

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Level: First Year License

Module: Foreign Language (English)

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Course N°1: The Human Society

Definition of human society

The term society is derived from a Latin word socius. The term directly means association, togetherness, gregariousness, or simply group life. Human society is made up of a group or aggregation of people. The concept of society refers to a relatively large grouping or collectivity of people who share more or less common and distinct culture, occupying a certain geographical locality, with the feeling of identity or belongingness, having all the necessary social arrangements or insinuations to sustain itself.

Society generally refers to the social world with all its structures, institutions, organizations, etc around us, and specifically to a group of people who live within some type of bounded territory and who share a common way of life. This common way of life shared by a group of people is termed as culture (Stockard, 1997). We may add a more revealing definition of society by Calhoun et al (1996: 27): "A society is an autonomous grouping of people who inhabit a common territory, have a common culture (shared set of values, beliefs, customs and so forth) and are linked to one another through routinized social interactions and interdependent statuses and roles."

Great founders of sociology had also focused on the dynamic aspect of society. Such early sociologists as Comte, Marx and Spencer grasped the concept of society as a dynamic system evolving historically and inevitably towards complex industrial structures (Swingwood, 1991: 313). However, in recent years such an approach has been criticized. Contemporary sociologists now frequently use the network conception of society. This approach views society as overlapping, dynamic and fluid network of economic, political, cultural and other relations at various levels. Such a conception is analytically more powerful and reflects the reality especially in the context of modern, globalizing world.

Basic features of human Society

Society is a complex web of social relationships that involves individuals, families, communities and organizations interacting with each other in various ways. For example, as family members, neighbours, work or school mates. They may also be members of cultural, business, religious or political groups. Human societies are characterized by their diversity, adaptability, and capacity for change. They have evolved over time, shaped by historical, economic, political, and cultural factors, and continue to undergo transformations in response to new challenges and opportunities. Human society is also characterized by social stratification, where individuals are grouped into different social classes based on factors such as wealth, occupation, education, and social status.

The family is one of society most basic institutions. It is traditionally defined as a residential kin group. Typically, a family consists of an adult female and an adult male, sometimes joined through marriage, as well as dependent children. Though this is typical, there are numerous variations including families with only one

adult or families not related by blood. The family as an institution though universally found in many societies has been found its own structure in different cultures. Sociologists have divided families into two types.

The two basic types of family are the extended family and the nuclear family. The extended family is made up of more than two generations, like grandparents, their children and the grandchildren. An extended family may also consist of other kin members like uncles and aunts. The nuclear family is based on marriage ties, when a couple decides to get married and they may want to move out of their respective parents' house and setup house on their own and raise a family. A nuclear family is made up of husband and wife and their dependent children. Although in many societies extended families are common, the most common family types found in many societies is the nuclear family, especially in modern societies

The family is the principal agent of socialization into society. It is the most intimate and important of all social groups. Of course, the family can assume different shapes in different cultures, and it can perform a variety of functions and meet a variety of needs. But in all societies, the family relationship centers on procreative and child-rearing functions. A cross-cultural comparison reveals that in all societies, most families possess these common characteristics:

- Sexual mating
- Childbearing and child rearing
- A system of names and a method of determining kinship
- A common habitation (at some point)
- Socialization and education of the young
- A system of roles and expectations based on family membership.

These common characteristics indicate why the family is so important in human societies. It replenishes the population and rears each new generation. Within the family, the individual personality is formed. The family transmits and carries forward the culture of the society. It is important to note that the above features of a society are by no means exhaustive and they may not apply to all societies. The level of a society's economic and technological development, the type of economic or livelihood system a society is engaged in may create some variations among societies in terms of these basic features.