

SOCIAL PROCESSES- I

The concept of social process refers to some of the general and recurrent forms that social interaction may take. The interaction or mutual activity is the essence of social life. Interaction between individuals and groups occurs in the form of social process. Social processes refers to forms of social interaction that occur again and again.

Meaning of Social Interaction: Social interactions are reciprocal relationships which not only influence the interacting individuals but also the quality of relationships.

According to Gillin and Gillin, “By social interaction we refer to social relations of all sorts in functions – dynamic social relations of all kinds – whether such relations exist between individual and individual, between group and group and group and individual, as the case may be”.

Eldredge and Merrill say, “Social interaction is thus the general process whereby two or more persons are in meaningful contact-as a result of which their behaviour is modified, however, slightly”. The mere placing of individuals in physical proximity, although it usually results in at least a medium of interaction, does not weld them into a social unit or group.

Social interaction may then be defined as that dynamic interplay of forces in which contact between persons and groups result in modifications of the attitudes and behaviour of the participants.

The two basic condition of social interaction are (i) social contact and (ii) communication. In the words of Gillin and Gillin, “social contact is the first phase of interaction”. Social contacts are always established through the medium of someone causes sense organ.

An object can be perceived by the sense organ only when that object causes communication with that sense organ. Hence the means of communication are essential adjuncts of social contact. Communication may be the form of direct person to person or it may take place through some medium of long-range contact such as the telephone, telegraph, television etc.

Meaning of Social Process:

Social processes refer to forms of social interaction that occur repeatedly. By social processes we mean those ways in which individuals and groups interact and establish social relationships. There are various of forms of social interaction such as cooperation, conflict, competition and accommodation etc. According to Maclver, “Social process is the manner in which the relations of the members of a group, once brought together, acquire a distinctive character”.

As Ginsberg says, “Social processes mean the various modes of interaction between individuals or groups including cooperation and conflict, social differentiation and integration, development, arrest and decay”.

According to Horton and Hunt, “The term social process refers to the repetitive form of behaviour which are commonly found in social life”.

Types of Social Processes:

Associative Process:

The associative or conjunctive social processes are positive. These social processes work for the solidarity and benefit of society. This category of social processes include cooperation, accommodation, assimilation and acculturation etc. Three major social processes such as cooperation, accommodation and assimilation are discussed below.

1. Cooperation:

Cooperation is one of fundamental processes of social life. It is a form of social process in which two or more individuals or groups work together jointly to achieve common goals. Cooperation is the form of social interaction in which all participants benefit by attaining their goals.

The term 'cooperation' has been derived from two Latin words – 'Co' meaning 'together and Operary meaning 'to work'. Hence, cooperation means working together for the achievement of a common goal or goals. When two or more persons work together to gain common goal, it is called cooperation. Co-operation means working together in the pursuit of like or common interests. It is defined by Green as "the continuous and common Endeavour of two or more persons to perform a task or to reach a goal that is commonly cherished.

According to Merrill and Eldregde, "Cooperation is a form of social interaction wherein two or more persons work together to gain a common end".

In the words of Fairchild, "Cooperation is the process by which the individuals or groups combine their effort in a more or less organized way for the attainment of common objective", Cooperation involves two elements: (i) Common end and (ii) Organized effort. When different persons have the same goals and also realize that individually they cannot achieve these goals, they work jointly for the fulfillment of these goals.

Following are the important characteristics of cooperation:

- (i) Cooperation is an associative process of social interaction which takes place between two or more individuals or groups.
- (ii) Cooperation is a conscious process in which individuals or groups have to work consciously.
- (iii) Cooperation is a personal process in which individuals and groups personally meet and work together for a common objective.

- (iv) Cooperation is a continuous process. There is continuity in the collective efforts in cooperation.
- (v) Cooperation is a universal process which is found in all groups, societies and nations.
- (vi) Cooperation is based upon two elements such as common end and organised effort.
- (vii) Common ends can be better achieved by cooperation and it is necessary for the progress of individual as well as society.

