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SOCIAL CONTROL

We remember from our childhood days how our parents urged us to eat with our right hand, to respect our elders and our teachers, to be punctual and to help the needy. Subsequently, we learn that we should drive on the left side of the road and to obey the laws of the land. Still later, we are made aware about responsibilities towards aging parents, towards children and professional responsibilities that come with one's job.

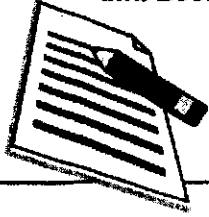
It is clear that our behaviour is regulated by family, by prevalent customs and traditions, by society and by the state, too. The notion that unrestrained freedom will lead to anarchy and a demise of social order. Therefore, it is considered imperative for any society to maintain order and progress.



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning and need for social control;
- explain the informal means of social control – i.e. the role of folkways, mores, customs and religion in maintaining social control;
- describe the formal means of social control – i.e. the role of law, education and state in establishing social control; and
- explain the agencies of social control – role of family, neighbourhood and public opinion.



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20.1 MEANING OF SOCIAL CONTROL

For the smooth functioning of any society, it is essential that its members conduct themselves in a manner that is acceptable to other members of that society. Our behaviour in every day life is quite orderly and disciplined. We normally do not wish to antagonise (oppose) people we interact with, we do try to stick to various rules and to observe discipline in schools etc. Those who do not obey these norms of society are criticized or looked down upon.

Social control is a general method of regulating the behaviour of individuals in a society through accepted social norms. It is a way to channelize the behaviour of individuals in society so that they conform to the accepted code of conduct. Social control is defined as “the way in which the entire social order coheres and maintains itself, operates as a whole, as a changing equilibrium.”

This SOCIAL CONTROL refers to the way society controls our behaviour, either through norms and practices or through the state and its compelling force. The regulation of behaviour in society, whether of individuals or of groups is undertaken in two ways –

- (a) by adhering to established norms and values of society; and
- (b) by the use of force.

The term “social control” is generally used by sociologists to refer to this first kind of regulation.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.1

Write answer in one sentence

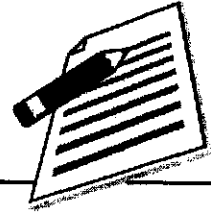
1. Define social control.

2. What are the two ways in which individual control can be regulated?

20.2 NEED AND PURPOSE OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Need

The need and importance of social control has been recognised by all social thinkers.



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Individuals differ in their interests and capabilities. If each individual is allowed unrestricted freedom to act and behave, it may lead to anarchy and disorder in the society. The resultant conflicts, frequent and persistent, would be a constant drain on society's energy and efficiency.

As an analogy, we could consider traffic movement on roads in the absence of any traffic rules and traffic signals, etc. It is easy to imagine the chaos that would rule the roads and the unending traffic jams that would follow. If we add to it the frustration of the drivers and their heated tempers. It is easy to understand that the end result is totally undesirable. The fact that traffic rules help to maintain order and efficient movement of vehicles is only due to the presence of control.

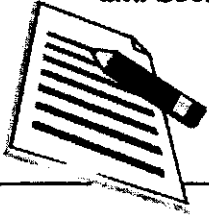
The situation in society would be no different if there was no accepted mode of behaviour. Individuals, therefore, have to be made to co-exist in a manner that benefits them as well as the groups they comprise of social control becomes a necessity for the following reasons:

- (i) **to maintain the old order** – For continuity and uniformity of a social group, it is important that the old social order is maintained. This function is fulfilled by the family. The old members of the family initiate and socialise the young ones into their traditions, value patterns and accepted forms of behaviour.
- (ii) **to regulate individual behaviour** – Individuals vary in their ideas, interests, attitudes and habits, etc. Even children of the same parents think and behave differently. Thus their behaviour needs to be regulated in accordance with the established norms which would lead to uniformity and solidarity of the group.
- (iii) **to check cultural maladjustment** – Society is changing at a rapid pace. The changes threaten to uproot the existing social system and replace it with a new system. There is a need for greater social control in order to distinguish between good and bad and to retain one's sense of balance and judgement.

