6. Socialization

Introduction

In the story of 'The Honest Woodcutter', the angel gives the woodcutter the golden and silver axes along with his own iron axe, as a reward for his honesty. The moral of 'honesty is the best policy' is narrated to children in an effective manner. Fables and stories which were usually narrated to children by elders, are transmitted today through animated forms and decorative story books filled with lots of colourful pictures. The forms may have changed. But for centuries together moral stories are being passed on from one generation to other.

The function of all children's stories is to create a sense in children of what is right/wrong, acceptable/unacceptable, do's/don'ts prevalent in a particular society. It gives them a sense of growing up in their own world. This process whereby vulnerable infants become self-aware, skilled individuals is termed as socialization.

The focus of this chapter is to understand the meaning and process of socialization. It aims to see how the individual becomes a social actor competent to participate in society.

6.1.1 Meaning of Socialization

An important concern in social sciences is about whether human behaviour can be explained in biological/genetic terms, i.e., determined by nature or is learnt and shaped by culture. Genetics suggests that people are born with certain abilities derived from biological imperatives. Instincts or the fixed human traits play a significant role in shaping human behaviour. From this viewpoint, we are born with certain abilities that are integral to our 'human nature'. The process of socialization on the other hand signifies the role of 'nurture' in human development. Sociologists use the term socialization to refer to lifelong social experiences by which human beings are transformed into social beings.

> Genetics is a study of genes and heredity. Genetics studies the inheritance patterns in traits that are handed down from parents to offspring.

6.1.2 Definitions

1. ***Wallace and Wallace:*** "Socialization is the process of transmitting socially appropriate beliefs and behaviour patterns to an individual and making possible the development of a 'self', or a personality."

2. ***Horton and Hunt:*** "Socialization is the process whereby one internalises the norms of the groups among whom one lives so that a distinct 'self'

emerges unique to the individual."

3. *Hobbs and Blank:* "Socialization transforms the biological organism into a social being."

From the above definitions, socialization can be understood as:

i. **A process of learning various forms of behaviour acceptable in a particular culture :** Young children must learn the roles, norms, values and become fully functioning members of their society. Through socialization children learn the ways of their elders and perpetuate the cultural values and social practices. This is how socialization connects different generations to one another.

ii. **An ongoing process of continuous learning :** The birth of a child is a new experience of parenting for a couple. Older people become grandparents thus creating another set of relationships connecting different generations with each other.

iii. **A process through which an individual gradually becomes a member of the society :** Every human society is marked by a distinct way of life or culture which is collectively created and lived. Socialization facilitates learning this collective way of life.

Cases of Feral/unsocialised children are evident enough to show how human behaviour is largely learnt.

You may have read the story of Mogli, a child raised by wolves or heard about the real account of the 'Wolf-Children' of Midnapore' two small girls reportedly found in a wolf den in 1920.

They howled like wolves, preferred raw meat, could not walk upright and lacked many basic human skills.

Do you know ?

Another well-documented example of Genie demonstrates the importance of socialization. Genie, a 13 year old girl in California was discovered in 1970 in completely unsocialised circumstances. She had been 'isolated in a small room and had not been spoken to by her parents since infancy. She was malnourished, abused, unloved, bereft of any toys or companionship. When Genie was found, she could not stand erect, she was unable to speak, she could only whimper.

Such stories and cases like Genie's suggest that human contact is necessary for basic social and physical development. For example, simple skills such as walking upright or using language that we assume in a conventionally raised child, were missing in Genie. Such examples denote the significance of socialization.

Significance of socialization is also evident from the fact that different cultures develop different ways of doing things. If human behaviours were governed only by instinct, there would be very few differences between societies. Human behaviour would be much the same regardless of place and time. However, cultural differences are very trivial for human society. What we think and how we act is taught to us by the larger culture that we inherit and share. Understanding the process of socialization is therefore very important, especially, in today's diverse world. It explains how our own way of living is only one acquired kind,

of the many diverse ways of living.

6.2 The process of socialization

Human behaviour and skills have to be taught and learnt. This learning process which we describe as socialization transforms the individual self into a social self. Through socialization we learn the behavioural rules to become active members of a social group.

