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**Concept and Role of Values in the Society:
With Special Reference to India**

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**Concept and Role of Values in the Society:
With Special Reference to India**

ABSTRACT

Values can be seen in different ways, even it can be considered in different disciplines, in our academic fields, as well as in the behaviour of our daily life. In sociology, the meaning of value is different from meaning of value in economics or philosophy. Let us see, in economics values has been considered as only price. The “theory of values” is almost co terminus with the “theory of price”. But if we look into the discipline of philosophy “values” is a part of ethics, political philosophy and aesthetics. In the context of sociology, social values form an important part of the culture of the society. In this paper, they can be analyzed as integrated into the following flow: Social culture → social values → social structure → social order → social control → social action that leads to social conduct in the INDIAN Society.

Keywords:

Acknowledgment:

Values can be observed in different ways, even it can be considered in different disciplines, in our academic fields, as well as in the behaviour of our daily life.

In sociology, the meaning of value is different from meaning of value in economics or philosophy. Let us see, in economics values has been considered as only price. The “theory of values” is almost co terminus with the “theory of price”. But if we look into the discipline of philosophy “values” is a part of ethics, political philosophy and aesthetics.

In the context of Sociology: Social values form an important part of the culture of the society. In terms of values in the society it can be look into in the following manner: Social culture→social values→social structure→social order→social control→social action that leads to social conduct.

Values guide our behaviour in many ways such as fundamental rights, respect for human dignity, rationality, sacrifice, individuality, equality, democracy etc. In simple words, values may be defined as measure of goodness or desirability. If we have the values in our thinking/activities, which reflects in our society i.e a society will be a healthy.

Various social scientists define the values in different ways, a few of them are given below:

1. According to H.M. Johnson, “Values are general standards and may be regarded as higher order norms”.
2. Young and Mack write, “Values are assumption, largely unconscious, of what is right and important”.
3. Michael Haralambos says “A value is a belief that something is good and worthwhile. It defines what is worth having and worth striving”.
4. H.L. Gorman say, “Values are group conceptions of the relative desirability of things”.
5. According to Peter Worsley, “Values are general conceptions of “the good”, ideas about the kind of ends that people should pursue throughout their lives and throughout the many different activities in which they engage”.
6. According to Indian noted sociologist Prof. Ram Krishna Mukherjee (1949) writes, “by their nature, all human relations and behavior are embedded in values”.
7. "Values are group conceptions of the relative desirability of things" — G.R. Leslie, R.F. Larson, H.L. Gorman.
8. According to H.M. Johnson, "Values are general standards and may be regarded as higher order norms".

On the basis on the above definitions we can say that in simple words, values may be defined as measure of goodness or desirability.

Thus, it is clear from the above definitions that values represent wised range of ideas about the ends that men should pursue in their life. The values of a society provide goals or ends for its members to aim for. These goals or ends are to be pursued in different contexts and situation.

Functions of Values

1. Values provide goals or ends for the members to aim for.
2. Values provide for stabilities and uniformities in group interaction. They hold the society together because they are shared in common. Some sociologists argue that shared values form the basis for social unity. Since they share the same values with others, the members of society are likely to see others as 'people like themselves'. They will therefore, have a sense of belonging to a social group. They will feel a part of the wider society.
3. Values bring legitimacy to the rules that govern specific activities. The rule is accepted as rules and followed mainly because they embody the values that most people accept.
4. Values help to bring about some kind of adjustment between different sets of rules. The people seek the same kinds of ends or goals in different field of their life. Hence, it is possible for them to modify the rules to help the pursuit of this end. For example, if the Indian people cherish the value of 'the principle of equality', then they will have to modify the rules governing the interpersonal relationship of man and women. As and when new activities emerge, people create rules in the light of their beliefs about what is 'good' and 'right'.

Kinds of Values

Values may be classified as they have hierarchy in order. We generally say that values are found everywhere. Values are humanistic in nature. They are varied. Professor Radhakamal Mukherjee discusses two types of values related to the Indian Society.

1. First instantaneous values are worldly in nature which may be observed in day to day life.
2. Second, supernatural values are related to the salvation of the human being. However, we would like to discuss general types of values. They are:
 - (a) **Moral Values**-Every society has different types of moral values. They are not scientific. They are related to the religion and different situations of society. For example, respect to the parents, do not steal things, don't tell a lie. Society does not allow for the violation of such value.
 - (b) **Rational Values**: Rational Values are Scientific and logical in nature viz. hard working is a rational value of modern society.
 - (c) **Aesthetic Values**-Aesthetic values are related to the literature, art, culture. Traditional Music is the sign of beautiful in Indian society.

