

The background of the slide features a series of classical columns in shades of blue and gold, receding into the distance. Overlaid on this is a network diagram consisting of stylized human figures (represented by circles with a person icon) connected by thin lines, forming a complex web of relationships.

Understanding Social Institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

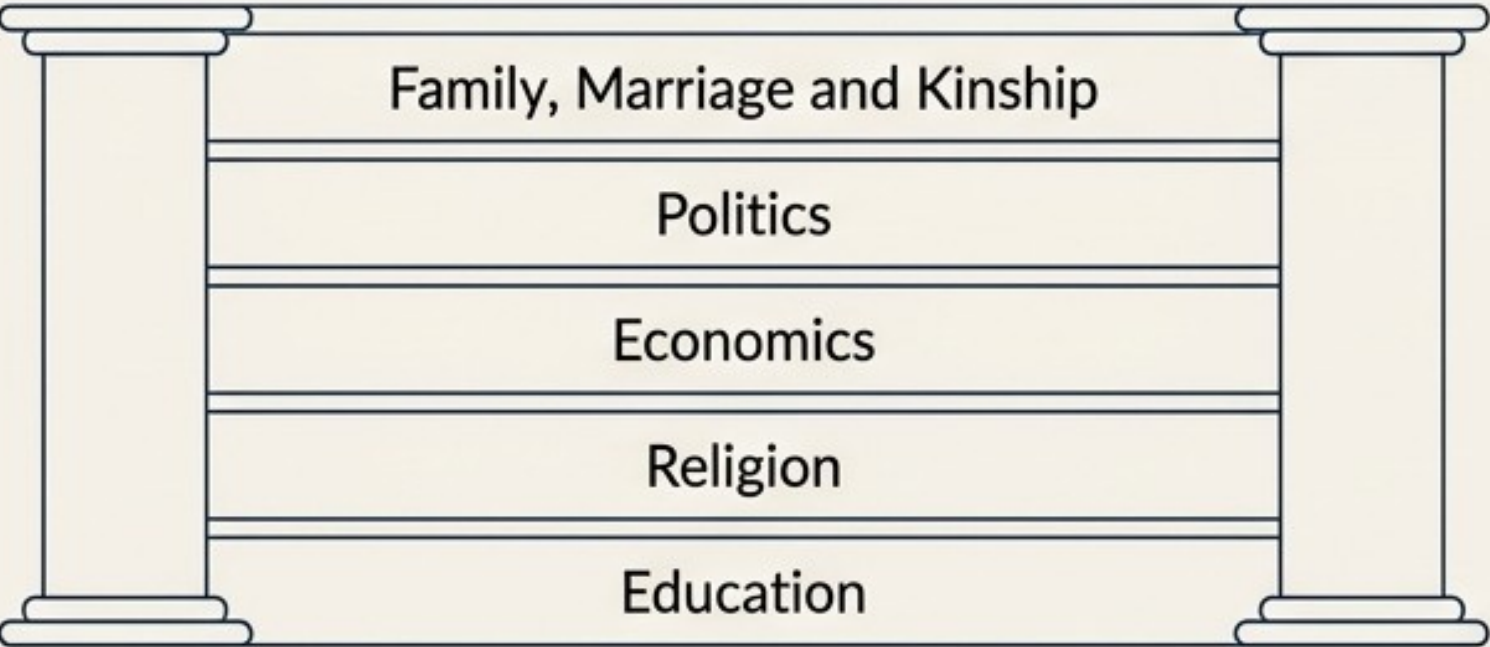
Social Institutions

A **social institution** is an established and structured pattern of behaviour or relationships that operates according to rules recognised by law or custom.

Institutions provide within which **people interact and behave**. They can constrain and control, but they can also provide opportunities. Social institutions may be:

- Macro institutions** → e.g. State
- Micro institutions** → e.g. Family

Major Social Institutions



Perspectives on Social Institutions

Functionalist Perspective

Social institutions are seen as a **set of norms, beliefs, values and role relationships** that arise in response to the needs of society. Institutions perform functions and help maintain social order. They exist to satisfy important social needs.

Conflict Perspective

Society is marked by unequal distribution of **power and resources**. Institutions may operate in the interests of dominant sections based on class, caste, tribe or gender. Thus, institutions may reproduce existing inequalities and power relations.

Formal and Informal Social Institutions

Informal	Formal
Family	Law
Religion	Formal Education

Remember: Institutions can both constrain individuals and provide opportunities.