Purpose

Sociologists attribute many purposes of social control. The aim of social control is to bring about conformity in a particular group or society.

At times, out of sheer ignorance, individuals could act in a manner that may or may not benefit them. But certainly society's interests lie at the collective level. There are other situations when the individual is perfectly aware of the ill effects of his actions on the society but he continues with his behaviour because it increases his welfare. For instance, in an industry where the owner is fully aware of the harmful effects of pollution but does not install pollution control device because he wants to maximise his profits at the cost of safeguarding the collective interests. Society



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seeks to regulate the individual behaviour. The purpose of social control is to regulate the interests of both the individual and the group in a way that is beneficial to both.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.2

Answer in TRUE or FALSE.

- Social control is essential to maintain the old social order.
(TRUE/FALSE)
- There is no need for social control in modern times. (TRUE/ FALSE)
- The purpose of social control is to regulate the interests of individual and the group.
(TRUE/FALSE)

20.3 MEANS OF SOCIAL CONTROL – FORMAL AND INFORMAL

At all times, all societies have had some means of maintaining order and control in their respective situation.

Individuals and groups comply with social norms through a network of social institutions, like family, kin groups, caste, village, education, state, religion and economic institutions, etc.

Sociologists have classified the mechanisms of social control into:

- the informal means of social control and
- the formal means of social control.

Informal Means of Social Control

In primary groups, the relationships are close, direct and intimate. Social control is often maintained by informal mechanisms, i.e. customs, traditions, folkways, mores and religion. These are adopted means by informal groups.

Informal mechanisms of social control include established and accepted institutions relating to socialization, education, family, marriage and religion etc.

It is executed through informal sanctions, which may be positive or negative. Positive sanctions include smile, a nod of approval, rewards and promotion, etc. For instance, Good performance in an examination may be rewarded with a bicycle or a watch by the parents.

Negative sanctions include a frown, criticism, physical threats and punishments. The unruly behaviour in school may result in detention or severe punishment is an example of negative sanction..

Formal Means of Social Control

The formal means of social control come from institutions like the state, law, education, and those that have legitimate power. They apply coercion in case of deviance. For instance, a person convicted of having stolen someone's property may be sentenced to imprisonment. In other words, these institutions exercise the legal power to control the behaviour of the individual and the group. We shall now deal with the various forms of informal and formal means of social control.

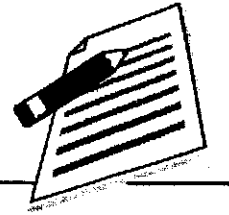
INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.3

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the bracket:
 - a. In primary groups relationships are _____ (intimate, formal).
 - b. Formal means of social control are enforced by _____ (clan, state, family).
 - c. Informal social control is maintained by _____ (law, customs).
 - d. Positive sanctions include a _____ (frown, smile).

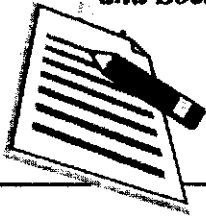
20.4 INFORMAL MEANS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

- (i) Folkways
- (ii) Mores
- (iii) Customs
- (iv) Religion

It must be mentioned here that with the variety in our ways of living, the means of social control also vary. Social control is specific to the group or the society in



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which it is exercised. Informal mechanisms of control vary accordingly. Besides family, informal social control is also exercised by other social institutions, like neighbourhood, kin group, clan and village, etc.