However, all these values represent two categories of values:

- (i) **Dominant value:** The value which has strong impact in the mind of a person and violation of such value is not possible for him, is called dominant value.
- (ii) **Variant value:** the value in which a person has freedom to behave according to his desires and choices is called variant value.

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 the bases for the choices of things
- Values are relatively permanent
- Values bring cohesiveness in society
- Values are motivating for public welfare
- Values have hierarchy in order

Traditional and Modern Values

(a) Traditional values

Traditional Indian society was organized on the principles of hierarchy, pluralism and holism:

Hierarchy: 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 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 hi living. It is his secure way of earning money, because no other caste or sub castes has right to interfere in his trade.

Pluralism: Pluralism, as a value, implies tolerance of others' style of life while preserving one's own. For example, Hinduism, was essentially tolerant and instead of abruptly converting, it gradually assimilated other faiths. Hindus believed in the existence of multiple paths leading to the same ultimate goal. Thus the faiths of other relations not only survived but also prospered for centuries in India. In spite of the differences at the level of doctrine and rituals, the

followers of different religions lived in relative harmony in India. This value system was important for the caste society. Each caste had its own occupation, custom, rituals, and tradition. While each caste was different at one level, it was interdependent at several others. For example, the barber served the agriculturist by cutting hair and in turn the agriculturalist gave the barber a certain amount of grain after the harvest.

Holism: Holism assumed a relationship between individual and group in which the latter had primacy over the former, the individual is expected to perform his duties and claim his rights, always keeping in mind the wider interests of the community. For example, in traditional India, the extended and joint families consisted of a larger number of kin, including dependents the aged, widows, unmarried ones, physically handicapped, etc. although each contributed according to his ability, yet one was expected to draw from the familial store of wealth only according to one's need. This called for self-restraint of one's own wants in the interest of fellow beings, and the community at large.

(b) Modern values:

From the above discussion, we have an idea of importance of values in traditional society. Let us now discuss the values in modern society. The fundamental values that the modern Indian state pursues are embodied in the Constitution of India. These values are of democracy, secularism and socialism. Although this value package is Western in origin, it is applied to the Indian context with the necessary adaptation and indigenization.

Democracy: democracy emphasizes the equality of opportunity. Democracy assumes the existence of autonomous and independent individuals capable of participating in the decision making process. For example, the citizens of our country give votes to select the leaders for local, state and central governance.

Secularism: Secularism means respecting and tolerating the practices of other communities, particularly religious communities. India is multi-religious nation. Such a situation called for the recognition of distinctiveness of other religious groups and the importance of secularism as a value. Secularism meant not only non-interference in the affairs of other communities but also developing a positive appreciation of their distinct life style.

Socialism: The world socialism means that the production, distribution and exchange of material resources of community are arranged in such a way that they can serve the common good. It is opposed to the concentration of wealth in few hands and decries monopoly.

As we know that Values and norms can run simultaneously therefore without the discussions of norms values cannot be possible to clearly defined. Therefore, let us to say something about the Norms which are more related with Values.

What is Norms?

“Social Norms” refer to the group-share standards of behaviour. Norms represent “Standard and generalization” concerning expected modes of behaviour. They are based on social values. A norm is a pattern setting limits on individual behaviour. Norms are the “blueprints” for behaviour. They determine, guide, control and also predict human behaviour.

Norms are group-shared expectations. Such expectations are reflected in statements such as – “A good citizen always respects laws”, “One is supposed to be quiet and respectful, and not to disturb others in a place of worship”, “A lawyer must not produce damaging evidence in the court against his own client”, “A scientist must be a restless searcher of truth and free from prejudices”, “Any occupant of any profession must follow the professional ethics associated with it”.

Definition of Norms

1. According to “Young and Mack” ‘norms’ refer to the ‘group-shared expectations’.
2. According to H.M. Johnson, ‘A norm is an abstract pattern held in the mind, that sets certain limits for behaviour’.
3. Norms refer to ‘the rules that guide behaviour in everyday situation and are derived from the value’ – ‘Donald Light Jr.’ and ‘Suzanne Keller’.
4. As ‘Robert Bierstedt’ has pointed out, ‘A norm is a rule or standard that governs our conduct in the social situations in which we participate’. He further writes that a norm can be treated as “a cultural specification that guides our conduct in society”.
5. ‘Social norms are rules developed by a group of people that specify how people must, should, may, should not and must not behave in various situations’. –G.R. Leslie, R.F. Larson and B.L. Gorman.
6. It is clear from the above definition that norms can be understood as rules and regulations that groups live by, Norms are the means through which values are expressed in behaviour.

Personal or Private Norms and Social Norms

We can make a distinction between personal or private norms and social norms. Private norms are purely individual in character and they reside with individual only. They may influence only the behaviour of the individual concerned. For example, an individual may make some individual resolutions on the New Year’s Day and decide to comply with them. Similarly, one may impose on oneself the norms of doing routine things on time schedule. As such, the sociologists are least interested in these personal or private norms.

