SIGNIFICANCE OF INSTITUTIONS IN A SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Man is a social animal. How did we reach a point for this saying to be formulated in the popular opinion? This question will be answered by following the sociological tracts of the ancient budding of the modern aspects of the civilisations. Society consists of many particular sub institutions which comprise its overall structure. The variations in the formations and structures of these institutions which lead to the variations that appears amongst the different societies. Evolution of the societies depends upon the conflicts that arise in the societies, their resolutions and the approach employed in doing so. Scholars have also proposed various theories regarding the perception of these institutions. These are the basic components of social institutions which are depicted through this paper.
Keywords - Social Institutions, Civilisation, Society, Human, Conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Human being cannot survive in isolation and needs support of other people for survival. The very need of the human being which lays the foundation of a social institution is the one which led to the foundation of fire, tools, wheel, electricity and missile. If nothing, even the 10000 years that a man has been civilized, is a consequence of human's requirements and needs. Today all of us lead a normal life. Going for work, studying, taking care of health, entertainment etc. are things which are nowadays very common to us. But there was a time when the human being was a mere hunter gatherer and could not even think of something called civilization. These drastic changes are all a consequence of the collective needs of the individuals in the society

Institutions are an essential part of any society. Police stations, schools, hospitals, temples, etc, all in sense impose a paradigm on how the individuals behave in a society. People are largely dependent on these institutions which work in collaboration to make a person's social life systematic. The other way around is also true as the social institutions too have no existence without the people endorsing it as one. An institution cannot ground its relevance with a handful of random people rather there needs to be a holistic acceptance amongst a vast community of individuals.

Basic Nature of Social Institutions-

Social institutions fulfill the 'needs' of the people by making them performing expected roles and expected behaviour required for the smooth running of that society for ages. For example, just to keep the civilization running for ages, the family institutions have been setup. Healthcare, education, etc. are all other 'needs' of the human being for not just survival but for a sustainable survival.

Thus we can conclude:-

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

↙　　　　↓　　　　↘

MADE BY　　FOLLOWED BY　　PASSED ON TO

↘　　　　↓　　　　↙
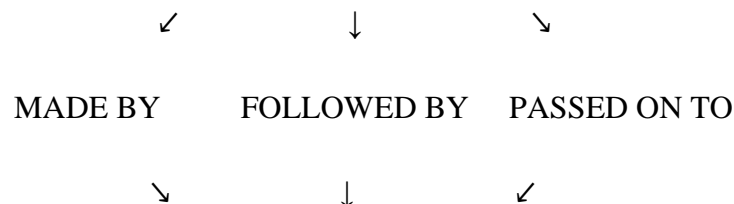
INDIVUDUALS

However, a social institution which would consist of so many different individuals, groups etc. banded together for common rights, privileges, liabilities, goals and objectives, are sure to have conflicts.

As human beings act and interact, their behavior becomes a habit and a taken for granted routine. Routine actions in which individuals take other individual into consideration and work towards a goal become 'roles'.

The small differences ground themselves very strongly in the communities causing a non-acceptance for any other alternative. Based on these differences even the sociologists are divided into three sections of thought regarding the social institutions, namely:-

1) Conflict Theorists
2) Functionalists

3) Neo Institutionalists

1) **Conflict Theorists –**

According to L. Coser, Social institutions are just a means of power annexation by the ones who are economically, politically and socially powerful. The dilemma is that the powerful do not fight amongst themselves, instead they create ghettos to marginalize the comparatively weaker sections, generally comprising of women, minorities, backward classes, tribals, etc. Thus, according to such thinkers, all these social institutions should be dissolved as they only work for widening the social gap.

But that is not actually a feasible way of dealing with the discrepancies in the societal setup. Just imagine a day, where without any social restrictions, rules and regulations, law of jungle would prevail.

If the human being is distinct and far more intelligent than the other creatures present on the earth, it is just because of the complex consortium of the various social institutions. So, this theory is having an extremist view because it is dangerous enough to lead the world back to stone age.

2.**Fuctionalists:-**

According to sociologist Derkhime, the social institutions have developed for resolving some particular 'purpose, need and objective'. Thus, as our needs change with time, the changes in these setups are also accepted. Anyways, a functional society is the only one which accepts the changes readily. Three functions can be distinguished: first, institutions structure human social relationships and serve as a catalyst for the role expectations with which individuals are confronted in their everyday actions. Thus, in the Indian view we can say that the numerous number of castes that were born in India were initially totally based upon the occupation of the people in the society and had nothing to do with the birth.

Second, institutions regulate the distribution of gratifications and the allocation of suitable persons to positions of power. In the Indian context, the brahmanas were the learned men who were given the top job of assigning righteous dharma to the people in the society. But with the time this motif seized to be driven by the idea of service and became moreover a selfish agenda for concentrating power in their own hands.