1. **FOLKWAYS** : Folkways are norms to which individuals conform. It is customary to do so. Conformity to folkways is not enforced by law or any other agency of the society. It is the informal acceptance of established practices in each group or society. Folkways are manifested in matters of dress, food habits, observance of rituals, forms of worship and method of greeting, etc. For instance, the food habits in North and South India are different and these habits persist even when the person has moved to a different location away from his earlier surroundings.
2. **MORES** : Mores refer to moral conduct as distinct from the customary practice of folkways. They influence the value system of a society and are in the form of social regulations which aim to maintain social order. Mores seek to regulate the relationship between individuals in defined situations, e.g. between husband and wife, parents and children and siblings, etc. They may also refer to general social relationships in terms of honesty, truthfulness, hardwork and discipline, etc. Since mores are consciously designed and created with a view to preserve them. Violations of these often entail penalties. They are perhaps the strongest mechanisms of informal social control.
3. **CUSTOMS** : Customs are the long established practices of people, which occur spontaneously but gradually. Alongwith regulating social life, they also bind them together. In primitive societies, customs were powerful means of social control but in modern times, they have weakened due to rise in the forces of individualism and diversity.
4. **RELIGION** : Religion exercises a powerful influence on its adherents. Emile Durkheim defines religion as the unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things. Those who have common beliefs and practices are united into one single moral community through religion. Religion occupies a significant place in the life of an individual and fulfills the spiritual, social and psychological needs of an individual.

Religion helps in the process of social control in the following ways:

- (a) Every religion has the concept of sin and virtue. Since early childhood, individuals are exposed to these concepts and to the notions of good and bad. These become ingrained in the individual's personality and guide his decision making during his life.
- (b) Religious conventions and practices determine marriage, mutual relations among family members, property relations, rules of succession and inheritance, etc.

- (c) Religious leaders regulate the behaviour of individuals by exhorting them to follow a prescribed code of conduct.
- (d) By organising community activities, prayer meetings and by celebrating religious events and festivals, religious institutions too contribute to this process by bringing believers together and strengthening the common belief systems – thereby, regulating individual behaviour.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.4

Answer in one sentence:

1. What are folkways?

2. What are mores?

3. Define customs.

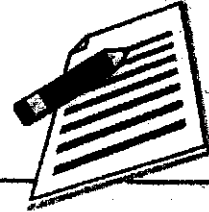
4. Define religion.

20.5 FORMAL MEANS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

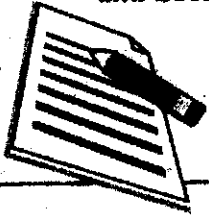
- (i) Law
- (ii) Education
- (iii) State

1. **LAW** : In primitive societies, the groups followed similar occupations and individuals shared a direct, personal and intimate relation among themselves. These folkways, mores and customs sufficed in controlling the individual behaviour. There was almost unquestioned compliance with the informal mechanism of social control.

In contrast, the modern societies are characterised by immense diversity, individualism, division of labour and differentiation in terms of work, ethics and lifestyle. Urbanisation and accelerated movement of people striving for more and more has changed the character of social groups. Relationships have become formal. Customs and folkways seem insufficient to control diverse population groups. Simultaneously, the state has grown stronger and more specialised in nature. It is now necessary and possible to regulate individual



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behaviour by formulating a set of common laws which are backed by the legal, administrative and political machinery of the State. Laws and enforcement agencies are replaced by customs and mores as the regulators of behaviour and ensure social order and control.

Law has been defined in two ways. Some theorists have defined it in terms of "ideal behavioural norms", while others have referred to it as rules that are promulgated by the state, which are binding in nature.

Individuals obey laws due to two prime reasons:

- (i) Fear of punishment – Punishment by state results in curtailment of essential freedoms of individuals and hence acts as a deterrent.
- (ii) Rule conforming habit – Many individuals believe that adherence to laws is necessary for their own well-being and prosperity as also for social stability and progress. This is called the "rule conforming habit". The family, educational institutions and religious preachers all play a role in inculcating and sustaining this behaviour.

