
UNIT 8 SOCIAL GROUPS AND COMMUNITY*

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- To give a definition of community;
- To identify the bases and elements of community;
- To explain the relation between community and association;
- To discuss the characteristics of community;
- To describe social groups and their different classifications;
- To explain the major concept of social group;
- To describe the nature and types of social groups; and
- To discuss the different aspects of social groups.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Wherever the members of any group, small or large, live together in such a way that they share, not this or that interest but the basic conditions of a common life, we call that group a community. A community is essentially an area of social living. It is marked by some degree of social coherence.

Thus, community is a circle of interwoven relationships. Within the ranges of a community the members may carry on their economic, political, religious,

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educational and other activities. Hence community is the total organization of social life within a defined social space; e. g. Village, tribe, city, district.

Group means a collection of human beings who have social relationships with one another. Social relationship involves some degree of reciprocity as well as awareness of mutuality. On the basis, of this criterion, many of those divisions of a population that are sometimes named social groups may not be so. For general understanding we regard any collection of two or more individuals to be a group, whose members identify and interact with each other in a personalized manner. The small size of some groups (often no more than 15-20 People) enables all the members to know and to interact with the help of shared values and norms. As a result the members of a group feel strong inter-personal bonds among themselves and with the group as a whole. There are countless kinds of groups in contemporary societies, including families, friendship cliques, work crews, teenage gangs, sport teams, juries, rap groups and committees of all sorts. All of us are members of numerous social groups that influences or shape many of our daily activities. The family is an extremely important group in most of our lives, since bonds of love and affection, commitments, marriage and kinship link us closely within the family. Even if we do not live with all the members of our family or interact with them on daily basis, we commonly maintain these interpersonal ties through letters, phone calls and visits. Categorizing groups as either primary or secondary is a convenient way of indicating the depth and inclusiveness of their social relationship.

8.2 DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNITY

- 1) According to Bogardus, Community is a social group with some degree of 'we feeling' and 'living in a given area.
- 2) For Kingsley Davis, Community is the smallest territorial group that can embrace all aspects of social life.
- 3) Ginsberg defines Community as a group of social beings living a common life including all the infinite variety and complexity of relations which result from that common life which constitutes it.

8.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY

All communities need not be self-sufficient. Some communities are all-inclusive and independent of others. Among primitive people, some communities of no more than a hundred persons, (Examples: Yurok tribes of USA) which are almost isolated. But modern communities, especially large ones are much less self-contained. Economic and political interdependence rather than kinship and family relationships, is a major characteristic of our modern communities. Apart from this, a community has the following characteristics:

- 1) Definite territory
- 2) Population
- 3) Close social relationship
- 4) Cultural similarity

- 5) We feeling
- 6) Organized interaction

Great and Little Communities

In spite of the expansion of the community to the dimensions of the nation and the world, the smaller communities still remain as viable units. The nation or the world state does not eliminate the village or neighbourhood, though they may be changed in character. As social beings, we need smaller as well as the larger circles of community. The great community brings us opportunity, stability, economy, the constant stimulus of a richer, more varied culture. But living in the smaller community we find the nearer, more intimate satisfactions. The larger community provides peace and protection, patriotism and sometimes war, automobiles and the radio. The smaller provides friends and friendship, gossip and face to face rivalry, local pride and abode. Both are essential to the full life process.

Bases of Community

The mark of a community is that one's life may be lived wholly within it. One cannot live wholly within a business organization or a church; one can live wholly within a tribe or a city. The basic criterion of community then is that all of one's social relationships may be found within it. A community then is an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence. The bases of community are; 1. Locality and 2. Community Sentiment.

