



NORMS AND VALUES

When teacher enters in the classroom, the students are expected to show their respect by standing up. Drinking too much alcohol, cheating in a test are not accepted and considered harmful in almost all modern societies. On the other hand, children's obedience towards their parents is considered absolutely necessary in modern societies. In sociology, these are known as norms and values. In this lesson we will read about norms and values and their importance in understanding society.

OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain what sociologists mean by norm and the process of their formation;
- describe the importance of norms in society;
- discuss different types of norms;
- explain and describe normlessness;
- explain what sociologists mean by values;
- state traditional and modern values and value conflict; and
- describe relationship between norms and values.

8.1 NORMS

Norms and values are the necessary part of each and every society. We are not at all wrong, if we consider them as the necessary pillars for social survival. Values

are ideas held by individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad. Values, differ from society to society. An individual's values are derived from the specific culture of which he happens to be a member. For example, in India, most people still prefer to have sons, and in some cases, girl children are killed. In other words, we can say that male progeny is valued. Norms, on the other hand, are generally known as correct or proper forms of behaviour. They are specific prescriptions of how an individual ought to behave to be consistent with values of the contemporary society. Thus, norms can be seen as the reflection of values. If the students stand up when the teacher enters into the class, this particular norm reflects the value of showing respect to teachers. All human groups follow definite types of norms, which are always backed by positive or negative sanctions.

How do we generally expect a doctor to behave? Doctors are generally expected to be calm, stable, sympathetic and responsible at all times. That is to say, we expect a certain kind of behavior from a doctor, which we do not expect from other professionals. A norm is a rule or standard that governs our behavior from a doctor, which we do not expect from other professionals. A norm is a rule or standard that governs our behaviour in the social situation in which we act and operate. Norms are group-shared expectations. Such expectations are reflected in statements such as: "good citizen always respect lives", "younger one must always respect elderly people". For example, in India, children touch the feet of their elders on social occasions. A norm is a pattern setting limits on individual behaviour. In this sense norms are unwritten laws. Norms determine, guide, control and also predict human behaviour. Now, it is clear that norms can be understood as unwritten rules and regulations that groups live by. Norms are the means through which values are expressed in behaviour.

We can make a distinction between personal or private norms and social norms. Private norms are purely individual in character and they live with individuals only. They may influence only the behaviour of the individual concerned. For example, an individual may make some resolutions on the New year's Day, say, he would stop smoking and decide to abide by it.

But sociologists are more interested in social norms. Social norms are rules developed by a group of people that specify as to how people should, and should not behave in various situations. For example, children must take parents' permission to go out. Social norms are always backed by societal sanction. Sanctions can be negative or positive. In case of negative sanction, the violators of norms suffer some penalties prescribed by the groups; while those who abide by the norms are rewarded as a result of positive sanction. For example, children who always obey their parents, do everything with their permission, are praised by everybody. But on the other hand, children who do not listen to their parents are criticized by

family members, etc. A positive sanction at work place is the promotion given to an employee for doing good work in the office. We can say that a sanction is a reaction from others to the behavior of an individual or group, which has the aim of ensuring that a given norm is strictly adhered to or followed meticulously.

Sanction can also be formal or informal. Formal sanctions are given by a definite body of people or an agency whose task is to ensure that a particular set of norms is positively followed. The main types of formal sanctions in modern societies are those involved in the system of punishment represented by agencies viz. Police, courts, and prisons. For example, most motoring offences are punished with fines or loss of license. Formal positive sanctions are found in many other areas of social life, for instance, the presentation of medals for bravery, degrees or diplomas to recognise academic success, etc.

Informal sanctions, positive and negative, are routine features of every society. Those of a positive type, include saying 'well done' to someone, or giving the person an appreciative smile or a pat on the back. Examples of negative informal sanctions are insulting, scolding or physically shunning a given individual. Formal sanctions are of fundamental importance in ensuring conformity to norms, to secure the approval of family, friends, neighbourhood, etc. and to avoid to be ridiculed, shamed or rejected. People generally value both formal and informal sanctions.