Laws have their origin in customs, traditions, religion and judicial decisions. As such, they very often have a moral dimension too. This moral dimension and the fact that laws are supported by legal and institutional arrangements enable them to bring about a degree of conformity in human behaviour. Laws that have both customary and legislative support (e.g. prohibition of bigamy) are readily accepted.

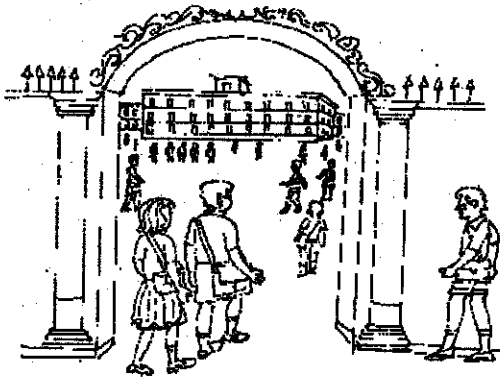
In modern states, laws are promulgated by legislative organs and enforced by the state through the governments. The government, in this context, includes all official agencies and functionaries through which the state achieves its ends. Laws thus regulate and control social behaviour by ensuring uniformity and conformity.

It may be noted that laws are different from customs in the following ways:

- (i) Law has a coercive character. Therefore, it compels people to act in a particular way. Customs, on the other hand, are respected and practised because of the sensibility of traditions and social approval associated with them.
- (ii) Customs are specific to groups and clans while laws have a more general and universal nature.
- (iii) Breach of law entails punishment by the state while disregard of customs is frowned upon by the society and only in an extreme case may result in ostracism.
- (iv) Laws are a more recent phenomenon associated with the growth of the state and its institutions, while customs existed in one form or another at all times and in all societies.

With the emergence of modern nation states, an establishment of relationships among them such as political, trading and military, international laws have become necessary to maintain world order. Just as national laws are meant for establishing order and control within domestic boundaries, international laws seek to establish orderly behaviour on the part of nations.

- 2. EDUCATION:** Alongwith laws, education has been an important agency of social control. It prepares the child for social living and teaches him the values of discipline, cooperation, tolerance and integration. Educational institutions at all levels, (i.e. school, college and university) impart knowledge as well as ethics through formal structured courses as well as behavioural inputs.



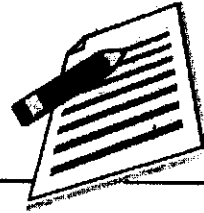
School as a medium of education

The different pace of the educational system in different societies, depends upon changing social mores, level of development and social needs. Thus, in ancient Indian society, the emphasis was on religious scriptures, philosophy and metaphysics. The focus shifted as social development has resulted in an increased demand for knowledge in other areas and managerial skills.

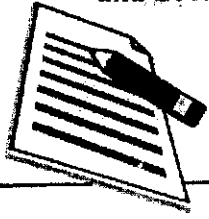
At schools, the ideas of democracy, secularism, equality and national goals are communicated to students in addition to the emphasis on our shared history, culture, heritage, norms and values. By inculcating the concepts of good moral behaviour, morality, discipline and social etiquettes, the educational system serves its role as an agent of formal social control.

- 3. STATE:** State has a vital role in administering social control. Sociologists have defined the state as "an association designed primarily to maintain order and security, exercising universal jurisdiction within territorial boundaries, by means of law backed by force and recognized as having sovereign authority".

State functions through the government. Modern nation states strive to be welfare states, i.e., they seek to provide to the citizens a wide range of social services like education, medical care, old age pension and unemployment



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allowance. These are achieved by means of the co-operation of individuals and through collective efforts of the media, the NGOs and other social institutions. For example, the pulse polio programmes of the government are extensively supported by the use of television, posters, NGOs and educational institutions, all of which try to educate the public on the advantages of the government measures. In the above mentioned context, the state acts as an informal agency of social control, eschewing coercion.

However, certain functions, like maintenance of law and order, defence, foreign relations and currency, require the state to intervene in a formal and sometimes in a coercive manner.