2. FAMILY

Family is one of the most universal social institutions, but its form varies across societies. Sociology and social anthropology show that families are diverse and change across cultures and time. Family is closely linked with the economic, political, cultural and educational spheres of society. The family is therefore not completely separate from the wider society.

Functionalist View of Family

Family performs important tasks that contribute to society's basic needs. It helps in maintaining social order.

Traditional functionalist arguments associated women with household/family responsibilities and men with earning the livelihood.

Variation in Family Forms

Family can be classified on different bases:

On the basis of Size

Nuclear Family: Parents and their children.

Joint Family: More than one generation and/or related family units living together.

Extended Family: Family extends beyond the nuclear unit to include other relatives.

On the basis of Residence

Patrilocal: Newly married couple lives with or near the husband's parents/family.

Matrilocal: Newly married couple lives with or near the wife's parents/family.

On the basis of Descent

Patrilineal: Descent is traced through the male line.

Matrilineal: Descent is traced through the female line.

On the basis of Power and Authority

Patriarchal Family: Men exercise greater authority and dominance.

Matriarchal: Women play a major role in decision-making and authority.

Important: NCERT distinguishes matrilineal societies from the stronger claim of matriarchal societies.

Family and Social Change

Family structures and norms are influenced by wider economic, political and cultural changes. Migration, economic insecurity and changes in welfare arrangements can affect family and marriage patterns. Change does not necessarily mean complete disappearance of older forms. Change and continuity can coexist.

How Gendered is the Family?

Family relations may reflect gender inequalities. Social expectations about sons and daughters can influence:



investment in children



care responsibilities



inheritance and support



decision-making

The family can therefore provide support and security while also reproducing gender-based inequalities.

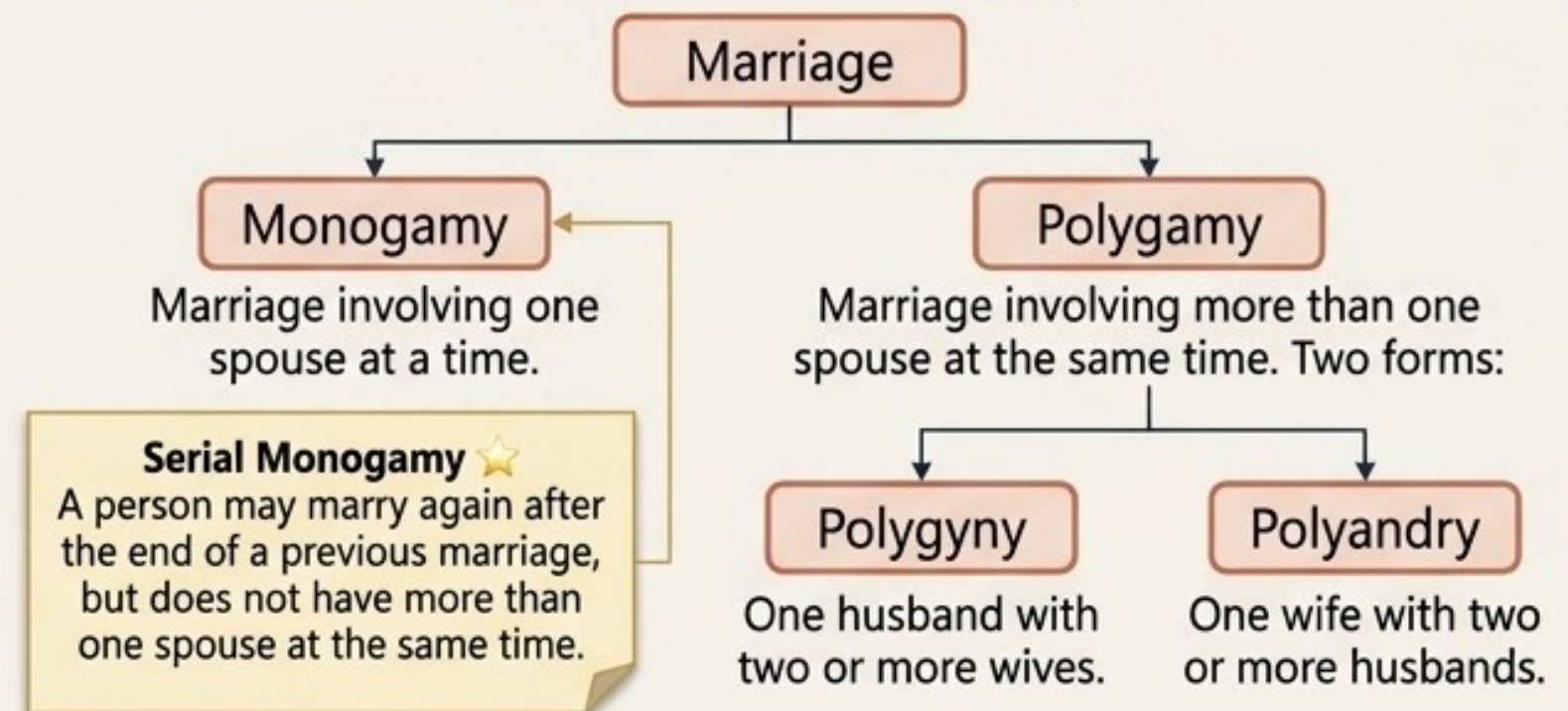
Exam point: Family should not simply be treated as a “natural” or completely unchanging institution. Its forms and relationships are socially organised and historically variable.