- 1) **Locality:** A community always occupies a geographical area. Locality is the physical basis of community. Even a nomad community, a band of gypsies, for example, has a local though changing habitation. At every moment, its members occupy together a definite place on the earth's surface. Most communities are settled and derive a strong bond of solidarity from physical proximity. A group of people form a community only when they begin to reside in a definite locality. In contrast with society, a community is, to an extent, locally limited. Living together facilitates people to develop social contacts, gives protection, safety and security. Most communities are settled and derive from the conditions of their locality a strong bond of solidarity. However, to some extent this local bond has been weakened in the modern world by the extending facilities of communication; this is especially apparent in the penetration into rural areas of dominant urban patterns. But the extension of communication is itself the condition of a larger but still territorial community.
- 2) **Community Sentiment:** People occupying specific local areas which lack the social coherence necessary to give them a community character in today's world. For example, the residents of a ward or district or a large city may lack sufficient contacts or common interests to instill conscious identification with the area. Such a 'neighborhood' is not a community because it does not possess a feeling of belonging together – it lacks community sentiment. Locality though a necessary condition, is not enough to create a community. A community is undoubtedly a common living. Community sentiment means a feeling of belonging together. The members develop a sense of 'we-feeling'. It means a kind of identification with the group. Without a sense of

identification, a sense of awareness, a sense of living and sharing some common interests in life there cannot be any community.

8.4 ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY SENTIMENT

- 1) **We-Feeling:** This is the feeling that leads men to identify themselves with others so that when they say “we” there is no thought of distinction and when they say “ours” there is no thought of division. This ‘we-sentiment’ is found wherever men have common interest, and thus throughout group life, but is revealed nowhere more clearly than where the interest is the territorial community.
- 2) **Role-Feeling:** This feeling involving subordination to the whole on the part of the individual is fostered by training and habituation in the daily discipline of life, so that each person feels he/she a role to play, his own function to fulfill in the reciprocal exchanges of the social scene.
- 3) **Dependency Feeling:** This refers to the individual sense of dependence upon the community as a necessary condition of his own life. This involves both a physical dependence, since his/her material wants are satisfied within it and a psychological dependence, since the community is the greater “home” that sustains him/her, embodying all that is at least familiar, if not wholly congenial to his life. The community is a refuge from the solitude and fears that accompany that individual isolation so characteristic of our modern life.

Criterion of Community

We are members, mostly, of a very small community, though we may be living in big cities. This is because our interests are cut down within a narrow area. On the contrary, we may live in a village and yet belong to a community as wide as the whole area of our civilization or even wider. No civilized community, as MacIver points out, has walls around it to cut it off completely from a larger one, whatever ‘iron-curtains’ may be drawn by the rulers of this nation or that. Communities exist within greater communities: the town within a region, the region within a nation and the nation within the world community which again, is in the process of development.

A community then is an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence. According to McIver, the mark of a community is that one’s life may be live wholly within it. One can’t live wholly within a business organization or a Church; one can live wholly only within a tribe or a city.

There may arise some questions such as, in certain condition some people gather for a long period of time, then will this gathering be called community or not? Following three set of questions are given regarding the condition given above. Among these questions first two get affirmative answer while the last one, negative

- 1) Shall we call monastery or convent or prison a community in our sense? These establishments are territorially based and they are, indeed, areas of social living. Many, however, would deny them a community status because

of the restricted range of functions of the inhabitants. But are human functions always limited by the nature of one's community? We should be inclined to answer this query in the affirmative.

- 2) Shall we call immigrant groups, which in the midst of large American cities cherish their own customs and speak their own language, communities? According to McIver such groups clearly possess the requirements.
- 3) Shall we call a social caste, the members of which exclude their fellow citizens from the more intimate social relationships, a community? Here the negative answer is more appropriate because, in order to satisfy our definition, the community group must by itself occupy a particular location. A social caste has social coherence, no doubt, but it lacks the community's territorial basis.

As a conclusion, community has been defined in following ways –

- a) A grouping of people
- b) Within a geographic area
- c) With a division of labour into specialized and interdependent functions
- d) With a common culture and a social system which organizes their activities
- e) Whose members are conscious of their unity and belonging to the community
- f) Whose members can act collectively in an organized manner.

