

Understanding Society Chapter 1

Social Structure, Stratification and Social Processes

Exercise : Solutions of Questions on Page Number : 20

Q1 :

Discuss the different tasks that demand cooperation with reference to agricultural or industrial operations.

Answer :

Cooperation in a society plays a very important role because it enables the social structure in a society. According to Durkheim, solidarity is important to understand cooperation in a society. The following are the two kinds of society referred to, by Durkheim:

(i) Agricultural society - Durkheim explained mechanical solidarity which is present in the agricultural operations, where most of the members live similar lives with little division of labour. For example, activities like transplantation of crops, tilling the land and ploughing the field are activities not associated with specialization of labour.

(ii) Industrial society - Here Durkheim explained organic solidarity, which is found in industrial operations and includes a specialized division of labour. For example, different stages of production at a manufacturing unit require specialization of labour of workers as they have to operate different kinds of machines.

Both of them are forms of cooperation in a society.

Q2 :

Is cooperation always voluntary or is it enforced? If enforced, is it sanctioned or is the strength of norms that ensure cooperation? Discuss with examples.

Answer :

According to Karl Marx's conflict perspective, cooperation is enforced and not voluntary. The enforcement of cooperation takes place because of the existence of the class system. The strength of norms or the 'social power' compels the workers to work because of the alien force which exists outside them. It is caused by the division of labour. For this, Marx gave an example of a worker in a factory, who undergoes the process of 'alienation' and loses control over the products of his/her labour because he/she follows the monotonous routine every time. Also, compared to the conditions of a factory worker who works in a cooperative environment with a worker who works for himself, it is found that the independent worker is happier.

Q3 :

Can you find illustrative examples of conflict drawn from Indian society? Discuss the causes that led to conflict in each instance.

Answer :

The following are some examples of conflicts that have occurred in the Indian society:

(i) Caste-based conflict - This type of conflict is based upon the institution of caste and it has led to violent clashes between the traditionally superior and inferior communities. Education has spread awareness about the oppression caused by this system. However, a lot needs to be done to eradicate the prejudice of caste.

(ii) The Kashmir conflict - India has officially stated that it believes that Kashmir is an integral part of India. Pakistan says that Kashmir is a disputed territory, whose final status must be determined by the people of Kashmir. China states that Aksai Chin is a part of China. Certain Kashmiri independent groups believe that Kashmir should be independent of both, India and Pakistan.

This was a territorial conflict.

(i) The Godhra incident - On February 27, 2002 at Godhra city in the state of Gujarat, the Sabarmati train was forcibly stopped and attacked by a large Muslim mob. As a result, 58 Hindu pilgrims - mostly women, children and seniors, returning from the holy city of Ayodhya - were burned alive. The attack prompted retaliatory massacres against Muslims on a large scale, in which 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed.

This conflict was based on religion.

(i) The Kaveri river conflict - It is a conflict between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the sharing of water of the river Kaveri. A dam was built over the portion of river that lies upstream in Karnataka, leading to depletion of water resources for the farmers in Tamil Nadu. A central tribunal, later, allotted more water to Tamil Nadu and allowed it to construct the Mettur dam as well.

This led to large scale riots in Karnataka.

This conflict was based on sharing of resources.

Q4 :

Write an essay based on examples to show how conflicts get resolved.

Answer :

There are many conflicts in contemporary society based upon different factors, ranging from social, economic and cultural. The kind of resolution depends upon nature of the conflict. Local conflicts get resolved through the intervention of administration and law enforcement agencies, like the police. However, bigger conflicts that involve communities of people cannot be resolved in this way. Special provisions have to be made for resolution of such conflicts.

Dialogue between the aggrieved parties is the most suitable way of finding out the root cause of the conflict. A successful example of dialogue as a mechanism of conflict resolution is the Good Friday agreement between Ireland and UK that led to reduction in violence in Ireland. However, in most cases, the leadership takes up rhetorical positions which create further dissatisfaction among people. Eventually, many conflicts take on a violent form and cause great loss of life and property. These include religious, ethnic and linguistic conflicts. Territorial and ideological disputes also lead to wars. The Second World War was a result of the conflict between territorial ambitions of European powers, while the Cold War was an ideological battle. Such conflicts get resolved only when one of the parties become too weak to challenge the other one. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union ensured the supremacy of the USA after the end of Cold War. The United Nations is an organization created to resolve conflicts, but its role has become increasingly limited in the present situation.

Ethnic conflicts and insurgencies have also taken place in the North-Eastern part of India due to a combination of factors. When there is a movement regarding reservation by the backward classes, within the country, the government resolves the issues by making special provisions in the constitution. This was also in the recent case of Jan Lokpal Bill, when Anna Hazare started a 'fast unto death' to exert pressure on the government of India to enact a strong anti-corruption legislation. Judicial action is also a remedy to resolve conflicts which are sensitive in nature. For example, the Babri Masjid dispute at Ayodhya.

Q5 :

Imagine a society where there is no competition. Is it possible? If not, why not?

Answer :

A society without competition is not possible. This is because it is an ambiguous idea, which is totally utopian in nature. Historically also, the idea of a society without competition, has failed miserably. Many societies adopted the ideology of socialism, which was based upon the principle of equality to all. However, socialism did not work as it was inconsistent with the fundamental principles of human behavior. It was inherent in human beings to compete, in order to survive. The growth of civilization has tempered indiscriminate competition to some extent and it has been the main difference between savages and civilized people. Technological advancements and innovations in human society have mostly taken place due to the urgency imposed by competition.

Furthermore, competition is the dominant ideology of capitalism. The main idea here lies behind rational individuals in free competition in the marketplace, each competing to get the maximum profit.

For example, if there was no competition, there would have been no difference between a student with the highest marks and a student with the lowest marks. Hence, the spirit of development would have been lost.

Q6 :

Talk to your parents and elders, grandparents and their contemporaries and discuss whether modern society is really more competitive or conflict ridden than it used to be before. And if you think it is, how would you explain this sociologically?

Answer :

Note: Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose.

One sample answer has been provided to you:

Society was competitive even during the time of our previous generations. Though the needs of that time were different, striving to get the best has always been a part of the society. For example, fifty years ago, the value of Rs. 100 would have been equal to the value of Rs 10,000 in the contemporary times. Hence, the competition at that time was to get Rs. 100, while today it is to get Rs. 10000 at least.



The urge to get the best available resources of the conflicts. This has been visible in the exploration of resources and the resultant process of colonization of were based upon locally unique phenomena. For example, the caste system in India was one of the oldest forms of division of labour.

time has always led to competition and consequently, the world by European explorers in search of new newly discovered lands. The other types of conflicts

Therefore, it can be concluded that society has never been free from conflicts and competition because there has always been a change in the nature of conflicts in different periods of a society according to the prevalent social, economic and cultural conditions.