

CUET · SOCIOLOGY · CLASS XI · CODE 326

Terms, Concepts and Their Use in Sociology

CUET unit: Introducing Sociology — Sociological Concepts
(Groups, Stratification, Status & Role, Social Control)

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Snapshot

- Equips students with the foundational vocabulary of sociology — **social groups, stratification, status & role, and social control** — and stresses that sociological terms are **conceptual tools (keys)** to understand reality, not final answers.
- Contrasts traditional/small-scale with modern/large-scale societies through paired categories — **primary vs secondary groups, community vs society/association, in-group vs out-group, ascribed vs achieved status, informal vs formal social control**.
- Introduces concepts through four theoretical lenses — **Marxist** (class & conflict), **Durkheimian** (solidarity & collective conscience), **Weberian** (life-chances, prestige, power), and **Functionalist** (society as organism, stratification as functional necessity).
- CUET routinely tests definitions (quasi group, reference group, peer group, sanction, deviance), distinctions (varna vs jati, ascribed vs achieved, status vs role), and theorist-attribution (Marx/Weber/Durkheim/Srinivas).
- Examples to remember: **Srinivas's Rampura "nenne monne bandavartu"** observation, **Khasi matriliney role-conflict**, **A.R. Desai on urbanisation and caste, honour killing as informal control**, and the **working-mother role-conflict** illustration.
- These concepts bridge Chapter 1 (sociology as a discipline) with the methodological discussion of Chapter 3, giving students the concept-set they will use in fieldwork.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Sociological vocabulary is necessary because sociology's subject matter — family, marriage, status, role, control — is precisely what everyone **already** thinks they know about; the discipline therefore has to "make the familiar strange" by giving everyday phenomena a specialised vocabulary. Terms are **keys** to open up institutions; they help us see structure where common sense sees only individual behaviour, and they prevent us from sliding back into the naturalistic explanations of Chapter 1 (NCERT §I Introduction, p. 24).

The key concepts sit in the broader sweep of sociological theory. **Karl Marx** organised his sociology around the categories of **class and conflict**: production divides society into owners and labourers, and the resulting class antagonism is the engine of historical change (NCERT §I, p. 25). **Emile Durkheim**, by contrast, worked with **social solidarity** and the **collective conscience** — the shared moral order that holds society together. After the Second World War, **structural functionalists** drew on Durkheim to picture society as a harmonious organism whose parts perform necessary functions, while **conflict theorists** drew on Marx to insist that what looks like consensus is in fact the imposition of dominant-class interests (NCERT §I, p. 25). There is also a methodological choice: **micro** approaches (status, role) start from the individual actor; **macro** approaches (social control, stratification) start from larger structures — class, caste, market, state (NCERT §I, p. 25).

Next, distinguish **aggregates, quasi groups and social groups**. Aggregates are mere collections of people sharing a place but no real connection — railway passengers, a cinema audience, customers in a market. **Quasi groups** are slightly more — they have **potential** groupness (classes, status groups, age groups, gender groups, crowds) but lack structure or organisation, and their members may not even be aware of the grouping (NCERT §II Social Groups, p. 26–27). Quasi groups can mature into **social groups**: a class becomes politically organised when it acquires a party; an anti-colonial collectivity matures into a **nation**. A genuine social group has six features — (i) persistent interaction, (ii) a stable pattern of that interaction, (iii) a sense of belonging marked by shared rules, rituals and symbols, (iv) a shared interest, (v) acceptance of common norms and values, and (vi) a definable structure (NCERT §II, p. 27).

Within social groups there are classical contrasts. **Primary groups** are small, intimate, face-to-face, person-oriented (family, village, friends); **secondary groups** are relatively large, formal, impersonal and goal-oriented (schools, government offices, hospitals, students' associations). Modern industrial society is dominated by secondary groups, but primary groups continue to be the emotional core of life (NCERT §Types of Groups, pp. 28–29). The closely related pair is **community vs society/association**: community refers to highly personal, intimate and enduring relationships, while society or association refers to the impersonal, superficial, transitory urban-modern relationships built on contracts. Community parallels the primary group; association parallels the secondary (NCERT §Community and Society, p. 29).