8.5 COMMUNITY AND ASSOCIATION

One of the most important divisions of social groups is an association. An association is a group of people united for a specific purpose or a limited number of purposes. Such is an army or a school, the object of which is to defend the nation or to impart knowledge.

A community on the other hand, is a permanent social group embracing a totality of ends or purpose. In contrast with an association the life of the members of a community is wholly lived in it; here they find all their social relations, while outside it there is little but they need.

The task of deciding whether a group is a community or an association is not always easy. The greater the plurality of ends of an association the nearer it approaches the concept of community, though that may never be reached. Thus in India the so-called communities, which gave rise to the problem of communalism, are not communities in the sociological sense. They are rather ethnical groups within which certain social and religious interests are satisfied; but owing to the dependence of these groups on one another and on the larger provincial or national unit, they cannot fulfill the definition of a community. For the same reason a religious community or an *Ashram* cannot be strictly called a community though it is largely self-contained. Yet many of the Utopian communities of the USA in pioneer times and not a few Indian villages may be considered as real communities inasmuch as their inhabitant live a simple self-contained life separated from the rest.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Define the concept of community. Explain various elements of community sentiments.

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- 2) What are the characteristics of community? Describe its various bases with examples.

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- 3) Distinguish between community and association in brief.

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- 4) Explain the basic aspects of great and small communities

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8.6 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL GROUP

Definition of Social Group

- 1) Albion Small defines a group as ‘any number of people, larger or smaller, between whom such relations are discovered that they must be thought of together.’

- 2) Bogardus defines ‘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.’
- 3) Green Arnold defines ‘a group is an aggregate of individuals which persists in time which has one or more interests and activities in common and which is organized.’
- 4) Williams defines ‘a social group is a given aggregate of people playing inter-related roles and recognized by themselves or others as a unit of interaction.’

8.7 BASES OF CLASSIFICATION OF GROUPS

Sociology considers human groups its primary unit of analysis. If asked to describe the bases on which social groups exist, different answers may exist for different kinds of groups. There are several criteria by which social groups may be classified. They, for instance, include the nature of their interests, the degree of organization, the extent of their permanence, the kind of contact among the members and the like. Ginsberg also takes the same view and says, ‘Groups can be classified in numerous ways, size and spatial distribution. Permanence and inclusiveness of the relationships on which they rest, mode of formation, type of organization and so forth.’

Thus, while some sociologists give a simple basis for classifying groups, others have given an elaborate classificatory scheme.

George Simmel considered size as the criterion for classification of groups. Since the individual with his societal conditioning is the most elementary unit of sociology, Simmel began with the nomad. He took the single person as a focus of group relationships and pursued his analysis through the ‘dyad’ and the ‘triad’ and other smaller collectivities on the one hand and the large scale groups on the other.

Dwight Sanderson takes structure as the basis for classifying groups. He classifies them into involuntary, voluntary and delegate groups.

C.H. Cooley divides groups into two types, namely primary group and secondary group on the basis of the kind of contact.

F.H. Giddings classifies groups into genetic or congregate on the basis of the type of relationship.

W.G. Sumner makes a distinction between the in-group and out-group on the basis of consciousness of kind.

George Hasen classifies groups on the basis of their relations to other groups into unsocial, pseudo-social or pro-social.

Miller divides social groups into horizontal and vertical groups.

8.7.1 Primary Groups and Secondary Groups

The term 'Primary Group' was coined by Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), in 1909 in his book 'Social Organization'. A primary group is relatively small. Members of this group generally have face to face contacts. They have intimate and cooperative relationship as well as strong loyalty. The relationships between the members are ends in themselves because members derive pleasure and enjoyment merely by associating with one another. They have no other end or goals in view. The primary group comes to an end when one or more members leave it they can't be substituted by others. The best example of a primary group is the family or the friendship or peer group.