George Herbert Mead has elaborated on this process of building *social self*. According to him, the self does not exist at birth. It emerges through communication and interactions with others and this is precisely what makes humans the social beings.

George Herbert Mead

According to Mead, formation of self occurs in three distinct stages

Stage 1: Imitation: In this stage, children imitate behaviour of adults without understanding it. A little boy might drive his mother to her office by driving his toy car, or help his parents clean the floor by pushing a broom or stick around the room.

Stage 2: Play Stage: A child plays, sometimes as being a mother or a teacher, at times a postal worker, a police officer etc. In this stage, responses are not organised. A child internalises the attitudes of others who are significant to her/him through enacting the roles of others.

'Significant others' is a term used by Mead to refer to those individuals who are most important in the development of the 'self'. A 'significant other' is someone whose opinions matter to us and who is in a position to influence our thinking, especially about ourselves. A significant other can be anyone such as parents, siblings, friends, and teachers.

Stage 3: Game Stage: As a child matures, and as the 'self' gradually develops, one internalises the expectations of a large number of people. Children learn to behave according to the impressions of others and in different situations. They learn to understand interactions involving different people with a variety of purposes. They understand that 'role play' in each situation involves following a consistent set of rules and expectations. For example, a child at this stage is likely to be aware of the different responsibilities of people in a restaurant who together, make for a smooth dining experience (someone seats you, another takes your order, someone else cooks the food, while yet another person clears away used dishes). Now they develop the ability to take the role according to the perception of others. Thus, the 'self' is mainly formed through our interactions with others and our understanding of others responses.

Socialization, in this sense, is a process of self awareness. It is a process of learning to behave according to expected norms and patterns. Take a simple example of accidentally burning your hand in a fire. The reaction to pain may be instinctive, but the consequent behaviour is certainly socially conditioned according to *who* you are (female/ male, child/ adult)

or *where* you are (at home/in a public area).

Socialization as a learning process is lifelong even though the most critical process happens in the early years. The learning which happens in the early years is termed as **primary socialization**. A child gets acquainted with values, customs, behavioural norms and manners. The process of learning attitudes, norms and behaviour patterns and becoming members of different social groups like family, kin network, peer group and later, formal groups like school, professional networks etc. is a lifelong process. What can be termed as **secondary socialization** extends over the entire life of a person.

6.3 Agencies of socialization

As noted above, the child gradually becomes a member of society by participating in different social groups and networks. Even though the newborn is initiated with this learning process in family it is not the only agency of socialization. There are different social groups and social contexts which can be seen as agencies of socialization.

6.3.1 Family

Primary socialization takes place in infancy and childhood and involves intense cultural learning. During this phase, family is the main agent of socialization. The child learns language and other basic behavioural patterns in a family. Basic values, manners and attitudes foundational for future learning are transmitted by family. A range of roles are learnt in the family. Children learn basic responsibilities and duties from parents and other family members. This learning involves using

sanctions which are mainly informal. Positive sanctions involving physical expressions (smile, for example), verbal approval (good boy/girl), physical rewards (gifts) and negative sanctions ranging from negative remarks to physical punishment may be used. Family thus plays a significant role in developing acceptable behaviour patterns in children.

Socialization through family is varied because there is no single, uniform pattern to do so. A child brought up in a nuclear family will undergo a different pattern of socialization than one in an extended family. In the first case, parents may be key socializing agents but in the other grandparents, an aunt, a cousin may play a significant role. Some children may be brought up in single-parent households. Patterns of child-rearing vary across families with different caste, class, and ethnic backgrounds. The influence of different family backgrounds can be well understood if we think of a child growing up in a poor, marginalised household in relation to a child growing up in an upper caste/upper class family background.

Socialization in family does not always mean unquestioned acceptance of everything that parents/elders say. Children can also negotiate, question and develop outlooks contradictory to their elders. This is more so in the contemporary world in which diverse socializing agencies influence social learning.

