

## Concept of Society



The term “*society*” is of term used in various senses. For instance, we speak of the Co-operative society, The Agricultural society, The Tribal Society, The Industrial Society, The Friendly Society, The Theosophical society etc. Here society means an association. Sometimes, words such as “I enjoy his society”, “I like the society of artists”, “I move in high society”, are also used to indicate company, fellowship. Terms such as urban society, rural society, a modern industrial society, a primitive society, an open society or a closed society, are also in fashion.

### Terminology:

The term society is derived form a Latin word “*Societas*” which in turn was derived from the noun ‘*socius*’, meaning companionship which means sociability. In the words of **George Simmel**, it is this element of sociability which defines the true essence of society.

### Definition:

Sociologists have defined society with two angles:

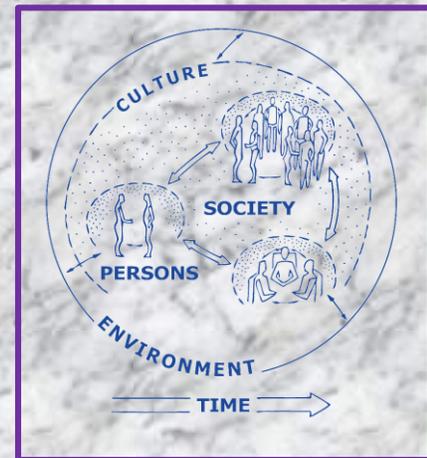
1. In abstract terms, as a network of relationships between people or between groups.
2. In concrete terms, as a collection of people or an organization of persons.

**Aristotle** rightly said “Man is a social animal”. Man lives in towns, cities, or villages, but he lives never alone, because aloneness brings him monotony and far. Man needs society for his own needs or living, working and enjoying life.

**According to Bhattacharya, 2002**, “It is rightly said human life and society always go together”

**According to Morris Ginsberg**, “society is a collection of individuals joint by certain relations or modes of behavior which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behavior.”

Another sociologist **Cooley** states that, “Society is a complex of forms of processes each of which is living and growing by interaction with the others, the whole being so unified that what takes place in one part affects all the rest.”





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**According to R.M. MacIver**, “Society as a web or social relationships giving importance to the reciprocal relationships that exist among its people, gave one of the most important definitions of society.”

**According to A.W. Green**, “A society is the largest group to which any individual belongs.”

**Another sociologist F.J. Wright**, “Society in essence means a state or condition, a relationship and is therefore necessarily an abstraction.”

**F.H. Giddings** in his book “The Elements of Sociology” stated that, “Society is the union itself, the organization the sum of formal relations in which associating individuals are bound together.”

**According to Morris Ginsberg**, “A society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or modes of behavior which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behavior.”

**According to MacIver and Page**, “Society is a system of usages and procedures, authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of human behavior and of liberties.”

**Another sociologist P. Gisbert**, in his book “Fundamentals of Sociology” stated that, “Society in general, consists in the complicated network of social relationships by which every human being is interconnected with his fellowmen.” Similarly another sociologist **N.S. Timasheff** told his book “Sociological Theories” , “Society is a relation among individuals; its members.”

**According to G.D.M. Cole**, “Society is the complex of organized associations and institutions with a community” Another sociologist **Lapiare** stated that, “The term society refers not to group of people, but to the complex pattern of the norms of interaction, that arise among and between them.”

### Characteristics:

Some of the basic characteristics of a “**society**” go as follows:

- I. **Territory** – A specific society is generally associated with a political territory. In this sense, Indian society is the society found in the state of India. However, the term ‘Society’ may go far beyond political boundaries and includes the sociological factors that keep a group together or unite it.
- II. **Abstract**: If society is viewed as web of social relationships, it is distinct from physical entity which we can see and perceive through senses. As written earlier, **MacIver** argued, “we may see the people but cannot see society or social structure, but only its only external aspects”. Social relationships are invisible and abstract. We can just realize them but cannot see or touch them. Therefore, society is abstract. Reuter wrote: “Just as life is not a thing but a process of living, so society is not a thing but a process of associating”
- III. **System**: Society provides a system of stratification of statuses and classes that each individual has a relatively stable and recognizable position in the social structure.
- IV. **Common culture** – Members of a society share a common culture that identifies the society.
- V. **Organized system** - Society is based on an organized system of structuring and coordinating among various parts that ensure its smooth functioning.
- VI. **Permanence** – Society is a permanent entity. It continues to exist irrespective of the survival of its members. Because of this quality, society is considered to be self- continuing; even if an individual member expires, it will continue to exist.