Types of Cooperation:

Cooperation is of different types. Maclver and Page have divided cooperation into two main types namely, (i) Direct Cooperation (ii) Indirect Cooperation.

(i) Direct Cooperation:

Under direct cooperation may be included all those activities in which people do like things together. For example, plying together, working together, carrying a load together or pulling the car out of mud together. The essential character of this kind of cooperation is that people do such identical function which they can also do separately. This type of cooperation is voluntary e.g., cooperation between husband and wife, teacher and student, master and servant etc.

(ii) Indirect Cooperation:

Under indirect cooperation are included those activities in which people do unlike tasks together towards a common end. For example, when carpenters, plumbers and masons cooperate to build a house. This cooperation is based on the principle of the division of labour.

In it people perform different functions but for the attainment of the common objective. In the modern technological age, specialization of skills and function are more required for which indirect cooperation is rapidly replacing direct cooperation.

A.W. Green has classified cooperation into three main categories such as (i) Primary cooperation (ii) Secondary cooperation (iii) Tertiary cooperation.

(i) Primary Cooperation:

This type of cooperation is found in primary groups such as the family. In this form, there is an identify of interests between the individuals and the group. The achievement of the interests of the group includes the realization of the individual's interests.

(ii) Secondary Cooperation:

Secondary cooperation is found in secondary groups such as Government, industry, trade union and church etc. For example, in an industry, each may work in cooperation with others for his own wages, salaries, promotion, profits and in some cases prestige and power. In this form of cooperation there is disparity of interests between the individuals.

(iii) Tertiary Cooperation:

This type of cooperation is ground in the interaction between the various big and small groups to meet a particular situation. In it, the attitudes of the cooperating parties are purely opportunistic; the organisation of their cooperation is both loose and fragile. For example, two political parties with different ideologies may get united to defeat their rival party in an election.

Ogburn and Nimikoff divided cooperation into three main types:

i. General Cooperation:

When some people cooperate for the common goals then there is cooperation, which is known as general cooperation e.g. cooperation found in cultural functions is the general cooperation.

ii. Friendly Cooperation:

When we want to attain the happiness and contentment of our group we give cooperation to each other, then this type of cooperation is known as friendly cooperation e.g. dancing, singing, dating etc.

iii. Helping Cooperation:

When some people work for the victims of famine or flood then this type of cooperation is known as helping cooperation.

Role or Importance of Cooperation:

- Cooperation is the most elementary form of social process without which society cannot exist. According to Kropotkin, it is so important in the life of an individual is that it is difficult to survive without it.
- Cooperation is the foundation of our social life. The continuation of the human race requires the cooperation of male and female for reproduction and upbringing of children.
- Cooperation for human beings is both a psychological and social necessity. It is needed at every step in our life.
- The physical mental and even the spiritual needs of the individual remain unsatisfied if he does not agree to cooperate with his fellow-members.
- The outstanding progress in science and technology, agriculture and industry, transport and communication would not have been possible without Cooperation.

2. Accommodation:

Adjustment is the way of life. It can take place in two ways such as adaptation and accommodation. Adaptation refers to the process of biological adjustment. Accommodation, on the other hand, implies the process of social adjustment. “Accommodation is the achievement of adjustment between people that permits harmonious acting together in social situation. It is

achieved by an individual through the acquisition of behaviour patterns, habits and attitudes which are transmitted to him socially.

It is a process through which individuals or groups make adjustment to the changed situation to overcome difficulties faced by them. As Maclver and Page say, “the term accommodation refers particularly to the process in which man attains sense of harmony with his environment”.

According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, “Accommodation is a term used by sociologist to describe the adjustment of hostile individuals or groups.”

As Horton and Hunt defines “Accommodation Is a process of developing temporary working agreements between conflicting individuals or groups”.

In the words of Gillin and Gillin “Accommodation is the process by which competing and conflicting individuals and groups adjust their relationship to each other in order to overcome the difficulties which arise in competition, contravention or conflict”.

It is the termination of competing or conflicting relations between individuals, groups and other human relationship structures. It is a way of inventing social arrangement which enable people to work together whether they like it or not. This led Sumner to refer to accommodation as ‘antagonistic cooperation’.