6.3.2 Peer Groups

Like family, peer group is seen as a primary socializing agency. Peer groups are friendship groups made up of people of similar age. (e.g. small children's play group, teenage gangs, senior citizen group)

They are considered as important primary agencies of socialization because personal interactions with our peers influences our behaviour – from how we dress to what we like and what we hate. In peer groups, the interactions are reasonably egalitarian as there is a greater amount of give and take, when compared to family or school.

Peer Groups

Peer groups also use informal sanctions including positive sanctions like approving gestures or laughing at your jokes, and negative sanctions like disapproving looks, labelling or rejecting your company. The values we learn in a peer group may vary with age and circumstances, but we carry the value of friendship with us throughout our lives.

6.3.3 Schools

School

Schooling and education are considered as secondary agencies. Schooling is secondary because it is a formal process. What we learn comes through a formal curriculum with specific subjects and skills. There is a possibility that in spite of the daily contact we may not develop primary attachment to other members. Schooling involves learning values and norms at a step higher than those learnt in family. Schools project a wider range of values and roles. Schools use positive sanctions ranging from grades, prizes, praise and encouragement and negative sanctions in some circumstances. Skills and values like teamwork, competitive spirit, discipline, conformity to authority are learnt in schools and this helps prepare students for the adult world.

Sociologists also discuss about hidden curriculum conditioning children's learning. Hidden curriculum refers to things we learn from attending the school such as respect for the system and obedience to authority. It also indicates unquestioned acceptance of the system. For example, while distributing co-curricular tasks, girls, and rarely boys are expected to do campus cleaning. Through this children learn the sexual division of labour. Many schools are making efforts to counter this by making boys and girls do similar tasks.

6.3.4 Mass Media

One of the significant forces of socialization in modern culture is mass media. Mass media has become an integral part of our day-to-day life. Mass media are the means for delivering impersonal communication directed to a vast audience. As a medium of communication they transmit information and messages which influence the personality of an individual to a great extent. Mass media includes traditional print media like newspapers and magazines, electronic media like radio and television, and current IT-enabled media and social media.

Mass Media

In the last few decades, children have been dramatically socialised by one source in particular: television. Studies have found that children spend more time watching TV than they spend in school. Television has an influence on children from a very young age and affects their cognitive and social development.

Modern technological advancements have strengthened and changed the role of mass media as an agent of socialization. Technology has certainly increased the spread of mass media. People spend most of their time in touch with the world, through different forms of mass media. Sometimes, the time allotted to other agents of socialization like family or friends, is sacrificed just to give time to the usage of mass media. Television shows and movies today dominate our life to the extent that, what they portray easily influences the real life. The number of people who depend on what they watch on television, hear on radio, or read on Internet, is increasing rapidly because of the help of modern advancements. More time is given to usage of mass media, and a greater proportion of that time is dedicated to entertainment.

Mass media has wider reach and can spread information in a more democratic manner. Electronic communication can reach a village that is not even connected by roads. Due of its effective reach, mass media plays a significant role in the dissemination of information, in building public opinion and reinforcing values. A wider concern is expressed about the impact of on-screen violence on children and youth. More research is needed to understand the precise nature of this link. What is certain is, the extent of media's influence in terms of both, its reach and its content.

Check this - How real are Reality Shows ?

The number of reality shows on Indian television is consistently increasing. Though conclusive research on the comprehensive effects of reality shows is yet to develop, it certainly points to the fact that reality shows influence children tremendously. Reality shows that 'hunt' the best talents have captured the minds of children and parents. Shows like Big Boss or Roadies show tend to "normalise" bullying and the use of slam words and harsh language.

Adult viewers know that these shows are largely scripted. But, children may not have the maturity to draw a line between what is 'real' on TV and what actually happens in the real world. So there is a danger of children confusing real life with the perceived reality through these programmes. Some reality shows also show participants taking extreme risks and putting themselves in dangerous situations. Since younger children mostly learn through imitation, watching such programmes may also put them at risk of physical injury.