Sociologists are more interested in ‘operative’ social norms. Operative social norms are always backed by sanctions. Because of sanctions, the violators of

norms suffer some penalties in the group, while those who conform we rewarded. Sociology studies in detail the types of social norms, the manner in which they are implemented, the way in which they differ from society to society, the way in which they are backed by sanctions, the functions they perform and so on.

Relation between Norm and Values

‘Values’ may be defined as a measure of goodness or desirability. They provide general guidelines for conduct. In this sense they are often referred to as “higher order norms”. But norms are given much more specific meaning. They define appropriate and acceptable behavior in particular situations. Values are cherished only through the observance of norms. The relationship between the two can be made clear by the following example.

Example: A society may cherish the value of “privacy”. This value provides only a general guide to behavior. Norms define how the value of ‘privacy’ is translated into action in particular situations and circumstances. For instance, norms relating to privacy may insist that person ‘letters must not be opened without permission etc. A person’s private life or individual life is his own concern and others must not interfere into the personal matters. In this way a series of norms direct how people should behave in terms of the value of ‘privacy’.

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: Norms vary from society to society. Sometimes, within the same society they differ from group to group.
- (v) Norms are normally internalized by the people: People in most of the instances accept norms and follow them or obey them. They do not question most of the norms and accept them implicitly.

Conformity to Norms

1. Indoctrination: We conform to the norms because we have been indoctrinated to do so from our very childhood.
2. Habituation: We conform to them because we become habituated to them.
3. Utility: we appreciate the utility of the norms and hence we conform to them.
4. Group Identification: By conforming to the norms we gain identification with the group. Hence we prefer to conform to them.

Violation of Norms

- (a) **Simple Violations of Norms:** Some norms which are not strongly enforced are often violated.
Example: Govt. officials may often use their official vehicles for personal purposes.
- (b) **Norm Conflict:** Complex societies have multiple and sometimes conflicting value systems.
- (c) **Existence of systematic Norms Evasion:** Sometimes norms are systematically or cleverly evaded on certain occasions.
Example: Forbidden drugs are sold and used in festivals, casual gathering places in an illegal way.

Importance of Norms

From the above discussion, it is clear that:

- (i) the concept of **social norms constitutes the very foundation of social structure.**
- (ii) **Norms govern the behavior of individuals** and help in interaction that takes place between them. They add some amount of regularity and inevitability to our behavior. 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.

- (iii) **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 return 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.

(iv) 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.

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 do something we are required to wear cloths in our society and forbidden to go naked on the street.

The second observation is that some of the norms pervade in the 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 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

Mores represent yet another category of norms. Mores is a term used to denote behavior 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 wellbeing, and 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 behavior. This prescription creates pressure on students, and they cannot deviate from this rule. And, this dress code undoubtedly given the students a common identification in the school.

Customs

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.

Folkways

Folkways are the recognized ways of behaving and acting in society which arise automatically with a group to meet in the problems of social living. They include the innumerable ways of behavior men have evolved about the business of social living. They are the customs and usages which have been passed from old generations and to which new elements are added according to changing needs of times. They represent man's unique means of adopting himself to his environment. No member even questions a folkway nor is anyone needed to enforce a folkway. One just abides by it without giving any thought to it. Thus eating three meals a day, brushing teeth, dressing style, shaking hands are examples of folkways.

Professor William G. Sumner that made a notable contribution in his classic "Folkways" applied the term more to those folkways which are considered by the group to be of great significance and therefore indispensable to its welfare. The mores relate to the fundamental rules of society more directly than do the folkways. They are regulators of behavior and express the group sense of what is fitting, right and conducive to social welfare. They imply a value judgement about the folkways. Violation of the mores, but not of the folkways, are looked upon as an evident danger to the rights of others. It is very difficult to draw a hard and fast line between mores and folkways. Rather, folkways and mores may be viewed as poles on a variety along which norms fall. The distinction between folkways and mores is a matter of degree rather than necessarily of kind, a question at degree of importance and degree of severity in punishment.

Conclusion

Now we have discussed all the above subject matter based on general theories. But as a researcher we have to propose here to search out the origin and nature of these customs, traditions, beliefs etc. that is existing in a given society. Every custom, traditions, folkways etc. varies society to society, country to country. We are interested to open a discourse on this issue from Marxist point of view in the academic arena. Marx stated that all human history is marked by class conflict. Marx believed that economic systems determine one particular society's beliefs, values, customs etc. Marx urged people not to let society evolve but to change it. So, today what is belief, customs existing in a particular society tomorrow it may not be by change of economic structure of that society.

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