

Revision Notes

Chapter 6

Social Structure, Stratification and Social Processes in Society

Social structure

- The term 'social structure' points to the fact that society is structured i.e. organised or arranged in particular ways.
- Social structure thus refers to the regularities or patterns of how people behave and the relationships they have with one another.
- The regularities or patterns exist due to the fact that it is repeated across periods of time and distances of space.
- For example, in a school certain ways of behaving are repeated over the years and become institutions.
- Social structure is made up of human actions and human relationships. These are patterned and arranged regularities which are repeated across periods of time and distance of space.
- Social structure helps every social institution to exist. However, changes take place in social structure when individuals who are part of different social institutions introduce changes.
- Thus, changes are introduced to reproduce the structure of the social institutions.
- Changes take place through either cooperative behaviour or serious conflict arising due to competition.
- According to Durkheim, social structure constrains our activities in a parallel way, setting limits to what we can do as individuals. It is external to us as individuals.
- Karl Marx also emphasised on the constraints that social structure exert on individuals but at the same time stressed on human creativity or agency that leads to reproduction of human behaviour and change in social structure.

Social stratification

- Social stratification refers to the existence of structured inequalities between groups in society, in terms of their access to material or symbolic rewards.

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- While all societies involve some forms of social stratification, modern societies are often marked by wide differences in wealth and power.
 - The most evident forms of stratification in modern societies involve class divisions, others like race and caste
 - The concept of stratification, then, refers to the idea that society is divided into a patterned structure of unequal groups, and usually implies that this structure tends to persist across generations.
 - Different bases of social stratification like gender or class constrain existing social processes and also to opportunities and resources available to individuals or groups to compete.

Social processes

- Social processes refer to actions taken by individuals in various ways within the constraints of social structure.
- Sociologists seek to explain these social processes in terms of actual social structure and society and on the basis of the pluralistic understanding of the society.
- Mac Iver and Page defines social process as “continuous change taking place in a definite manner within the social structure”.
- Social processes are thus the byproduct of social interaction and is also referred to as process of social interaction.
- But both Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim presume that human beings have to cooperate to meet their basic needs, and to produce and reproduce themselves and their world.

Cooperation

- Cooperation is necessary for the survival of human society.
- The idea of cooperation rests on certain assumptions about human behaviour.
- It is argued that without human cooperation it would be difficult for human life to survive.
- Cooperation is required to fulfil certain basic needs of society which is possible through division of labour in society.
- According to Emile Durkheim, cooperation is required to fulfil certain needs of society and the role of division of labour emphasises on this function.

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- He emphasises that solidarity through division of labour, the moral force of society is fundamental for our understanding of cooperation and thereby the functioning of society.
 - According to Karl Marx, humans adjust and accommodate to cooperate but in the process alter society.
 - Humans in cooperating thus do not passively adjust and accommodate but also change the natural or social world to which they adjust.

Competition

- Competition may be defined as struggle between two or more individuals, who are striving to get something which is relatively limited.
- Competition is a universal and natural social process that exists in all human societies. It is a predominant idea, norm and practice in contemporary society.
- In today's time, there can be no society without competition as a guiding force.
- Competition gives rise to individualism in modern societies. It is intrinsic to the ways modern capitalist societies function.
- Modern capitalist society focuses on the expansion of trade and hence emphasises on mass scale production in a factory where the work is done by multiple workers.
- The ideology of competition works as the dominant idea of capitalism.

Conflict

- When people are competing for inadequate material and non-material products, it may mean clash of interests.
- The objectives of conflict may be power, status or property.
- We may see conflict occurring in every aspect of the society be it political, social, economic or religious.
- The bases of conflict may vary from caste or class, tribe or gender, ethnicity or religious community.
- Conflicts have always been part of a society. It may change in nature and form at different stages of social development.