Secondary Groups: Secondary groups in several respects are the opposite of primary groups. As they are in general large groups, members of the secondary groups maintain relatively limited, formal and impersonal relationships with one another. Secondary groups are specific or specialized Interest groups. It generally has a well-defined division of labor. Secondary groups may continue irrespective of whether its original members continue to be its members or not. A football team, a music club, a factory, an army etc. are examples of secondary groups.

Difference between Primary and Secondary Group

- 1) The size of the primary group is small; Secondary group is bigger.
- 2) There exists a personal and intimate relationship among members of a primary group while the relationship among the members of the secondary group is relatively impersonal.
- 3) There is much face to face communication among members of a primary group while in the secondary group the members have little face to face communication.
- 4) Members have a strong sense of loyalty of 'we' feeling in a primary group but in case of a secondary group anonymity prevails.
- 5) Informality is most common in a primary group. The group usually does not have a name, officers or regular meeting place, but in secondary group such formality prevails.
- 6) Primary group are relationship-oriented but secondary groups are goal oriented.
- 7) In primary groups, the relations are inclusive and that is why the absence of one person cannot be fulfilled by another. Inclusiveness of relations is not found in secondary groups and therefore a person can very easily be substituted for another.
- 8) Virtues like love, sympathy, mutual help etc. flourish in the primary groups while secondary groups promote self-interest and individuality.
- 9) Group decisions are more traditional and non-rational in primary group while in secondary group decisions are more rational and the emphasis is on efficiency.
- 10) The position of a person is fixed according to his/her birth-order and age in the primary group while it is fixed according to roles in the secondary groups.

- 11) Primary groups are primary in time and importance. As such, they are the foundation stones of the society while the secondary groups are always secondary in importance.

Primary and Secondary Relations in Modern World

Among primitive people and in villages and small town communities, individuals are linked together for the most part by primary bonds – the other members of the group are known as persons, not merely as representatives of positions in the formal order. Thus, for his apprentices the member of the medieval guild was more than a “boss”; he was a counsellor, disciplinarian, teacher, friend (or enemy) and so on.

Task Group

Some groups are neither clearly primary nor secondary but are intermediate, with some features of each. Task groups (or task oriented groups) are small groups formed to do some task or set of task (Nixon, 1979). They include work teams, committees, and panel of many sorts. Some scholars consider the task group the most common form of group of our society (Fisher, 1980). Task group resemble primary groups in being small, for only small groups are efficient work units. This is why large labour forces are broken down into small teams. Task group also resemble primary groups in that interaction is typically face-to-face and informal. But the task group contacts are impersonal, segmental and utilitarian. Members are not much interested in one another as persons and are not concerned with the entire person but just with work performance in the task group.

8.7.2 Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

Somewhat similar to the concept of primary and secondary groups are the concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, developed by Ferdinand Tonnies (1887). These two terms translate roughly as ‘Community’ and ‘Society’. The Gemeinschaft is a social system in which most relationships are personal or traditional and often both. A good example is the feudal manor, a small community held together by a combination of personal relationships and status obligation. Although great inequality existed, the lord of the manor was personally known to his subjects, while their duties to him were balanced by his obligation for their welfare.

In the Gesellschaft, the society of tradition is replaced with the society of contract. In this society neither personal attachment nor traditional rights and duties are important. The relationships between people are determined by bargaining and defined in written agreements. Relatives are often separated because people move about and live among strangers. Commonly accepted codes of behavior are largely replaced by rational or ‘cold-blooded’ calculation of profit and loss. Thus in the Gemeinschaft, primary-group relationships were dominant, while in the Gesellschaft, secondary-group relationships gained in importance.