3. MARRIAGE

Marriage

Marriage is a socially acknowledged and approved union between adult individuals. Marriage connects not only two individuals but also their wider families and kin networks.

Forms of Marriage



Rules of Marriage

- **Endogamy:** Marriage within a culturally defined social group. Example: caste/community.
- **Exogamy:** Marriage outside one's own specified group. Example: certain forms of village/clan exogamy.

4. KINSHIP

Kinship

Kinship refers to relationships established through marriage or descent.

Family of Orientation: The family into which a person is born.

Family of Procreation: The family established through marriage and childbearing.

Types of Kin

Consanguineous Kin
Kin related through descent/blood relations.

Affines
Kin related through marriage.

Remember: Consanguineous → descent/blood Affines → marriage

5. WORK AND ECONOMIC LIFE

What is Work?

Work refers to activities involving physical or mental effort directed towards producing goods or services. In modern society, work is commonly understood as paid employment, but not all work is paid. Household work and work in the informal economy may not appear in official employment statistics.

Modern Forms of Work and Division of Labour

Industrialisation transformed the organisation of work. In pre-modern societies, most people were involved in agriculture and livestock-related activities. Modern industrial societies involve greater specialisation and division of labour. Work increasingly became separated from the home. Service industries expanded alongside industrialisation.

Transformation of Work

Modern work became increasingly organised around: clock-time, fixed working hours, specialised occupations, industrial and organisational discipline. The factory system transformed the relationship between worker, workplace and time.

Economic Life as a Social Institution: Economic institutions organise the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Economic processes are connected with other social institutions such as family, politics and education.

6. POLITICS

Power and Authority

Power: The ability to influence or control the behaviour and decisions of others.

Authority: Power that is regarded as legitimate or rightful.

Stateless Societies

Some societies historically maintained social order without a modern governmental apparatus. Order could be maintained through kinship, marriage, residence, alliances, customs and rituals.

Concept of State

A **state** exists where there is:

- ✓ a political apparatus of government
- ✓ a defined territory
- ✓ a legal system
- ✓ authority to implement policies
- ✓ capacity to use legitimate force

Important Concepts

Sovereignty: The undisputed political rule of a state over a given territorial area.

Citizenship: Membership in a political community that provides individuals with rights and responsibilities.

Types of Rights

Civil Rights

Rights related to individual freedom and equality before law.
Examples: freedom of expression, freedom of religion.

Political Rights

Rights enabling participation in political processes.
Example: right to vote.

Social Rights

Rights related to social welfare and well-being.
Examples: access to education, healthcare and minimum standards of livelihood.

Nationalism: A strong sense of identification and belonging with the nation. Modern nationalism developed alongside the modern state.

7. RELIGION

Religion as a Social Institution

Religion exists in all known societies, although beliefs and practices vary across cultures. Religion is not only a matter of private belief; it also has a public and social character. Religion is closely connected with politics, power, economy, gender and other institutions.

How does Sociology Study Religion? ★

Empirical Method

Studies how religion actually functions in society. Avoids a judgemental approach.



Comparative Method

Compares religious beliefs and practices across different societies.



Sociological Investigation

Studies religious beliefs and practices in relation to other aspects of society and culture.

Characteristics of Religion

Most religions involve:

- Symbols that evoke reverence or awe
- Rituals and ceremonies
- A community of believers

Sacred and Profane

Sacred → things regarded with reverence, awe and special significance.
Profane → ordinary, everyday aspects of life.

