activities of rural people i.e., rural social processes, social patterns and social organizations.

Scope:

Scope of Rural Sociology indicates areas or fields of the study of rural sociology. The important of them are:

1. Origin and development of rural society.
2. Nature and role of rural social institutions.
3. Nature and role of rural social organizations in the context of rural development.
4. Nature of rural culture.
5. Nature of rural leadership.
6. Influence of **demographic factors** on rural life.
7. Influence of ecological factors on rural life.
8. Nature and role of social control operating in rural society.

9. Rural social change.
10. Rural Social problems

Importance of the study of Rural Sociology:

The importance of the study of rural sociology could be understood by its uses.

1. The study of rural sociology helps to understand the nature and role of rural social organizations like cooperatives, panchayas, youth clubs, self- help groups, etc. in the context of rural development. Consequently, the change agents could involve these social organizations effectively in achieving rural development.
2. The study of rural sociology is essential for framing effective policies or plans or programmes. The social plans or policies or programmes are the measures formulated and implemented for the betterment of rural people. The policy makers/planners can design effective rural development policies/ plans or programs only if they have adequate knowledge about different dimensions of rural life and this could be achieved only through the study of rural sociology.
3. The study of rural sociology helps to understand different dimensions of rural culture which influence actions, attitudes and decision-making of rural people. This helps change agents to evolve effective strategies to create favourable attitudes and right **decision-making** among rural people towards acceptance and adoption of new technology.
4. Rural sociology helps in understanding different facets of rural leadership like qualities, functions, types, methods of locating leaders and their development functions. This helps change agents to get a comprehensive knowledge about rural leadership and thereby involve rural leaders in technology transfer or rural development process.
5. The study of rural sociology is helpful in understanding causes and consequences of rural social change. This helps change agents to understand the dynamics of rural life and thus, formulate strategies to increase positive changes to promote welfare of rural people.
6. The study of rural sociology helps in finding solutions to rural social problems. As the rural sociology generates scientific knowledge on causes and effects of rural social problems, the change agents could find suitable **remedies** to the social problems of rural society. This would contribute to the welfare of rural people.

INDIAN RURAL COMMUNITY

Human beings live a collective life in a specific area with fellow feeling, which is called community. In other words, community is an area of common life marked by some degree of coherence. Examples of community are village, town, city, **tribe**, and **nation**. A group of people, a definite locality and community sentiment are the essential elements of a community. There are three major types of communities, namely, rural, urban and tribal communities.

Bases of Classification of Rural and Urban Communities:

Sociologists have used three criteria to classify community into rural and urban communities, they are: size of population (numerical strength), occupation and kind of relationship among people.

Meaning of Rural and Urban Communities:

Rural community is one which consists of relatively small size of **population**, follows agriculture and allied activities as a major occupation and possesses primary relationships. Primary relationships are intimate, personal and face-to-face relationships.

Urban community is one which consists of relatively large size of population, following non-agricultural occupations and possessing secondary relationships. Secondary relationships are nonintimate, impersonal and indirect relationships.

Characteristics of Indian Rural Community:

The important characteristics of Indian rural community are:

1. Predominance of agriculture
2. Predominance of primary relationships
3. Predominance of caste system
4. A strong sense of neighbourhood
5. Simple and homogeneous life
6. Lack of intense social mobility
7. Informal social control
8. Conservatism
9. Mass illiteracy
10. Joint family

Differences between Rural and Urban Communities:

1. Agriculture and allied activities are pursued as a major source of livelihood in rural community while in urban community nonagricultural activities are pursued as a major source of livelihood.
2. The size of population in rural community is limited while in urban community size of population is relatively large.
3. The dependency of rural people is more upon the nature than that of the urban people.
4. Rural relationships are predominantly primary in nature while urban relationships are secondary.
5. Rural community involves simple and homogeneous life whereas urban community involves complex and heterogeneous life.
6. There is lack of intense social mobility in rural community. But in urban community intense social mobility is very much seen.
7. In rural community informal social control is operating significantly in defining and regulating actions of people whereas in urban community formal social control is operating predominantly.
8. Caste based social stratification prevails in rural community while in urban community class based social stratification operates significantly.
9. Rural people are conservatives while urban people are innovators.
10. Joint family has been **traditionally** a predominant form in rural community while in urban community nuclear family is predominant.