India has a federal polity and government manifests itself at various levels – village, block, district, state and at the national level. At all these levels, its functionaries can enforce rules and laws. In modern societies, state has become increasingly important as an agent of social control.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.5

Answer in one sentence.

1. Why do we obey laws?

2. Mention two sources of law.

3. What do you understand by the term government?

4. Distinguish between laws and customs.

20.6 AGENCIES OF SOCIAL CONTROL – FAMILY, NEIGHBORHOOD AND PUBLIC OPINION.

1. Family

A child is a product of its genes and environment. He is born with certain inherent capabilities, which either grow or are stunted depending upon the environmental stimuli. In this, his situation is akin to that of a flower. With proper nourishment and care, it will bloom. If denied, it will decay.

Family is the most important agency of social control. Every child learns from his immediate environment, which is first provided by the family. Etiquettes, habits

and attitudes are first learnt from the immediate role models (i.e. parents, siblings, kin groups, etc.). The family socialises the child into the norms, values, traditions and customs of the group. Thus, family has a predominant role in shaping the personality of the child.

In villages, an individual gets his status from his family. The elders have a dominant role in shaping the personality of the individual. This is manifested in the individual attitudes, interests and lifestyle, etc. Marriages are mostly arranged by the elders and seen as an alliance between families rather than between two individuals.

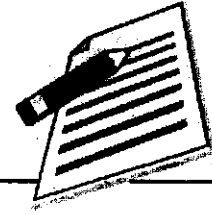
In **cities**, the family continues to play a predominant role in shaping an individual's personality. However, industrialisation, limited income and the paucity of space have contributed to the prevalence of nuclear family. This is very different from what is encountered in villages. Hence, families tend to focus upon themselves. This results in an increased accent on individualism as opposed to collectivism common in villages. The function of socialization that a family carries out is complemented by other secondary institutions such as the classroom, playground, peer group and the media. Unlike in a rural surrounding, the individual derives his social status partly from his family but more importantly from his personal achievements. Parents and elders still largely arrange marriages in cities. However, the consent of the boy and the girl is sought. Marriages outside caste and religion are also on increase. Thus, we see that individual choice is becoming increasingly important. However, due to the absence of the strong family support on both sides, individual disagreements are more likely to lead to separation and divorce as opposed to the rural setting where the family network provides a readily available conflict resolution mechanism.

2. Neighbourhood

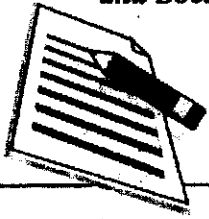
Neighbourhood in **villages** comprises people normally belonging to the same kin group or caste. Hence, relationships that exist are intimate and informal. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood, the bonds are strong, as is evident from the fact that the son-in-law of a family is regarded as the son-in-law of a much larger group, sometimes of the entire village.

In contrast, relationships between neighbours in the **urban environment** are characterised formally. They are marked by intermittent interactions and hence are far weaker than what is seen in the rural environment. In big cities, the ties of neighbourhood are almost relegated to the backseat. This is hardly any interaction between neighbours.

Thus, the village neighbourhood is an enthusiastic participant in many daily activities of a family. It thereby fulfills its role as a medium of social control. It ensures uniformity and conformity and corrects deviant behaviour. For instance, in a village neighbours would subject a son not looking after his aging parents to sharp disapproval and even sarcasm.



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In cities, while not controlling individual behaviour so closely, individual actions that affect community are monitored by the neighbours, e.g. a person throwing trash in the open would be pulled up by his neighbours for spoiling the ambience of the neighbourhood.

Public Opinion: Public Opinion is commonly used to denote the aggregate views that individuals hold regarding matters that affect the interests of community.

Newspapers, radio, television, motion pictures, legislations, pamphlets and even the word of mouth mould public opinion.

