**Elements of Society**

**Social Status and Role:**

Status within a society implies the position or the rank one holds in a social group, and, Role refers to the specific functions that one is expected to perform in that social group. Every status holder is a role performer. Status and Role, is inter-connected. In a social group, every member has a status role position.

All status roles do not command similar position authority; or the social recognition authority. Status-role of a father, as the head of a family, in patriarchal society, like that of ours differs, from his status-role in a matriarchal society. Women are everywhere the same, but their status-role in our society, in several ways differs from women in the Arab or in a western society in a similar situation.

**Status-Role Inter-Relation:**

Status-role coordination is the woof and Warf arrangement of a social group. The status-role of an individual depends on the position, he holds in the group and in consequence of which he is expected to exercise his authority to fulfill his obligations. The status role is the basis-of social order.

A social group cannot function if this arrangement is not in due and related order. This coordination harmonizes the social relations. It is an arrangement of convenience, sanctified by tradition or underwritten by the law of the land. It is historical in character as in all age’s men and women inherited or acquired status-role position, it is universal as the system exists in all societies.

**Status:**

**Meaning of Status:**

Recognitions of the position of an individual in the social system and the authority he holds in consequence are the basis of status system. Status is position that one holds in a given system. It means the location of the individual within the group – his place in the social network of reciprocal obligations and privileges, duties and rights.

Thus, every position (father, mother, teacher, and employer) defines a different status. It is by status differentiation that social positions are defined and distinguished from one another by assigning to each a set of rights and responsibilities.

**Definitions:**

According to Lundberg, it is the, “comparative amount of prestige, deference or respect accorded to persons who have been assigned different roles in group or community.”

According to Davis, “status is a position in the general institutional system, recognized and supported by the entire society, spontaneously evolved rather than deliberately created, rooted in the folkways and mores.”

According to H.T. Mazumdar, “status means the location of the individual within the group — his place in the social network of reciprocal obligation and privileges, rights and duties.”

It is position in a social group or grouping, in relation to other positions held by other individuals in the same group or grouping. Status determines the extent of authority which may be wielded by the holders of the status or the degree of submission required on the part of those who are at a status lower than him. The authority one wields is socially defined and limited, as is degree of submission required.

The essence of status is defined: superior-inferior relationship; in other words dominance and subordination – but always within the rule. Status involves sort of special social privileges. An increase in the individual’s social status entitles him to more respect than before word ‘status’. However, is to be used with care. If one holds a family status, it does not mean, that he will be so recognized in his profession. A doctor of status may be a bad husband and worse father.

Sometimes status is likely to be confused with the official position one may be holding. Official designations carry ‘prestige’. This varies from position to position, from office to office.

**Essential Elements and Characteristics of Status:**

As the definitions have pointed out the term status has physical as well as a psychological situation. This situation forms certain element and characteristics. These element and characteristics of status may be enumerated as below.

1. The status is determined by the cultural situation of the particular society,

2. The status is determined only in relevance of the other members of the society,

3. Every individual has to play certain role in accordance with the status,

4. Status is only a part of the society as a whole,

5. As a result of status the society is divided into various groups,

6. Every status carries with it some prestige,

**Types of Status**

According to status people may be divided into various categories. These categories or statuses are not imposed from above. Some of these statuses are earned or achieved while others are ascribed.

**Ascribed status and achieved status**:

A status may be divided into two types: ascribed status and achieved or earned status.

**Ascribed Status:**

The status which is given to an individual on the basis of the situation in the society or by other members of the society is called ascribed status. Such a status may be given by birth or by placement in a social group. For example, a person may enjoy a particular status because of the sex or age of birth in a rich family. An infant gets a family status which includes family name and prestige, share in social standing and the right of heritage.

**Basis of the ascribed status:**

These two kinds of statuses are based on factors that are not common. For example the ascribed status is based on age, sex, kinship race, family etc. In almost every society particularly the patriarchal system of the society, it is the elder men who are respected but in matriarchal system of society elder women are respected. Since the ascribed status is determined by birth Brahmin are given higher status as compared to Sudras and people said to be belonging to honorable class are given better status than the people of the ordinary class.

**Achieved Status:**

The status or the position that a person has earned out of his own personal efforts is called achieved status. This status is given by the ability, capacity and the efforts of the individuals. Some persons achieve a particular status because if the facilities available to them but some have to achieve that status as against the odds and difficulties.

**Basis of Achieved status:**

The achieved status is based on the personal ability, education, earned wealth etc. A person who is able to display his ability in the field of social service, sports, education etc. is given higher and better status.

**Distinction between the Ascribed status and Achieved status:**

The distinction and relationship between the two may be discussed as under.