11. The incomes of rural people are generally low and thus their standard of living is also low, while the incomes of urban people are relatively higher and thus they have better standard of living.
12. Incidence of **illiteracy** is higher in rural community while **literacy** rate is higher in urban community.

SOCIAL GROUPS

Man is a group living animal. He is born into and spends his life in groups. Generally, groups help people to acquire social qualities, culture and also to satisfy their desires. Hence, groups are important in the life of human beings.

In Sociology group and social group are synonymously used. Social group refers to a collection of human beings who are interacting with one another in accordance with a set of norms. Examples of social groups are family, youth club, panchayat, political party, etc.

Definitions:

1. "Social group is a collection of people, two or more, who are brought into social relationships with one another" – MacIver.
 2. "A social group is a collection of individuals, two or more, interacting on each other, who have common objects of attention and participate in similar activities." – Eldredge and Merrill.
- The important characteristics of social group are:

1. A group of people
2. Social interaction
3. Common interest
4. Functional interdependence
5. System of **leadership**
6. We-feeling
7. Group norms
8. Size of group.

Factors Considered in Formation of Social Groups:

The important factors considered in the formation of groups are:

1. **Occupation**: Farmers' association, Teachers' association, etc.
2. **Caste** : Dalits' association, Brahmins' association, etc.
3. **Religion** : Hindus' association, Christians' association, etc.
4. **Region** : Jharkhand Morcha, Telugu Desham, Assam Gana Parishat, etc.
5. **Race** : Whites, Negroes, etc
6. **Income** : Upper class, middle class, lower class.
7. **Common interest**: School, Recreational clubs, etc.

Classification of Social Groups:

The major classifications of social groups are as follows:

1. **Voluntary and involuntary groups** based on nature of **membership**: Voluntary groups are the one in which membership of a person is not compulsory. Involuntary groups are those in which the membership of a person is compulsory. Examples of voluntary groups

are political party, youth club, recreational club, etc. Examples of involuntary groups are family, community, nation, etc.

2. **Formal and informal groups** based on degree of formality and informality involved: Formal groups are the one deliberately formed by people for achieving their common needs. These groups possess written rules, defined purpose, specific meeting place and time, specific name, selected and titled officers. Informal groups are spontaneous or natural serving general purposes of people. These groups have none of the characteristics of formal groups excepting nomenclature. Examples of formal groups are college, political party, village panchayat while examples of informal groups are family, neighborhood, nation, etc.
3. **In-and-out groups** based on personal feeling of belonging to the groups: This classification is given by W.G. Sumner. In-groups are the one to which people feel that they belong. In other words, the groups with which people identify themselves are called in-groups. Outgroups are the one to which people do not feel that they belong. In other words, the groups with which people do not identify themselves are called out-groups. Examples of in-groups are our country, our family, etc. while examples of out-groups are other university, their village, etc.
4. **Primary and Secondary Groups** based on kind of relationships among the members. This classification is given by C.H. Cooley. Primary groups are those whose members have personal, intimate and face-to-face relationships. Examples are family, village, tribe, small neighborhood, peer group, play group, etc. Secondary groups are the one whose members have non-intimate, impersonal and indirect relationships. Examples are political party, city, trade union, nation, etc.

Differences between Primary and Secondary Groups:

1. Primary groups are small in size where as secondary groups are large in size.
2. There is close physical proximity among the members of primary groups while the members of secondary groups do not have close physical **proximity**.
3. The primary groups involve personal, intimate and face-to-face relationships whereas the secondary groups involve impersonal, non-intimate and indirect relationships.
4. Primary groups are spontaneous or informal whereas secondary groups are formal and deliberate.
5. Primary relationships are all inclusive while secondary relationships are non-inclusive.
6. Primary groups are governed by informal social control. But, secondary groups are governed by formal social control.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification refers to the division of society into different strata or ranking of people or groups into socially superior and inferior positions. Strata imply existence of status differences characteristic of groups or society.