Remote village communities, which do not have access to television and newspapers rely on "gossip" for information about the happenings around them and to express their opinion on these subjects. However, radio has increasingly become an important source to obtain news about events in distant places. There are group readings of newspapers too. Of late, television has also been introduced in the villages. In independent India, the introduction of adult franchise, Panchayati Raj institutions and planned development processes have all contributed to bringing villages in the mainstream of Indian polity and economy

In cities, the print and visual media play a dominant role in shaping public opinion. As the audio visual medium is more powerful, television has slowly gained ascendancy over newspapers. However, newspapers continue to influence opinions among the educated group.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.6

1. Fill in the blanks :
 - a. Family plays a _____ role in a child's development.
 - b. In cities, the socialisation function of the family is complemented by _____ institutions.
 - c. In urban centers, an individual derives his social status primarily from his _____.

Answer in 1 sentence.

2. What is public opinion?

3. What are the important agencies of public opinion?


WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

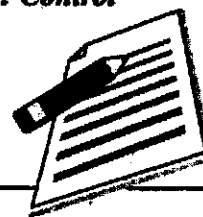
- Social control is the regulation of individual behaviour by society so that individuals adhere to social norms.
- Folkways, mores, customs and religion are informal means by which society maintains social control while law and education are the formal mechanisms for achieving this objective.
- In modern societies, state plays a crucial role in maintaining social control. It does so, both by moral persuasion and coercion. State functions through government agencies and functionaries at various levels (i.e., village, district, state, etc.).
- Family, neighbourhood and public opinion also impact social control.
- While customs and family traditions suffice to maintain social control in a rural environment, urbanisation and the resultant heterogeneity in social character warrant a reliance on a set of laws backed by the state apparatus.

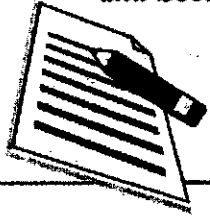

TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What is social control? Why do we need social control?
2. Distinguish between 'informal' and 'formal' means of social control.
3. How do folkways and mores help in social control?
4. Examine the role of religion in social control.
5. Distinguish between law and customs.
6. Highlight the role of state in maintaining social control.
7. How does education help in social control?
8. What is the role of family and neighbourhood in social control?
9. Examine the role of public opinion in maintaining social control.

GLOSSARY

1. **Division of Labour** : It is the range of tasks within a social system. This concept is used primarily in the study of economic production.
2. **Group** : A group is a social system involving regular interaction among members and a common group identity.
3. **Metaphysics**: is that stage in the evolution of societies where social phenomena are explained partly in terms of supernatural and partly in terms of science.
4. **Pre-literate Society** : A society that does not have the tradition of reading and writing. This term is generally used for the primitive society.


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5. **Urbanisation** : is the process through which population becomes concentrated in large communities in cities which are essentially non-agricultural in character.



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

20.1

1. **Social control** : is the way society controls individual behaviour, either through norms and practices or through the state and its coercive power.
2. (a) by adhering to established social norms and values and
(b) by the use of force.

20.2 a) True b) False c) True

20.3 a. Intimate b. State c. Customs d. Smile

20.4

1. Folkways are norms individuals conform to in every society.
2. Mores refer to moral conduct as different from the customary practices of folkways.
3. Customs are the long established practices of people.
4. Religion is the unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things.

20.5

1. (a) Fear of punishment, (b) Rule conforming habit.
2. (a) Customs, (b) Religion, (c) Legislation.
3. Government comprises all agencies and functionaries through which the state functions.
4. (a) Customs are specific to groups and clans while laws have a more general nature.
(b) Customs are respected since they have the sanction of tradition and social approval of the group while laws are obeyed since they have a coercive character.

20.6

1. a- crucial b- secondary c- achievements
2. Public opinion is the aggregate of views that individuals hold regarding matters that affect the interests of community.
3. Agencies of public opinion include newspapers, radio, television, motion pictures, legislation, pamphlets and even the word of mouth.