Gemeinschaft Relationships Gesellschaft relationships

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|----------------|---------------------|
| 1) Personal | Impersonal |
| 2) Informal | Formal, Contractual |
| 3) Traditional | Utilitarian |

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|----------------|--------------------------|
| 4) Sentimental | Realistic, 'hard-boiled' |
| 5) General | Specialized |

8.7.3 In Group and Out Group

These twin terms were introduced by WG Sumner to refer insiders in a 'we' relationship, in contrast with outsiders to the relationship. Sumner used the term 'in-group' in his celebrated book *Folkways* (1906). There are some groups to which I belong, my family, my religion, my university, my clique, my profession, my sex, my nation – any group which precede with the pronoun, "my". These are in-group, because I feel, I belong to them. There are other groups to which I do not belong other families, cliques, occupations, races, nationalities, religions, the other sex – these are out groups, for I am outside them.

The simplest societies live in small, isolated bands which are usually clans of kinsfolk. It was kinship which located one's in-group and out-group and when two strangers met, the first thing they had to do was establish the relationship. If kinship could be established they were friends, both members of the in group. If no relationship could be established, then in many societies they were enemies and acted accordingly. In modern society, people belong to so many groups that their in-group and out-group relationship may overlap. For example, in a hostel there are various in-groups who consider others as members of out-groups. However, in a cricket match against another hostel, all the hostel inmates will behave as in-group and cheer their team on the field.

In-groups and out-groups are important then, because they affect behaviour. From fellow members of an in-group we expect recognition loyalty and helpfulness. From out-group our expectation varies with the kind of out group. From some out-group we expect hostility; from others, a more or less friendly competition; from still others, indifference. From the same out group, we may expect neither hostility nor indifference yet in our behavior a difference undeniably remains. For example, the 12 year boy who shuns girls grows up to become a romantic lover and spends most of his life in matrimony. Yet when men and women meet on social occasions they tend to split into sex groups, perhaps because each sex is bored by many of the conversational interests of the other. The clique is one kind of in-group. Thus, our behavior is affected by the particular kind of in-group or out-group which is involved. However, it should also be obvious that in-group and out-group are not actually groups in-so-far as people create them in their use of the pronouns 'we' and 'they' and develop a kind of attitude towards these groups. Nevertheless, this distinction is an important formal distinction because it enables us to construct two significant sociological principles.

- a) The in-group members tend to stereotype those who are in the out-group. Thus the people of Delhi may have stereotypes of those who live in Bihar or UP. The significant thing is that such stereotypes are usually formed by considering what appears to the members of the in-group as the least respectable traits to be found in the members of the out-group. The people of each linguistic state in India have tendency to form a stereotype of the people of other linguistic states. A Punjabi, for instance, has stereotype or a generalized perception of what a Gujarati do not fit into that stereotype. In fact, social distance (a concept developed by Bogardus) encourages such categorization and discourages individual differentiation. Knowledge of this

principle helps to considerably reduce the unfortunate effects of such categorization into stereotypes and to demolish the barriers that obstruct the easy communication between people.

- b) Any threat, real or imaginary, from an out-group tends to bind the members of the in-group against the members of the out-group. This may be illustrated with references to our experience in the family situation. Meccius, the Chinese sage, said many years ago: “Brothers and sisters who may quarrel within the walls of their home, will bind themselves together to drive away any intruder”.

8.7.4 Reference Group

Reference group refers to any group accepted as model or guide for our judgments and actions. However, it needs further elaboration for clarity. In some situations, we conform not to the norms to which we belong but rather to those of the groups to which we would like to be identified.

A reference group may not be an actual group. It may even be an imaginary one. Any group is a reference group for someone if his conception of it, which may or may not be realistic, is part of his frame of reference for assessment of himself or of his situation.