**Ascribed Status:**

1. Ascribed status is the gift from the society of the individual members and to make no the effort to get it.

2. For an achieved status certain conditions are namely ability, efficiency, economic status etc. are necessary.

3. Generally ascribed status is based on age, race, caste, kinship, etc.

4. Ascribed status is more stable and more rigid. Its basis does not change easily.

5. Ascribed status occupies a place of respect in a traditional society.

6. In regard to the ascribed status the role of the authority and actions that flow from them are unpredictable.

7. In ascribed status there is a co-relationship between the status and role.

8. The ascribed status has a, vital relationship with the internal aspects of the personality. It provides satisfaction to sentiments, emotions and feelings etc.

9. Ascribed status can be helpful to a person for achieving certain thing or acquiring the achieved status.

10. Ascribed status has greater relationships with the customs, traditions and other existing factors of the society. In other words ascribed status is more traditional.

**Achieved status:**

1. There is no precondition for getting the ascribed status for example; the elder in the family is bound to be respected. There is no qualification required.

2. The achieved status is based on characteristics like capacities and abilities etc.

3. Achieved status has an unstable basis and so it is itself changeable.

4. In open and modern societies it is achieved status which is given importance because in this respect, it is the personal qualities and achievements that matter.

5. In regard to achieved status the role or the action is more or less predictable because it is based on reason.

6. In relevance to the achieved status it cannot be said that there shall be co- relationship between the achieved status and the role.

7. Achieved status is the gift of one’s personal accomplishments and personal characteristics.

8. Achieved status is helpful in acquiring the ascribed status.

9. Achieved status is the result of the personal accomplishments and is acquired as result of competition. It has no relationship with the customs and traditions.

1. **Social Groups:**

Human beings never live in isolation. He rarely exists alone. Human life is essentially a group life. As a social animal he always lives in group. He begins his life as a participating member of the group i.e. family. He born, live, grows and dies in group. He forms group to fulfill his different needs and to attain common goals. Groups play an important role in shaping personality, in the development of social organization and socialization.

That is why the study of group is very important in understanding the behavior of men and women. Hence group is one of the basic concepts in sociology. The concept of group may be considered from both individual and society’s point of view. Famous Sociologists W.G. Sumner, C.H. Cooley, T.M. Newcomb and R.K. Merton made important contributions to the development of the concept of group.

The term social group consists of two terms i.e. social and group. Ordinarily by social group we mean a collection of human beings. But the term social refers to social relationships or shared behaviors. Similarly in the words of E.S. Bogardus the term “group refers to a number of units of anything in close proximity with one another”. Accordingly, it may refers to a group of trees, a group of houses, a group of horses etc. But in case of human beings as Maclver and Page says a group refers to “any collection of human beings who are brought into social relationships with one another”. Accordingly, a social group is a collection of interacting individuals who participate in similar activities and have a consciousness of joint interaction. There exists some degree of reciprocity and mutual awareness among the individuals.

A social group is an organized one. Besides having mutual interaction and reciprocity the members of a social group have similar goals. The members of a social group interact according to some established patterns. Definite relations exist among individuals which constitute a social group. In the truest sociological sense a group refers to a collection of individuals who are brought into social relationship with one another and organize themselves for the fulfillment of common aims.

**Ambiguous Terms Associated with Social Group:**

But to have a complete understanding of the term social group it must be distinguished from the terms like social aggregates, social category, potential group or quasi group. A social aggregate is a mere collection of individuals who are in a particular place at a particular time but share no definite relations with one another e.g. passengers in a train. But a social category refers to a collection of individuals who have some common characteristics e.g. caste, sex, age and occupational groups.

A potential or quasi group consists of a group of individuals having some common characteristics who does not possess any recognizable structure. But a potential or quasi group became a social group when it becomes organized. A social group has an organizational aspect i.e. rules, regulations, rivals, structure etc. and a Psychological aspect i.e. awareness or consciousness of the members. Members of a social group linked together in a system of social relationships with one another and they interact with each other according to norms of the group. A social group is also dynamic in nature.

**Definitions of Social Group:**

(1) According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, “Whenever two or more individuals come together and influence one another, they may be said to constitute a social group”.

(2) According to A.W. Green, “A group is an aggregate of individuals which persists in time, which has one or more interests and activities in common which is organized”.

(3) According to Horton and Hunt, “Groups are aggregates or categories of people who have a consciousness of membership and of interaction”.

(4) According to Maclver and Page a social group is “any collection of human beings who are brought into human relationships with one another”.

(5) According to Williams, “A social group is a given aggregate people playing inter-related roles and recognized by themselves or others as a unit of interaction”.

(6) According to E.S. Bogardus, “A social group may be thought of as a number of persons two or more, who have some common objects of attention who are stimulating to each other, who have common loyalty and participate in similar activities”.

**Characteristics of Social Group:**

**(1) Given number of Individual:**

A social group consists of a given number of individuals. Without a number of individuals no social group can be formed. Two or more than that individual are necessary to form a group. This number may vary. These individuals belong to the group as members of the group and are considered as unit of the group.