In-group and **out-group** are defined by the "we" feeling. The in-group is "us"; the out-group is "them". Migrants are often treated as the out-group, but the boundary shifts — M.N. **Srinivas**, during his **1948 fieldwork in Rampura**, found that villagers distinguished **recent migrants** ("nenne monne bandavartu" — "came yesterday or the day before") from **old immigrants** ("arsheyinda bandavaru" / "khadeem kulagalu" — "those who came long ago", "old lineages"). The boundary is not fixed by some essential cultural marker; it is **drawn and re-drawn over time** (NCERT §In-Groups and Out-Groups, pp. 29–30). The closely-related **reference group** is the group one does **not** belong to but emulates — the signature example is colonial-era middle-class Indians



treating the English gentleman as a reference group (NCERT §Reference Group, p. 30). A **peer group** is a kind of primary group made up of individuals of similar age or profession; **peer pressure** is the social pressure peers exert on each other (NCERT §Peer Groups, p. 30).

Social stratification is structured inequality between groups in their access to material and symbolic rewards. Historically four systems are named: **slavery, caste, estate, class**. Slavery is the extreme — in ancient Greece and Rome and in the 18th–19th century Southern United States some human beings were literally owned by others. The **estate** system characterised feudal Europe. **Caste** in the Indian context is defined as a system in which **position depends totally on ascribed status by birth**, organised around purity/pollution; the four-fold **varna** scheme names Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, with the **Panchamas** (the "fifth") historically treated as outcastes, while on the ground innumerable occupation-based **jatis** exist (NCERT §Social Stratification & §Caste, p. 31).

Class has two main theoretical treatments. **Karl Marx** defined classes by their **relation to the means of production** — those who own land or factories and those who own only their labour. **Max Weber** broadened this by introducing **life-chances** (rewards and advantages afforded by market capacity) and argued that inequality may rest on **economic relations, prestige, or political power** — three analytically distinct dimensions. **Functionalists** by contrast argued that no society has ever been classless: stratification has unconsciously evolved as a device by which societies ensure that the most qualified people occupy the most important positions, with corresponding rewards (NCERT §Class, pp. 32–33).

Next comes the **status–role pair**. A **status** is a position in a society or group; a **role** is the dynamic, behavioural aspect of a status. A sharp mnemonic: "**status is occupied, but roles are played**". Individuals hold a **status set** — multiple statuses at the same time (a student is also a daughter, a sister, a friend) — and a **status sequence** — statuses attained in succession over the life-course (son → father → grandfather → great-grandfather) (NCERT §Status and Role, pp. 33–34). The most heavily tested distinction is between **ascribed status** (based on birth — age, caste, race, kinship, sex) and **achieved status** (attained voluntarily through personal ability, achievement, education, income or expertise). Simple/traditional societies are dominated by ascribed status; modern societies emphasise achievement, but ascribed status still matters everywhere (NCERT §Status and Role, p. 34).

Prestige is the value attached to a **status** or **office**, not the person occupying it; this is why a doctor may have higher prestige than a shopkeeper even when the shopkeeper earns more. **Role conflict** is the incompatibility among roles tied to one or more statuses — illustrated through the **middle-class working woman** juggling mother, wife and professional, and through the **Khasi matriliney** example where men are torn between their natal house and the wife-and-children household (Nongbri 2003). **Role stereotyping** is the cultural reinforcement of fixed roles — men as breadwinners, women as homemakers (NCERT §Status and Role, pp. 34–35).