From the above discussion we may infer the following characteristics of norms:

- (i) Norms are parts of society.
- (ii) Norms are positive and negative both.
- (iii) Norms are formal and informal
- (iv) Norms have situations
- (v) Norms are related to sanctions.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 8.1

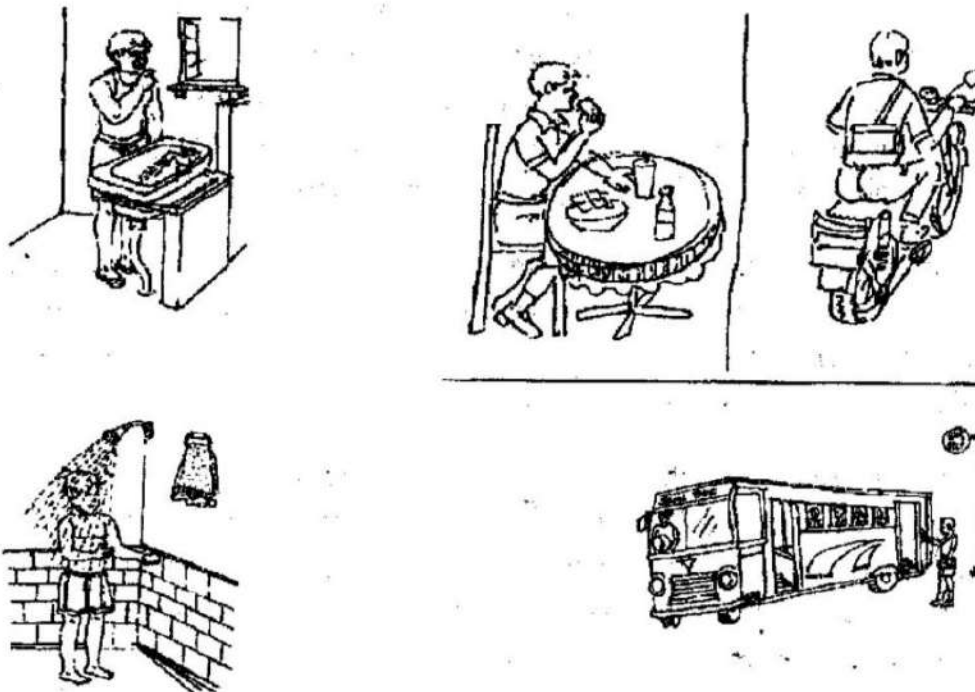
Tick mark the write answer:

1. Which of the following would be an example of value?
 - a. Nandini believes that it is wrong to cheat in a test.

8.2 IMPORTANCE OF NORMS

From the above discussion, it is clear that the concept of social norms constitutes the very foundation of social structure. Norms govern the behaviour of individuals and help in interaction that takes place between them. They add some amount of regularity and inevitability to our behaviour. They act as guides to our behavior. They help to mend our ways and regulate our daily life. No individual can ignore social norms without incurring the disapproval of others. For example, in a classroom, students are taught how to behave in front of a teacher. When the teacher comes into the class, the students stand up; when the teacher asks questions, they stand up and answer them; they must take permission to get into the class when they come late. If the students do not obey these rules, they must face disapproval of others or even punishments.

Norms are an indispensable part of our life. In our daily life, we do a lot of work and interact with a number of people. Without the norms, the individual would be faced with the burden of taking decisions at every moment. The following example reveals how norms can ease our daily work. For example: a college going student gets up early in the morning, brushes his teeth and takes bath, eats breakfast, wears dress, rides the vehicle to the college, meets other friends, attends lectures, goes to library, plays or chats with friends and returns home in the evening, and so on. The students do not find it difficult or problematic to do all these activities. The reason behind this is that each of these activities is governed by norms. The students knowledge of these norms has eased his work



Norms Govern The Behaviour Of Individuals

Norms give cohesion to society. The collective and co-operative life of people is made possible because of norms. The normative system gives society an internal cohesion, without which social life is not possible. For example, in an office, all the employees including the boss have to follow certain rules regarding punctuality and completing office work. These rules help in bringing them on a common platform. Norms help to maintain social order.

8.2.1 Types of Norms

Social norms are numerous and varied. They assume different forms. They differ in terms of severity and durability. Their influence and effect on individual and society have not been uniform. Therefore, there is no standard classification of the norms in the sociology texts and each sociologist has presented a somewhat different list. We want to make two preliminary observations. The first of these is that the norms are both prescriptive and proscriptive. Prescriptive norms dictate what people should do and proscriptive norms what people should not do. Frequently, the prescriptions and proscriptions come in pairs; that is, we are required to do something and forbidden not to do something we are required to wear clothes in our society and forbidden to go naked on the street.

The second observation is that some of the norms pervade in entire society and others, less pervasive, prevail only in certain groups. We shall call the former

communal norms and the later associational norms. An example of a communal norm would be the custom of shaking hands upon meeting a new acquaintance, a custom that appears throughout our society, in all groups and classes. The example of associational norm would be the custom of wearing sacred thread among Hindus and it applies to the members of upper castes but not to the all other castes.

These two ways of classifying norms as prescriptive or proscriptive and as communal or associational represent categories that cross each other. However, all the norms may be subsumed under three major concepts – folkways, mores and custom – which we shall discuss here.