Definitions:

1. 'Social stratification is the process by which individuals and groups are ranked in a more or less enduring hierarchy of status - Ogburn and Nimkoff.
2. 'Social stratification is the vertical division of society into different social strata. Strata imply different status levels – J.S.Rucek and R.L.Warren.

The term status is the position held by people or groups in society in relation to others. Examples of status are engineer, doctor, mother, adult, boy, girl, student, leader, etc. There are two types of status, they are ascribed status and achieved status. Ascribed status is one given to individuals or groups based on certain factors such as caste, religion, sex, age, race, etc., upon which they have no control:

Examples are:

Caste status - Brahmin, Harijan, etc.

Racial status - White and Negro, etc.

Religious Status - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, etc.

Age based status - Infant, child, adult, aged, etc.

Sex based status - Boy, Girl.

Achieved status is one obtained by people or groups by their efforts and personal competence. Examples are professor, doctor, engineer, etc.

Bases for Social Stratification:

The important bases upon which people or groups are ranked into different social status levels are:

1. Income
2. Gender or Sex
3. Wealth
4. Race
5. Education
6. Religion
7. Occupation
8. Caste

Types of Social Stratification:

There are two types of social stratification, namely;

1. Open social stratification
2. Closed social stratification

Open social stratification

Open social stratification is one wherein there is an opportunity for people or groups to move upwards or downwards in their status based on their efforts and personal competence. This stratification prevails very much in industrially advanced societies. Example of this social stratification is social class system.

SOCIAL CLASS

Social class refers to a group of people having more or less same status such as higher or middle or lower status. The social classes generally found in society are upper, middle and lower classes,

which are based on the factors like income, wealth, education and occupation. In Indian rural society, we find different classes based on landholdings possessed by people. These classes are large farmers, medium farmers, small and marginal farmers and agricultural laborers. These classes of rural society are known as agrarian classes.

Characteristics:

Social class possesses certain important characteristics, viz.

- a) Social class is a status group.
- b) Social class is a culturally homogeneous group.
- c) Social class involves more of class consciousness.
- d) Social class maintains social distance.
- e) Social class is an open system.

Closed social stratification:

Closed system of social stratification is one wherein people or groups do not have adequate opportunities to move from one status to the other. Rather, they are required to remain in that status which is given to them on the factors beyond their control. Example of this stratification is Indian caste system.

CASTE SYSTEM

Caste is an example for closed system of social stratification in Indian society. The term caste owes its origin to Spanish word 'Casta' which means breed, race or a complex of hereditary qualities. The Portuguese applied this term to the classes of people of India known by the name of 'Jati'. The English word caste is an adjustment of the original term.

Definition:

"Caste is a group of people who often (not always) have association with hereditary occupation, eat and marry among themselves and avoid (minimize) interaction with members of other out-groups." – M.N.Srinivas.

Characteristics:

Prof. G.S. Ghurye has given the following six important characteristics of caste system.

- 1. Segmental division of Indian society.
- 2. Social and religious hierarchy
- 3. Endogamy
- 4. Restriction on feeding and social intercourse.
- 5. Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation.
- 6. Civil and religious disabilities.

Differences between class and caste systems:

- 1. Class is an open system where as caste is a closed system.
- 2. Class is secular in nature whereas caste is divine in nature.
- 3. Class is non-endogamous whereas caste is endogamous.
- 4. There are no restrictions on food habits, interaction, occupation in class system while there are rigid restrictions in caste system in respect of food habits, interaction and occupation.

CULTURE AND ITS CONCEPTS

Culture is an integral aspect of human life, which influences the attitudes, actions and patterns of living of people in a society. Culture is the sole possession of human beings and upon which they could be distinguished from other lower animals. Culture is a system of learned behaviors shared by and transmitted among the members of a group.