Characteristics:

- (i) It is the End-result of Conflict
- (ii) It is both Conscious and Unconscious Process
- (iii) It is a Universal Activity
- (iv) It is a Continuous Process
- (v) It is a Mixture of both Love and Hatred:

Forms or Methods of Accommodation:

- (i) **Admission of one's Defeat:** This method of accommodation is applicable between the conflicting parties of unequal strength. The stronger group can pressurize the weaker group by its strength. The weaker party submits to the stronger one out of fear or because of fear of being over-powered.
- (ii) **Compromise:** This method is applicable when the combatants are of equal strength. In compromise, each party to the dispute makes some concessions and yields to some demand of the other. The "all or nothing" attitude gives way to a willingness to yield certain points in order to gain others.
- (iii) **Arbitration and Conciliation:** Accommodation is also achieved by means of arbitration and conciliation which involves attempts of the third party to resolve the conflict between the contending parties.
- (iv) **Toleration:** Toleration is the method of accommodation in which there is no settlement of dispute but there is only the avoidance of overt conflict or open conflict. Toleration is found in the field of religion where different religious groups exist side by side, having different policies and ideologies.
- (v) **Conversion:** Conversion is a method of accommodation in which one of the contending parties tries to convert his opponents to his view of point by proving that he is right and they are wrong. As a result, the party which has been convinced is likely to accept the view point of other party.
- (vi) **Rationalization:** Accommodation can be achieved by rationalization. It is a method which involves the withdrawal of contending party from the conflict on the basis of some imaginary explanations to justify his action. In other words it means an individual or a group rationalizes his behaviour by plausible exercises and explanations.

Importance of Accommodation:

Accommodation is the way which enable people to work together whether they like it or not. Society can hardly go on without accommodation. Since conflict disturbs social integration, disrupts social order and damages social stability, accommodation is essentially essential to check conflict and to maintain cooperation which is the sine qua non of social life.

It not only reduces or controls conflict but also enables the individuals and groups to adjust themselves to changed conditions. It is the basis of social organization. As Burgess remarks: “Social organization is the sum total of accommodation to past and present situations. All the social heritages, traditions, sentiments, culture, techniques are accommodations..... ”

Accommodation makes for group life. It is indispensable in modern complex society. In accommodation the barriers between the parties have been partially broken down, social distance weakened and formal relations established whereby groups can work together.

3. Assimilation:

Assimilation is a fundamental social process; it is that process by which individuals belonging to different cultures are united into one. Successful accommodation sets the stage for an additional consequences of human interactions, namely assimilation. This implies the complete merging and fusion of two or more bodies into a single common body, a process analogous to digestion, in which we say that food is assimilated.

For instance, American Indians adopted cultural elements of whites abandoning their own culture. But assimilation is not limited to this single field only. For example, husbands and wives with dissimilar background often develop a surprising unity of interest and purpose.

Assimilation is a slow and gradual process. It takes quite some time before individuals or groups once dissimilar becomes similar. **Acculturation** is the first step to assimilation. Acculturation is

the name given to the stage when the cultural group which is in contact with another borrows from it certain cultural elements and incorporates them into its own culture.

The contact between the two groups inevitably affects both; though it is natural that culturally weaker group would do more of the borrowing from and would give very little to the culturally stronger group. When two cultures meet, the dominant culture becomes the common culture of the two interacting cultures.

Some of its definitions of assimilation are given below:

According to Biesanz and Biesanz, “Assimilation is the social process whereby individuals or groups come to share the same sentiments and goals”.

“Assimilation”, says E.S. Bogardus, “is a process whereby attitudes of many persons are united, and thus, develop into a united group”.

As Ogburn and Nimkoff define, “Assimilation is the process whereby individuals or groups once dissimilar become similar, that it become identified in the interests and outlook”.