Third, by means of symbols, policies and ideologies, certain social institutions represent and stabilize the values, ethics and contexts of meaning of the social systems. Such systems are totally abundant in our society , the major ones being- marriage, religious rituals etc.

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3. **Neo Institutionalists** :-

Everyone in the society have their responsibilities and discernment fixed. The varna system, as devised in the Rigvedic era was an institution based on allotting particular task to a person specializing in the same. Abilities and qualities were factors which assigned a status to the people in the society unlike today (on the basis of birth). Thus, the varna system of Rigvedic period is a perfect example of the neo-institutionalist thought.

This section also endorsed the idea of change in the social institution over the period of time but they are reasonable in stating that such changes are a gradual and slow process. After all, it is difficult for every person to adjust with the contemporary changes due to three main reasons:-

1. They want to keep their power and status maintained
2. Lazy nature
3. Having an indifferent approach towards changes

The prominent sociologists who promote this belief are – Powell and Williamson.

Applied Concepts of Social Instiutions -

In the Indian context, the social behavior is decided by the texts under the name of Dharmasastras. Just like any other society even the Indian society consists of both status quoism and progressive ideology. Some of the texts declare their preachings to be irreplaceable but on the other hand we see a chain of bold changes in the societal ideologies running from vedas to the later Smritis, commentaries and the Nibandha texts. Changes are inevitable as no individual, civilization or era can be perfect and be totally rid of all sorts of conflicts. Thus it is stated in Bhagwad Gita (4.16) -

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयो पयत्र मोहिताः

Religion and rituals are another very important social institutions that have evolved over the period of time to explain the inhumanly and out worldly happenings taking place around the people. As we know that social institutions are subject to change, this institution too went through a slow and gradual period of reform with the advent of science and technology as this was the time when everything around us was being explained scientifically and logically. Religion too changed from being the driving force in a society to just an institution promoting

faith by different ways – 'either by the depiction of an omnipotent entity or by frightening the people by the stories of fury of the gods'.

However, the change came very reluctantly. Galileo Galilei who for the first time declared that the earth revolves around the sun and not the vice versa as stated by the church, he was called insane and hanged to death. Thus it is very difficult sometimes to implement a change in the existing social setup.

The other organizations like law, security, etc, are all a part of the social institution. We can say social institutions are:-

FAMILY

RELIGION   EDUCATION

POLITY   ←   ECONOMY

All this is a standardization of the term social institutions but even the informal organizations like neighbourhood, colony, family etc. are also a type of social institution.

Conflicts Rising Because of these institutions-

While a new born child has no bias towards any individual or any societal settlement but with the birth itself, she instantly becomes a part of many social institutions like family, caste, community, neighbourhood, etc. Due to this, eventually we see that when two very different communities live together, they are more prone to conflicts than the one living amongst a homogenous set-up. Even here we see two levels of development of the same cultural divide of ideology. As stated earlier, in the Indian context, religion is the axis which decides the course of movement of all the other institutions of the society viz. social, political, cultural, economic, etc. Religion is also the factor which connects the people together due to the rich philosophical and spiritual heritage but the same is also prone to misuse and cause adverse repercussions in the society. Although, the conflicts arise due to various reasons, it is a totally region specific and people specific issue why and how these conflicts manifest. Other institutions interact with one another to bring out such situations. For example, more educated, well provided for, family driven and open minded population would help ease these conflicts while it will be exactly opposite for an uneducated, individualistic and struggling population.

This divide is set up in our mind so deeply that we cannot tolerate even a small change in the usual setup. That's why when a community is subject to intrusion or attack, it retaliates and

fights back. The extent of the extremism of the retaliation depends upon the extent of the cultural divide just like the situation in the middle east where people have reverted to violent retaliation against the intrusion of the west. However, it is a fact that America is still anyway able to attack middle-east because it was more powerful than them. This indicates the maintenance of the status quo itself generating the conflict.

CONCLUSION-

Actually, due to the paucity of scientific advancement, all the ancient settlements like Indus, Mesopotamian, Roman and Greek, were all based on religious interpretation of the things happening around in the world. This also was the genesis of the different religions coming up in these settlements. But now, all the other religions and cultures of that era have already become oblivious but Hinduism is the only one still prevailing. A certain amount of conservatism is inavertible for the existence of a particular social institution and its original aspects but a complete rigidity can prove to be fatal. Thus, the accommodating nature of Indian culture is the root cause of continuation of this institution over a vast span of time. All the sub institutions under the Indian culture like Dharmashastric Law, security, education, values etc. are also developed, changed, adapted and evolved over this period of time. When these institutions work in collaboration with each other, then only we call ours a perfectly functional society.

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