Definitions:

1. "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society." - E.B. Tylor.
2. "Culture is the totality of group ways of thought and action duly accepted and followed by a group of people." – Walter Paul.

Characteristics:

1. Culture is an acquired quality.
2. Culture is a social heritage.
3. Culture is transmissive
4. Culture is continuous and cumulative
5. Culture is dynamic
6. Culture is ideational
7. Culture is gratifying

Types of Culture

There are two types of culture; they are:

1. Material culture refers to concrete objects created by human beings to satisfy their desires. These are external to human beings. Examples are tools, furniture, automobiles, buildings, utensils, etc.
2. Non-material culture refers to an abstract creation of man such as ideas, customs, beliefs, habits, morals, laws, knowledge, etc. These are internal to human beings and are acquired through process of learning.

Cultural Concepts:

There are different aspects in the culture of a society, which are addressed by different concepts. The understanding of these concepts helps to understand the various dimension of culture.

1. Cultural Traits are the individual elements or smallest units of a culture. These units put together constitute culture. Thus, shaking hands, touching the feet of elders, tipping hats, saluting the national flag, wearing white 'saris' at mourning, taking vegetarian diets, walking barefooted, sprinkling water on the idols are cultural traits. Thus, traits are the elemental units of a culture.
2. Culture Complex is a group or cluster of related culture traits. According to Hoebel "cultural complexes are nothing but larger clusters of traits organized about some nuclear point of reference." Cultural traits do not usually appear singly or independently. They are customarily associated with other related traits to form culture complex.

3. Cultural Diffusion is the process by which cultural traits spread from one group or society to another. This may take place either due to the physical proximity of people of different societies or through mass media of communication like T.V. etc.
4. Cultural Relativity (Cultural Relativism) is judging a culture on its own terms and not in comparison to another culture. In other words, judging the cultures in their own terms rather than by the standards of other culture is cultural relativism. Cultures should be judged only in the context in which they occur.
5. Cultural Lag is a situation in which some parts of culture (usually material culture) change at a faster rate than other parts (usually non-material culture). This concept has been given by Ogburn.
6. Cultural Pluralism is the living together of people despite cultural differences with sympathetic consideration to each other.
7. Cultural Universals are those cultural traits that apply to all the members of a society. Examples are incest taboo, respecting the national flag, loyalty and patriotism to the nation, respecting elders/women, etc.
8. Cultural Alternatives refer to the cultural traits that offer socially acceptable choices. Examples are different modes of dress, worshiping, occupation, customs, etc.
9. Cultural Change is the process of alterations in different spheres of culture of a society. This takes place due to two sets of factors, namely; (1) inventions and discoveries, (2) cultural diffusion and borrowings.

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The term ‘institution’ is used to indicate the procedures followed by social organizations. These procedures may be formal or informal, which define and regulate actions of members of social organizations. Therefore, Barnes called institution a strong hold of social life.

Definitions:

1. “Institution is an established forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity” – MacIver.
2. “Institution is the normative order of defining and governing the patterns of social action, deemed by the members of the group or society as morally and socially crucial to the existence of group or society” – Park and Burgess.

The social organizations and procedures which we call social institutions always go hand in hand. In view of this close relationship and also due to their expression through social organizations, most sociologists called social organizations themselves as social institutions. This is why family, panchayat, co-operatives, school, church, government, etc. are called social institutions.

Major Social Institutions

Family: Family is a universal primary social institution. It functions as a social, biological and economic unit and therefore it has a prime place in human society.

Definitions:

1. “Family is a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children”- MacIver.
2. “Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without children, or a man or woman alone with children”- Nimkoff.

Functions:

Following are the important functions of family

1. Fulfills sexual and reproductive urges.
2. Provides physical necessities for upbringing of children.
3. Provides affectionate and intimate relationships.
4. Serves as an effective agency of socialization.
5. Acts as an important agency of social control.
6. Determines initial status of its members.
7. Organizes and transmits assets.