Mores represent yet another category of norms. Mores is a term used to denote behaviour patterns, which are not only accepted but prescribed. In simple words, when the folkways clearly represent the group standards, the group sense of what is appropriate, right and necessary for the well being, then they are known as mores. Mores may be positive or negative. Positive mores represent what should be for example, respecting elders, speaking the truth, etc. While negative mores represent 'don'ts', examples like do not steal, do not tell lies. Mores are the means by which individuals gain identification with their fellows. As a result, mores bind people into one strong cohesive group. In this way the mores help to maintain social order. For example, students must wear uniform in school. It is not only accepted but also prescribed form of behaviour. This prescription creates pressure on students, and they cannot deviate from this rule. And, this dress code undoubtedly gives the students a common identification in the school.

Customs, another kind of social norms, are socially accepted ways in which people do things together in personal contacts. Our accepted procedures or practices of eating, meeting people, playing, working, etc. can be called custom. Custom preserves our culture and transmits it to the next generation. For example, it is the custom to touch the feet of elders before examination or at different other auspicious and religious occasions in India, but not in western countries. People have seen their elders to maintain this custom. People have learnt this and they themselves maintain this. In this way this particular custom has become a part of our culture from generation to generation. They have added stability and certainty to our social life. Customs are found in all the communities of the world, No society can do without them. Therefore, customs act as an effective means of social control. Individual can hardly escape their grip. Customs also provide the background for the formulation and establishment of rules. Customs become laws when the state enforces them as rules to be abided by the citizen.

8.4 VALUES

Values are broad ideas regarding what is desirable, correct, and good that most members of a society share. Values define social preference, specify societal choice, and provide a vision for future action. Individuals' values are strongly influenced by their specific culture. Social structure, social institution are generally followed by a change in social values and also sometimes vice versa. This position will be very clear if we focus on how these social values have evolved from traditional to modern societies.

8.4.1 Importance of Values

Values are important for the following reasons

- 1) **Values provide stability in group interaction.** They hold the society together because they are shared in common. Since they are shared, the members of a society are likely to see others as "people like themselves".
- 2) **Values bring legitimacy to the rules that govern specific activities.** The rules are accepted and followed because they embody the values.
- 3) **Values help to bring about some kind of adjustment between different sets of rules.** For example, if India cherish the value of equality then they will have to modify the rules governing the interpersonal relationships between husband and wife and man and woman and between castes.

8.4.2 Traditional and Modern Values

Traditional Indian society was organized on the principles of hierarchy, pluralism, and holism. Hierarchy implies the ordering of units, which constitutes a system of relation to the whole in a superior-inferior gradation. For examples, the Brahmins who are believed to have emerged from the mouth of the creator occupy the highest position as compared to Sudra who are believed to have emerged from the feet of god. Hierarchy manifested itself not only in the system of caste and sub caste stratification but it also depends upon the Hindu concept of occupational life-cycles, age grades and moral duties. For example, traditionally, the Sudra could not take up the occupation of a priest and teaching. While the concept of hierarchy manifests inequality in every aspect, it allocates a secure and definite place to each individual and caste group. For example, the potter makes clay pots to earn his living. It is his secure way of earning money, because no other caste or sub castes has right to interfere in his trade.

8.4.3 Characteristics of Values

From the above discussion we may reveal the following characteristics of values.

- Value is a matter of faith and belief.
- Values are abstract as they have cognitive elements.
- Values are normative in nature
- Values are general ideas which people share.
- Values are related to the emotions and sentiments.
- Values are the bases for the choices of things.
- Values are relatively permanent.
- Values bring cohesiveness in society.
- Values are motivated for public welfare.
- Values have hierarchy in order.

8.4.4 Value Conflict

From the above discussion, it is clear that values have evolved through ages and they have an important role in all societies. But one of the chief tasks of the contemporary Indian society is to bring about a synthesis between the traditional social value and the modern social value. In this section we will see that although the value sets have conflict among them, similarity among these sets is also possible.

We may say that there is no basic contradiction between the traditional value of pluralism and the modern value of secularism, since the tolerance of others' style of life is basic to both. But there is a difference between the two. The pluralism of the past was associated with distinct traditions for each of the groups, which often provided legitimacy for special privileges. But secularism calls upon the advantaged groups in such a way as not to handicap the less privileged.

Hierarchy was an important value of the traditional order. The important point is that the allocation of resources and distribution of rewards was based on birth. For example, the Brahmin used to enjoy high status than any other caste. The definition of status in modern society is however based on an individual's potential to contribute to the system.