Social control is the means by which a society brings recalcitrant or unruly members back into line. Functionalists see social control as restraining deviance and maintaining order; conflict theorists, drawing on Marx, see it as a tool by which dominant classes impose their interests on others — law itself, from this angle, is the formal writ of the powerful (NCERT §Society and Social Control, pp. 35–36). **Formal social control** uses codified, systematic mechanisms — law, the state, the police, the courts. **Informal social control** is personal, unofficial, uncoded — smiles, frowns, ridicule, laughter; the family, religion and kinship are its key agencies. **Honour killing** is cited as an extreme outcome of informal control gone violent (NCERT §Social Control, p. 37). A **sanction** is a mode of reward or punishment reinforcing expected behaviour — sanctions can be **positive (reward) or negative (punishment)**, a point CUET examiners love to trap candidates on. **Deviance** is action that does not conform to the norms and values of most members of a group or society; what counts as deviant varies across periods and cultures (NCERT §Social Control, pp. 37–38).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Aggregate	A mere collection of people in the same place with no definite social connection (railway passengers, audience)	26
Quasi group	An aggregate or combination lacking structure or organisation, whose members may be unaware of the grouping (classes, status groups, crowds)	27
Social group	A collection of continuously interacting persons sharing common interest, culture, values and norms	27
Primary group	Small group connected by intimate, face-to-face association and cooperation; person-oriented	28
Secondary group	Relatively large, formal, impersonal, goal-oriented group	29
Community	Highly personal, intimate, enduring relationships	29
Society / Association	Impersonal, superficial, transitory relationships of modern urban life based on contracts	29
In-group	A group marked by a "we" feeling	29
Out-group	A group to which in-group members do not belong; "they"	29
Reference group	A group whose lifestyle is emulated though one does not belong to it	30
Peer group	Primary group of individuals of similar age or profession	30
Social stratification	Structured inequalities between groups in access to material or symbolic rewards	31
Slavery	Extreme inequality where some individuals are literally owned by others	31

Term	Definition	Page
Estate	Feudal European stratification system	31
Varna	Four-fold traditional hierarchy — Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras	31
Jati	Innumerable occupation-based caste groups on the ground	31
Class (Marxist)	Defined by relation to the means of production	32
Life-chances (Weber)	Rewards and advantages afforded by market capacity	32
Status	A position in society/group with defined rights and duties	33
Role	The dynamic/behavioural aspect of status	33
Status set	Multiple statuses an individual holds simultaneously	34
Status sequence	Statuses attained in succession across life stages	34
Ascribed status	Position occupied by birth or involuntarily	34
Achieved status	Position attained voluntarily by personal ability	34
Prestige	Value attached to a status/office (not to the person)	34
Role conflict	Incompatibility among roles tied to one or more statuses	34
Social control	Means used by society to bring unruly members back into line	35
Formal social control	Codified, systematic mechanisms — law, the state	37
Informal social control	Personal, unofficial, uncodified — smiles, frowns, ridicule	37
Sanction	Mode of reward or punishment; can be positive or negative	37
Deviance	Action that does not conform to dominant norms/values	37–38

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Four testable visual contrasts, each of which CUET has used as a stem. The first is the **aggregate/quasi group vs social group** classification (p. 26), with photographs of railway-station passengers and cinema audiences alongside the question "What kind of groups are these?". The point: mere co-presence is **not** a group — structure, persistent interaction and shared norms are required. The second is the **primary group (community) vs secondary group (society/association)** photo pair on p. 28 — "Contrast the two types of groups" — fixing that a family photograph and a school assembly are categorically different social formations.

The most testable **process** is the **quasi group → social group transition** on p. 27. A class is a quasi group; once it acquires consciousness and a political party, it becomes a

social group. A pre-national collectivity becomes a nation through the social process of anti-colonial struggle. CUET likes to test the **direction** of this transformation — quasi group → social group, not the other way round. The second process is the **status sequence** on p. 34 — son → father → grandfather → great-grandfather — a life-course progression that should not be confused with the **status set** (concurrent statuses).