- 1) Thus, an individual who is anxious to move up the social ladder usually, has a tendency to conform to the norms of etiquette and speech of a higher social class than his own because he seeks identification with this class. ‘Sanskritization’ in the Indian context, is one of the best illustrations of the concept of reference group where people in the upper ladder of the caste hierarchy are taken as a ‘model’ and imitated by those below them. For members of a particular group, another group is a reference group if any of the following circumstances prevail 1. When members of the first group aspire to membership of the second group, the second group becomes the reference group for the next. For example, IAS trainees serve as the reference group for many of the university students in India.
- 2) When members of the first group strive to be like the members of the second group in some respect, the second group serves as the Positive reference group of the first. It is to be noted here that the first group wants to be like the second group. For example, the non-Brahmins, in some parts of India have a tendency to emulate the ways of behavior of the Brahmins in order to acquire the prestige of the Brahmins (as noted by Srinivas).
- 3) When the members of the first group derive some satisfaction from being unlike the members of the second group in some respect, and even strive to maintain the difference between themselves and the members of the second group, the latter group is the Negative reference group of the first. For example, in USA, the whites strive to remain unlike the African Americans and in this case the African Americans become the negative reference group for the whites.
- 4) When without necessarily striving to be like or unlike or to belong to the second group, the members of the first group appraise their own group or themselves by using the second group or its members as a standard for comparison; the second group becomes the reference group of the first. For

examples, in some situation the non-teaching employees of the colleges are found to assess their own performance or record attendance in reference to those of the teachers.

Vertical and Horizontal Groups

A vertical group (concepts by Miller) consists of members from all walks of life, while a horizontal group consists mainly of members from one social class. Occupational groups of doctors, electricians, engineers etc. are examples of the first, while caste groups are examples of vertical groups.

Institutional and Non-Institutional Groups

Institutional group are those which function through rituals, symbols, officers, codes of conduct, regulatory power including power to punish. The nation is an institutional group. The state as an association of citizens for power is an institutional group in contrast to picnic party which is a non-institutional group.

Contractual and Non-Contractual Groups

The contractual groups born with a contract within a definition of power and responsibilities of the members as well as of the group. It is a formal group with definite tendency toward institutionalization. The framers of Indian Constitution, the corporation, a labor union are some examples of contractual group. The non-contractual groups are students, passengers on a train etc.

Voluntary and Involuntary Groups

A voluntary group is one which a person joins his own. It is his option whether he wants to remain a member or not. For example, a club membership is voluntary. An involuntary group is one which is based on kinship or caste group and it is beyond own will an example of involuntary group members.

Informal and Formal Groups

An informal group is one in which a number of persons work together to attain a common goal. There is no set of formal rules and regulations to govern the relationship. It has no definite structure. Crowd is an example of an informal group.

A formal group consists of a number of persons working together toward a given goal according to a set of rules under the direction of a set of officers. It has a definite structure. A bureaucratic group is an example of a formal group.

8.8 SOCIAL GROUP AND COMMUNITY DIFFERENCES

Social Group	Community
1) Group is an artificial creation.	1) Community is a natural growth.
2) Group is formed to realize some.	2) Community includes the whole circle of social life.
3) Membership of group is voluntary.	3) Membership of community is compulsory.
4) Group is comparatively temporary.	4) Community is comparatively permanent.
5) Group is a part of community.	5) Community is a whole.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Define social group. What are objectives of social group?

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2) What are the different types of Social groups? Describe with examples.

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3) Explain basic aspects of In-group and Out-group groups.

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4) What are the bases of classification of Social groups? Explain.

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8.9 LET US SUM UP

This unit has explained clearly some important and basic concepts of Community and social group. Community is the most inclusive grouping of humans, marked by the possibility for the individual member to live his life wholly within it. Community need to be self-sufficient and in fact is decreasingly so as civilization becomes more interdependent. This unit briefly examined the two bases of all communities, the occupation of a territorial area and the shared possession of a community sentiment.

Basic concepts of social group, as explained in this unit, by group it means any collection of human beings who are brought into social relationship with one another. Social relationships involve some degree of reciprocity between those related, some measure of mutual awareness as reflected in the attitudes of the members of the group. On the basis of this criterion, many of those divisions of a population named social groups. The basis for the classification of groups, then, size or some quality of group interaction or some quality of group interest or the degree of organization, or some of these combination. The classification of major types of groupings is based primarily upon the range and nature of interests and the degree of group organization, while other criteria enter into the distinctions between the subtypes.

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