Characteristics of Assimilation:

- (i) Assimilation is an associative process.
- (ii) Assimilation is a universal process. It is found in every place and at all times.
- (iii) Assimilation is a slow and gradual process. It is gradual as the individual comes to share the expectations of another group and slowly acquires a new set of values.
- (iv) Assimilation is a unconscious process. Individuals are not conscious that they discard their own values and acquire new set of values.
- (v) Assimilation is a two-way process. It is based on the principle of give and take. Assimilation takes place when groups of individuals borrow cultural elements from each other and incorporate them to their own culture.

Factors Conducive for Assimilation:**The following factors may account for the ready occurrence of assimilation:**

- (i) **Toleration:** Tolerance helps people to come together, to develop contacts and to participate in common cultural and social activities. When the dominant group is hospitable and tolerant towards differences, the minority groups have a greater opportunity to participate in the total community life.
- (ii) **Close Social Contact:** When the people or group of different cultures come into close proximity with each other, the assimilation process takes place very easily. The close social contact creates a good understanding among the people and the group and this creates a healthy atmosphere in which people exchange their views in a better way. For instance, in India the assimilation between Hinduism and Buddhism is possible due to the close social contact among the members of these two religious groups. Thus, the close physical proximity plays a vital role in promoting the assimilation process.
- (iii) **Amalgamation:** Amalgamation is another promoting factor of assimilation. By amalgamation we mean, individuals or groups come into close contact to one another. It occurs when two different cultural groups establish matrimonial relationship among themselves.
- (iv) **Equal Economic Opportunity:** The inequality of economic status among the people of different cultural groups hinder the process of assimilation. But the equal economic opportunities facilitate assimilation process. The people or groups having equal economic position become more easily intimate. Thus, intimate relationship promotes assimilation.
- (v) **Common Physical Traits:** Common physical traits or qualities of the people of different cultures also promote the process of assimilation. The foreign immigrants of

the same race can more easily assimilate than those with different races. For instance, the Indians who live in America permanently can easily assimilate with the Indian culture.

- (vi) **Cultural similarity:** Cultural similarities between two groups of individuals promote assimilation. If there are similarities between culture groups, assimilation is quick to take place. Similarly, assimilation occurs most readily when two culture groups have common language. Without knowledge of language, the individual remains outside the adopted society. The first step in assimilation into a new society is, therefore, to learn language.

Factors Hindering Assimilation:

Merely bringing persons of different backgrounds together does not assure that a fusion of cultures and personalities take place. Sometimes it results in conflict rather than fusion between the contiguous groups. There are various factors that retard assimilation. These factors are discussed below.

- (i) **Physical Differences:** Differences in features, complexion of skin and other physical trait may also help or hinder in assimilation. Generally the adjustment problems are the easiest for those immigrants who in appearance are supposedly most like the people of the new land.
- (ii) **Cultural Differences:** Language and religion are usually considered to be main constituents of culture, Immigrants having the same religion and language can easily adjust themselves in other area or country.
- (iii) **Prejudice:** Prejudice is a barrier to assimilation. Prejudice is the attitude on which segregation depends for its success. As long as the dominant group prejudices those who have been set apart, neither they as a group nor their individual members can

easily become assimilated to the general culture. Prejudice also impedes assimilation between constituent elements within a given society.

- (iv) **Sense of superiority and inferiority:** Assimilation is hindered by the feelings of superiority and inferiority. The people who have strong feelings of superiority, generally hate the people who suffer from a sense of inferiority. Due to this reason intimate relationship between two groups of people become difficult. Hence, assimilation is retarded.
- (v) **Domination and subordination:** Assimilation between two groups of people is almost impossible where one group dominates the other. In this case social relation which is essential for assimilation does not develop among the people of dominant and subordinate groups. The dominant group always considers the people of subordinate group as inferior and exercises its power over them. As a result jealousy, hatred, suspicion and conflict etc. develop among them. All these hinder the process of assimilation.
- (vi) **Isolation:** Isolation also hinders assimilation. People who live in isolation fail to establish social contacts with others. The isolated people cut off entire social relationship with other people in society. Therefore, the process of assimilation becomes very difficult.

In short, it can be summed up that assimilation is a slow process of adoption and adjustment on the part of individuals. There is no abrupt change in the way of life. In short, assimilation is a process of cultural adoption and adjustment.