6.3.5 Neighbourhood

Neighourhood

A neighbourhood community is an important agency of socialization. A neighbourhood is a geographically localised community within a larger city, town, or suburb. As social communities, neighbourhoods are formed through considerable face-to-face interaction among members often living near one another. In this sense, they are local social units larger than households. Families operate as part of the larger community network. Children often take inputs from people living very closely around, and in many cases are as good as family members. A neighbourhood community provides the base for an individual to extend social relations and interactions beyond the narrow limits of the home. Apart from one's own parents, adults in the neighbourhood also exert an influence on shaping social behaviour of the growing child. Neighbourhood social networks built through the celebration of cultural festivals, organisation of sports activities, taking up social issues such as environment or traffic, provide great source of learning for children.

6.3.6 Workplace

As stated earlier, socialization is a life-long process. Adult socialization indicates this continuous process of learning. One of the significant agents of adult socialization is the workplace. Adult individuals spend significant amount of time at the workplace. Socialization through workplace involves acquiring new skills, knowledge and behaviour patterns suitable to the requirements of the job. Through various mechanisms like on-job training, orientation and formal meetings, individuals get familiarized with each other and learn new roles. At the workplace, a person meets people of different age groups, belonging to different social and cultural backgrounds. Social interactions at the workplace, help a person to broaden her/his horizons in terms of social acceptance and tolerance towards the others. It also sometimes helps in changing the notions of 'right' and 'wrong'. Workplace thus serves as an important context of socialization.
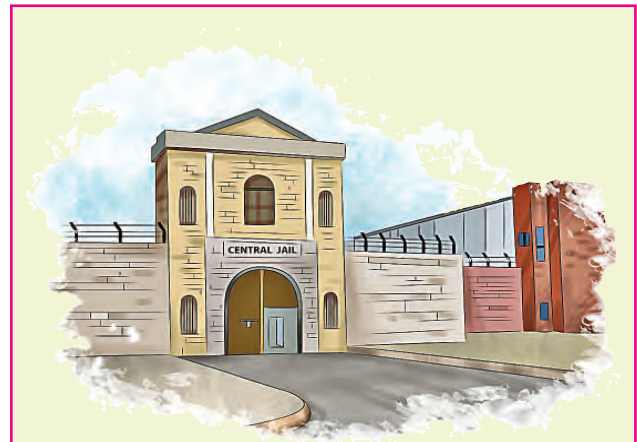
6.4 Re-socialization

As discussed earlier, socialization is a life-long process. It involves learning new

things continuously. The modern world is complex and diverse in terms of knowledge, skills and values. So, the individual needs to adapt and cope with new situations and environment sometimes by learning new things or sometimes even by unlearning. This process of unlearning old norms, roles, values, and behavioural patterns and learning new patterns is called re-socialization.

Sometimes an individual is caught in a situation where one has to break away from past experience and earlier way of life and internalise radically different norms and values. It involves complete alteration of the earlier lifestyle and thinking. The new way of life is not only different but also incompatible with the earlier one. So, the individual has to completely re-engineer one's sense of social values, beliefs and norms. The basis of re-socialization is to unlearn and then relearn.

Resocialization can also be defined as a process which subjects an individual to new values, attitudes, and skills defined as adequate, according to the norms of a particular institution, and the person must change in order to function adequately according to those norms. A prison sentence, is a good example. The individual not only has to change and rehabilitate one's behaviour in order to return to society, but she/he must also accommodate the new norms required for living while in prison. Severity of re-socialization depends on the context in which it is carried out. For example, re-socialization which happens when an individual enters into a completely different and new occupational world is milder than the one which will take place in a 'total institution' like prison.

Prison

Erving Goffman is credited for having popularised the term 'total institution', a term closely associated with re-socialization. A total institution is usually set apart from the society by distance, laws, and physical attributes like high walls, barbed wire fences, and locked gates. They are organised by strict rules and norms determined and enforced by a single authority. Examples of total institutions are prisons, military camps, mental health facilities, and private boarding schools. The fundamental purpose of these institutions is to re-socialise people into changed identities and roles. Re-socialization in total institutions is severe and difficult. It strips off the individuality completely and creates a new identity bound by tight schedules and rules of the institution. The individual has to submit all one's personal belongings such as clothing or accessories, privileges and comforts and align to 'life of the inside'. It requires a strong will power and determination on the part of the individual to adapt to the new environment.

