

B. A. Part - I - SOCIOLOGY

Paper - I (Principles of Sociology)

Topic : Social Structure
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SOCIAL STRUCTURE

- **Introduction**

In the most general sense, the notion of “structure” refers to a set of relations between elements that has some measure of coherence and stability. It is, then, a concept that we could, in principle, apply to any parcel of reality where we perceive a certain order.

Structure refers to the pattern within culture and organisation through which social action take place. It is the arrangements of roles, organisation, institutions, and cultural symbols that are stable over time, often unnoticed, and a changing almost invisibly.

In the social sciences, social structure is the patterned social arrangements in society that are both emergent from and determinant of the actions of individuals. Likewise, society is believed to be grouped into structurally-related groups or sets of roles, with different functions, meaning or purposes. Example of social structure include family, religion, law, economy, and class. It contrasts with “social system” which refers to the parent structure in which these various structures are embedded. Thus, social structures significantly influence larger systems, such as economic systems, legal systems, etc.

Social structure is the basic concept of sociology. It is the basic scheme blue print or the organizational frame work of the given social group, society or social system or social phenomenon or situation. Social structure is made up of the structured forms of social institutions and associations.

Social relation → Social institutions → Patterning of various social institutions = Social structure

- **Definition :**

Several Sociologists and social anthropologists have tried to define it, let us see the main definition as such :

- **According to Radcliffe Brown :** “Social structure consists of the sum total of all the social relationships of all individuals at a given moment of time.”
- **According to Ginsberg :** “Social structure is concerned with the principal forms of social organization, i.e., types of Groups, associations and the complex of these which continue societies.”

- **According to Persons :** “Social structure is the term applied to the particular arrangement of the interrelated institutions, agencies and social patterns, as well as the statuses and roles which each person assumes in the group.”

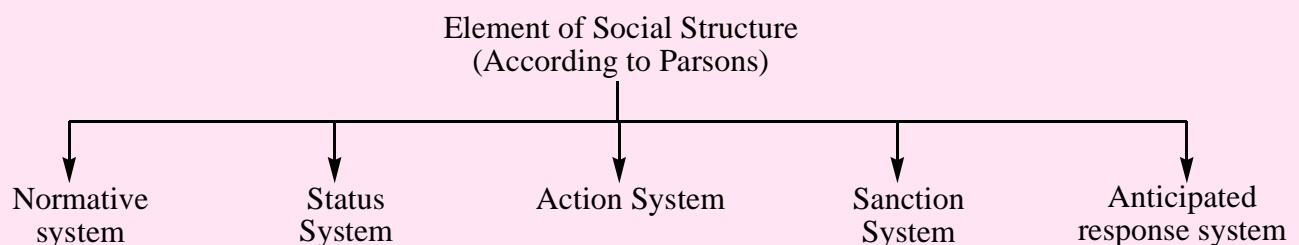
- **Characteristics of Social Structure :**

- (1) Social Structure are abstract.
- (2) Social structure is related to the external nature of society.
- (3) Sequence in units of Social Structure.
- (4) Every Unit of Social Structure has a definite Position.
- (5) Social structure is influenced by local features.
- (6) Hierarchy of sub structure in Social Structure.
- (7) Social Structure is relatively a permanent concept.
- (8) Elements of disintegration are also found in the social structure.

- **Elements of Social Structure**

In a Social Structure the human beings organize themselves into associations for the pursuit of some object or objects. The aim can be fulfilled only if the social structure is based upon certain principles.

According to Parsons there are many elements of social structure :



- (1) **Normative System :** Normative system presents the society with the ideals and values. The people attach emotional importance to these norms. The institution and associations are interrelated according to these norms. The individuals perform their roles in accordance with the accepted norms of society.
- (2) **Status system :** It refers to the status and roles of the individuals. Members of the society are required to perform different roles in accordance with their position social placement or social status and their capacities, capabilities, education, experience, skill etc.
- (3) **Sanction system :** In every society there is a sanction system to decide what is proper law permitted and acceptable by society. The members are expected to conform to the norms, values, law, etc, so that the society can function smoothly. But all members are not really conformists some may be non-conformists opponents, critics, rebels also and they also have some role for the reform, innovation or progress. The sanction system has certain scope to deal with tolerate or control them.

(4) **Anticipated response system** : The anticipated response system calls upon the individuals to participate in the social system. 'His preparation sets the social structure in motion . The successful working of social structure depends upon the realisation of his duties by the individual and his efforts to fulfill these duties.

(5) **Action System** : It is the object or goal to be arrived at by the social structure. The whole structure revolves around it. The Action is the root cause which weaves the web of social relationships and sets the social structure in motion.

- **Conclusion :**

Thus we can conclude by saying the social structure means more fundamental or basic patterns of social relations in a given society or social system. This is the blue print, or basic and permanent or long - lasting structure of a society, on the basis of which it functions. It is just like the basic systems in human body – the skeleton or bone system, digestive system, blood circulation system, and the nervous system, which work in mutual inter - relationship harmoniously and without which no one can be alive and function effectively.