**(2) Reciprocal Relations:**

There exist reciprocal relations among the members of a social group. These reciprocal relations among the members are the basis or foundation of social group without which social group cannot be formed. The members must interact or inter-related with each other.

**(3) Common Goals:**

It is another important characteristic of a social group. The aims, objectives and ideals of the members are common. For the fulfillment of these common goals social groups are formed. Here individual interests are sacrificed for group interests.

**(4) Sense of unity and solidarity:**

Members of a social group are always tied by a sense of unity and bond of solidarity, common goals and mutual relations strengthens this bond of unity and solidarity. This creates loyalty and sympathy among the members of social group.

**(5) A strong sense of we-feeling:**

Members of a social group are characterized by a strong sense of we-feeling. This we- feeling fosters co-operation among members. Because of this we- feeling the members identify themselves with the group and consider others as outsiders.

**(6) Group Norms:**

Every social group has its own, regulations and norms which the members are supposed to follow. With the help of these rules and norms the group exercises control over it’s members. These norms may be written or unwritten. Any violation of group norms is followed by punishment. The group norms maintain unity and integrity in the group.

**(7) Similar Behavior:**

Members of a social group show similar behavior. As the interests, ideals and values of a group are common hence its members behave in a similar manner. This similar behavior helps in the achievement of common goals.

**(8) Awareness:**

Members of a social group are aware about the membership which distinguishes them from others. This is perhaps due to ‘the consciousness of kind’ as opined by Giddings.

**(9) Group Control:**

Social group exercises some sort of control over its members and over their activities. This control may be direct or indirect. Of course group exercises control only over non-conformists or deviants.

(10) Social groups may be permanent or temporary in nature. There are permanent groups likes family and temporary groups like crowd, mob etc.

(12) Social groups are dynamic in nature. It is not static. It responds to different changes. The nature of change may be slow or rapid but it is bound to occur.

(13) Social groups have established patterns.

**Social Networks**

According to Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, A social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organizations) and a set of the dyadic ties between these actors. The social network perspective provides a set of methods for analyzing the structure of whole social entities as well as a variety of theories explaining the patterns observed in these structures.

Social network analysis is a way of conceptualizing, describing, and modeling society as sets of people or groups linked to one another by specific relationships, whether these relationships are as tangible as exchange networks or as intangible as perceptions of each other. Network analysts believe that how an individual lives depends in large part on how he or she is tied into the larger web of social connections. A focus on networks helps us understand, for example, the activities of economic elites, how people get jobs, how juries reach consensus, how nations pattern their trade, the "small world" phenomena, and the structure of the Internet.

**Key Points**

* A social network is comprised by various nodes and the ties that connect them.
* Nodes can be individuals or organizations.
* Ties are the various types of connections these nodes. Ties are assessed in terms of strength. Loose connections, like mere acquaintances, are called weak ties. Strong ties, like family bonds are called strong ties.
* The study of networks is called either social network analysis or social network theory.

The small world phenomenon is the hypothesis that the chain of social acquaintances required to connect one arbitrary person to another arbitrary person anywhere in the world is generally short. The concept gave rise to the phrase "six degrees of separation" after Stanley Milgram's 1967 experiment.

**Terms to Remember:**

**Social Network Analysis**

It is the study of social networks

**Node**

They are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors.

**Ties**

They are the various types of connections between nodes.

**Example**

Facebook is an example of a large social network. This example demonstrates the difference in strong and weak ties. If all of your friends are nodes in your Facebook social network, how many of your connections are strong ties? How many are weak ties? How does the difference in whether the tie is strong or weak both reflect and impact between you and the friend represented by the other node?

**Shape and Size**

The shape and size of social networks influence their utility for their nodal participants. Smaller, tighter networks composed of strong ties behave differently than larger, looser networks of weak ties. The looser and larger the network, the more likely nodes are to introduce new ideas and opportunities to their members. Participants in smaller networks are more likely to share values and information, increasing efficiency, but decreasing creativity.

**Small World Phenomenon**

The small world phenomenon is the hypothesis that the chain of social acquaintances required to connect one arbitrary person to another arbitrary person anywhere in the world is generally short. The concept gave rise to the famous phrase "six degrees of separation" after a 1967 small world experiment by psychologist Stanley Milgram which found that two random US citizens were connected by an average of six acquaintances.

**Social Network Analysis**

The study of social networks is called either social network analysis or social network theory. Research has indicated that social networks operate on many levels—from familial to national—and play a critical role in determining the ways that problems are solved, the way organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals. Social network theory argues that individual traits and characteristics usually presumed to have significance actually matter far less than an individual's relationship and ties to other actors in a network. Critics argue that this perspective diminishes the power and agency of the individual. Despite these criticisms, sociologists study social networks because of their influence on individuals. Social networks are seen as the basic tool individuals use to connect to society.