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- VII. **Process:** “Society exists only as a time sequence. It is becoming, not a being; a process and not a product” (*Maclver and Page, 1956*). In other words, as soon as the process ceases, the product disappears. The product of a machine endures after the machine has been scrapped. To some extent the same is true not only of material relics of man’s past culture but even of his immaterial cultural achievements.
- VIII. **Society involves of people** – Society is composed of people. It is a very common knowledge that there can be no educational institution without the students and the teachers. Similarly, without people there can be no society, no social relationships, and no social life at all.
- IX. **Cooperation and conflict:** Cooperation and conflict are universal elements in human life. Society is based on cooperation but because of internal differences, there is conflict also among its members. This is why, *Maclver and Page* observed that “society is cooperation crossed by conflict”. We know from our own experience that a person would be handicapped, showed down, and feels frustrated if he is expected to do everything alone, without the aid of others. “Cooperation is most elementary process of social life without which society is impossible” (*Gisbert, 1957*).
- X. **Likeness** – This essential condition exists among those who look like another to some degree, likely in body and in mind. Its means similarities. It may be observed that people have similarities with regards to their needs, works, values, aims, ideals, outlook towards life, and so on. As the birds of the same feather flock together, so men belonging to same species called *Homo sapiens* have many things in common.
- XI. **Permanent Nature:** Permanency is another important characteristic of society. It is not a temporary organization of individuals. Society continues to exist even after the death of individual members. Society is a co-herent organization.
- XII. **Dynamic:** The very nature of society is dynamic and changeable. No society is static. Every society changes and changes continuously. Old customs, traditions, folkways, mores, values and institutions got changed and new customs and values takes place. Society changes from its traditional nature to modern nature. Hence it is one of the most important characteristic of society.
- XIII. **Accommodation and Assimilation:** This two associative social process is also important for the smooth functioning and continuity of society. Hence it is also another characteristic of society.
- XIV. **Individual:** No doubt society consists of individuals. But mere collection of individuals is not society. It is something more than that and something beyond the individual. Durkheim is right when he remarked that society is more than the sum of its parts i.e. individuals.

### *Elements of Society*

1. **Likeness:** It is an essential pre-necessary of society. *MacIver* stated that ‘*Society means likeness.*’ The sense of likeness was focused in early society on relationship likely real or supposed blood relationships. *Maclver* points out, “Comradeship, intimacy, association of any kind or degree would be impossible without some understanding of each by the other, and that understanding depends on the likeness which each apprehends in the other.”

In modern societies, the conditions of social likeness have lengthy out in the principle of nationality or one world concept. Friendship, familiarity, association of any kind would be impossible without some understanding of each other.

2. **Society is social relation which is abstract:** Society represents the social relationship among the individuals, likely it is not something that can be seen, observed or touched but an abstract feeling which



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cements the fellow human beings with one another. Society is not real form of organization but a concept in its essential terms.

It is not necessary that the present relationships must to be good. There may be wicked relationships even. Thus, the society is an abstract organization which prevails wherever there is existence of social relationships.

**3. It is a permanent organization:** Society is completely different from the temporary gatherings of the crowd. It is a clear organization and is permanent. Society is not born with any temporary objective to achieve but its life will be till this planet is inhabited by the human beings.

Its origin goes back to the dawn of history and gives to those remote corners of the planet where people are living together.

**4. Difference:** But this sense of likeness does not exclude diversity. Society suggests difference. It depends on the latter as much as on likeness. If people were all exactly similar, their social relationships would become very much limited. They would contribute very little to one another.

All our social systems involve relationship in which differences complement one another. Even a family rests upon the biological difference between the genders. Besides this difference in sex, there are other natural differences of skill, interest, capacity etc. Thus difference also a necessary society.

**5. Conflict:** Conflict is an ever present phenomenon present in every human society. Not only cooperation but also conflict is necessary for the formation of society. They must coexist in a healthy society. Conflict is a process of struggle through which all things have come into existence. *Maclver* rightly states that “Cooperation Crossed by conflict marks society wherever it is revealed.”

**6. Inter-dependence:** Inter-dependence is another essential element to establish society. Family, the first society, with which we all are closely associated, is based on the biological interdependence of the sexes.

None of the two sexes is complete by itself and therefore, each seeks fulfilment by the help of the other. This fact of interdependence is very much visible in the present world. Today not only countries but also continents depend upon one another.

**7. Co – Operation:** Without co-operation, no society can exist/formed. Unless people co-operate with each other, they cannot live a happy life. Family rests on co-operation. Co-operation avoids mutual force and results in economy. In the words of *P. Gisbert*, “Cooperation is the most elementary process of social life without which society is impossible.”

**8. Sociability in society is essential:** *According to Hudson, 1976*, Man is a social animal and to achieve very close contact may .....prefer to inhabit a large communal dwelling. A man living in remote places having friendships with cats and kids, like Robinson Crusoe is not a social man in the sense he lacks true feeling of sociability. Man cannot live without society. *Aristotle* remarked that man is essentially a social animal. A solitary individual cannot construct society.

### **9. The Reciprocal Awareness:**

Likeness is generative of reciprocity. Once some are aware of the mutual likeness, they, certainly differentiate against those who are not like them. The problem of likes and dislikes was concomitant to the



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social growth. Consciousness of this kind, alone could make sense of likeness. All social action is based on reciprocal response. This alone, makes possible, that we-feeling.

Besides these above elements, *Maclver* has also mentioned some seven other elements of society such as, usages, procedures, authority, mutual aid, groupings, controls and liberties.

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