Thus, resocialization involves a process of tearing down and rebuilding an individual's role and socially constructed sense of self. It is often a deliberate and

an intense social process. It revolves around the notion that if something can be learned, it can also be unlearned.

ACTIVITY - 3

Do you think resocialization requires 'total institutions'? Why? Why not? Conduct a group discussion on this.

This chapter will have showed you how humans become social beings through the lifelong process called socialization. You have learnt about how our lives are shaped by forces like family, education, friends, media and so forth. You will have understood how human beings constantly resocialize in different environments.

SUMMARY

- Socialization is a process whereby an individual develops one's personality and becomes a functioning member of society.

- Human behaviour involves continuous learning and through socialization we learn behavioural rules to become active members of social groups.

- The individual self and a distinct social identity is formed only through social interaction.

- A child gradually becomes a member of society by participating in different social groups and networks which can be termed as agencies of socialization.

- Even though the newborn is initiated with this learning process in family, it is not the only agency of socialization. There are different social groups and social contexts which can be seen as agencies of socialization, For example: school, peer group, mass media, neighbourhood, etc.

- The individual needs to adapt and cope with new situations and environment; sometimes by learning new things or even by unlearning. This process of unlearning old norms, roles, values, and behavioral patterns and learning new patterns is called re-socialization.

EXERCISE

1. (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the statements.

(1) The process whereby an individual learns to conform to the norms of society is called ___.
(assimilation, socialization, cooperation)

(2) Family is a ___ agency of socialization.
(primary, secondary, tertiary)

(3) School is a/an ____ agency of socialization.
(primary, secondary, tertiary)

(4) Television is a/an ___ medium of communication.
(audio, visual, audiovisual)

1. (B) Correct the incorrect pair.

(1) (i) Language, behaviour - family

(ii) Social values like friendship - peer group

(iii) Teamwork, discipline - neighborhood

(iv) To build opinion - mass media

1. (C) Identify the appropriate term from the given options.

> Internet, Peer group,
> Childhood socialization

(1) Takes place in the early years of life.

(2) Global impact in today's world.

1. (D) Correct underlined words and complete the sentence

(1) Radio is an <u>audiovisual</u> medium.

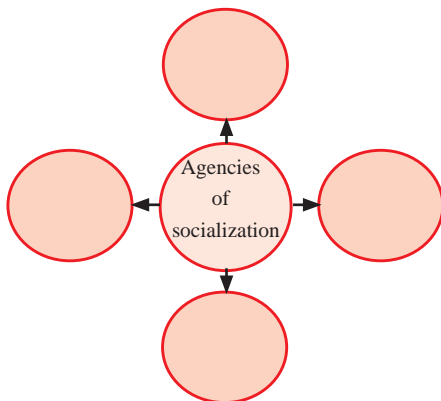(2) <u>Peer group</u> is an example of an authoritarian agency.

2. Write short notes.

(1) Formation of 'self' according to Mead

(2) Agencies of socialization

(3) Resocialization

3. Explain the following concept with an example.

(1) Primary socialization

(2) Secondary socialization

4. (A) Complete the concept map.

(B) State whether the following statements are True or False with reasons.

(1) Socialization is a life-long process.

(2) Advertisements influence consumer behaviour.

5. Give your personal response.

(1) 'Breaking News' tends to create panic or emotional responses. Why do you think this happens? Give relevant examples to illustrate.

(2) The use of 'unacceptable language' is often picked up by children even if this kind of language is not used within the home. Explain how this might happen.

6. Answer the following question in detail (about 150-200 words)

You belong to a generation that has been exposed to internet. Discuss how Internet has brought about positive and negative results.

ACTIVITY:

Collect data from five students regarding their experience with social networking sites (example Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter). Find out about how much time they spend online, what kinds of people they interact with, what topics are usually discussed, the uses and problems of social networking sites. Write a 100-word Report on your findings.

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