Two boxed inputs deserve memorising. The **Peter Berger box on social control** (p. 36) states that **violence is the oldest and ultimate means** of social control, but adds that the primary-group mechanisms — the look, the laugh, the silence — are "potent and subtle". The **newspaper report "Man kills sister for marrying from outside the caste"** (p. 37) is a case study of how **informal** social control, exercised by family and panchayat, can escalate into **honour killing**. Together these show that informal does not mean weak, and that formal/informal is an analytical distinction rather than a measure of severity.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Aggregate vs Quasi group vs Social group** — passengers at a station are an aggregate often called a quasi group; only with persistent interaction, shared norms and structure does it become a social group. NTA often offers all three for the same example.
- **Community vs Society/Association** — community parallels the **primary group**; society/association parallels the **secondary** group. Reversing this pair is the most common error.
- **Reference group vs In-group** — you **belong** to the in-group; you only **aspire** to be like the reference group. Colonial Indians treating the English gentleman as a reference group is the canonical example.
- **Varna vs Jati** — varna is the four-fold scheme; jati is the innumerable occupation-based ground-level groups. NTA frequently inverts the two.
- **Ascribed vs Achieved status** — ascribed = by birth; achieved = by personal effort. Modern societies emphasise achievement but ascribed status still matters.
- **Status vs Role vs Prestige** — status is occupied (position), role is played (behavioural aspect), prestige is the value attached to the status (not the person).
- **Marx vs Weber on class** — Marx: relation to means of production; Weber: life-chances, with inequality based on economic relations, prestige OR political power. Do not attribute "life-chances" to Marx.
- **Formal vs Informal social control** — law and state = formal; family, religion, kinship, ridicule, frowns = informal. Honour killing is cited under informal control agencies.
- **Sanction is not always punishment** — sanctions can be positive (reward) or negative (punishment); CUET 2024 used this as a True/False trap.

- **Functionalist vs Conflict view of stratification** — functionalists see it as a necessary device for placing the qualified; conflict theorists see it as the institutionalised dominance of one class. Don't mix the two attributions.
- **Srinivas's Rampura observation** is about the **shifting in-group/out-group boundary**, not about varna/jati. Examiners frequently misroute this example.
- **Status set vs Status sequence** — set is simultaneous; sequence is temporal/successive.

2.5 Thinkers / Theories

Name	Theory / Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
Karl Marx	Class & conflict	Society divided by relation to means of production; bourgeoisie vs proletariat	25, 32
Emile Durkheim	Solidarity & collective conscience	Shared moral order integrates society; social facts shape individual behaviour	25
Max Weber	Life-chances; multidimensional inequality	Inequality may be based on economic relations, prestige or political power	32
Talcott Parsons / Functionalists	Stratification as functional necessity	Stratification places the most qualified in the most important positions	33
M.N. Srinivas	Shifting in-/out-group boundary	Rampura 1948 — distinction between "nenne monne bandavartu" and "arsheyinda bandavaru"	29–30
Peter Berger	Social control as ultimately violent	Violence is the oldest means; primary-group control is "potent and subtle"	36
A.R. Desai	Urbanisation and caste	Cited for the persistence of caste under urban/industrial change	25
Tiplut Nongbri	Khasi matriliney	Men torn between natal house and wife/children — role conflict	35
Ferdinand Tönnies (implicit)	Gemeinschaft / Gesellschaft	Underlies the community/society distinction	29
Robert K. Merton (implicit)	Reference group theory	Underlies the reference-group concept	30
Ravinder Kaur / sociologists of caste	Caste as ascribed stratification	Caste position depends totally on ascribed status by birth	31

Name	Theory / Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
Conflict theorists (post-Marx)	Social control as class domination	Law is the formal writ of the powerful	36

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is among the highest-yielding in CUET Sociology, typically contributing 5–7 MCQs per year. NTA repeatedly tests definitions (quasi group, reference group, peer group, sanction, deviance, varna vs jati), pair-matching (primary/secondary, community/association, ascribed/achieved), theorist-attribution (Marx on means of production; Weber on life-chances; Durkheim on solidarity; functionalists on stratification as device), and case-based items drawn's own examples (Srinivas's Rampura migrants, Khasi matriliney role-conflict, A.R. Desai on urbanisation and caste, the honour-killing newspaper box). For consolidated practice see </pyq/sociology> on UniDrill.

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