Emile Durkheim ★

Distinguished between the sacred and the profane. Religion creates a sense of collective belonging and solidarity. Sociologists are interested in how religious beliefs, rituals and symbols connect individuals to the wider community.

Max Weber ★

Studied the relationship between religion and economic behaviour. His study of Calvinism showed how religious ideas could influence the development of modern capitalism. The Protestant ethic encouraged disciplined work, frugality and investment.

Religion and Social Change

Religion can be connected with power and politics. Religious movements can also contribute to social change, including movements against caste and gender discrimination. **Secularisation** refers to the process through which religion is expected to become less influential over different spheres of social life as societies modernise. However, contemporary society shows that religion can continue to have an important role.

🏠 **Key conclusion:** Religion cannot be understood in isolation; social forces influence religion, and religious norms can also influence society

8. EDUCATION

Education as a Social Institution

Education is a lifelong process involving formal and informal learning. Sociology focuses particularly on school education in this chapter. Education involves the transmission and communication of group heritage.

Simple Society vs Complex Society

Simple Society	Complex/Modern Society
Learning mainly through everyday participation	Formal and specialised education
Family/community transmit knowledge	Schools transmit knowledge
Particularistic values	Universalistic values
Less specialised division of labour	Increasing division of labour
Informal learning	Formal schooling

Why Formal Education Became Important

Complex societies have: increasing division of labour, separation of work and home, specialised skills, state systems, nations, complex knowledge and symbols. Therefore, informal transmission of knowledge alone is insufficient, creating a need for formal education.

Emile Durkheim ★

Education provides society with a common base of ideas, sentiments and practices. It helps children internalise the core values of society. It also prepares individuals for specialised occupations. Education therefore contributes to the maintenance and renewal of social structure.

Education and Social Stratification

From a functionalist perspective, education helps in selection and allocation of individuals into future social roles.

From a conflict perspective, education can also act as a stratifying agent. Inequality in educational opportunities may reflect existing socio-economic inequalities. Different social groups may have access to different kinds of schools and therefore different opportunities.

 **Key conclusion:** Education can both transmit common social values and reproduce existing social inequalities.

Question–Answers A. MCQs

1. Which of the following is an example of an **informal social institution**?
 - a) Law
 - b) Family
 - c) Parliament
 - d) Formal education
2. Marriage involving more than one spouse at the same time is called:
 - a) Monogamy
 - b) Serial monogamy
 - c) Polygamy
 - d) Endogamy
3. One husband with two or more wives is known as:
 - a) Polyandry
 - b) Polygyny
 - c) Monogamy
 - d) Exogamy
4. The specialisation of work tasks in which different occupations are combined within a production system is called:
 - a) Social mobility
 - b) Division of labour
 - d) Social stratification
5. According to Durkheim, religion distinguishes between:
 - a) Power and authority
 - b) State and society
 - c) Sacred and profane
 - d) Family and kinship
6. Which of the following is a characteristic of modern economic systems?
 - a) Absence of occupational specialisation
 - b) Highly complex division of labour
 - c) Complete dependence on agriculture
 - d) Work being restricted to the household

Answers | 1. b | 2. c | 3. b | 4. b | 5. c | 6. b

B. Short Answer Questions

1. What is meant by Division of Labour?

Answer: Division of labour refers to the specialisation of work tasks, through which different occupations are combined within a production system. In modern societies, division of labour becomes highly complex, with people specialising in different occupations.

2. What is meant by Religion?

Answer: Religion is a social institution involving beliefs, symbols, rituals and a community of believers. Sociologists study religion empirically and comparatively and examine its relationship with other institutions of society.

3. What is Monogamy?

Answer: Monogamy is a form of marriage in which an individual has one spouse at a time.

4. What is Polygamy? Mention its two forms.

Answer: Polygamy is a form of marriage in which an individual has more than one spouse at the same time.

Its two forms are:

Polygyny — one husband with two or more wives.

Polyandry — one wife with two or more husbands.

5. Mention the characteristics of social institutions.

Answer: The main characteristics are:

- They operate according to established rules and norms.
- They provide a framework for social behaviour and interaction.
- They constrain and control individual behaviour.
- They can also provide opportunities to individuals.
- They are relatively stable and continuous patterns of social life.

6. What are some problems found in the modern family?

Answer: Some important problems are:

- Gender inequality within family roles and responsibilities.
- Unequal distribution of household and care work.
- Changes caused by migration and economic pressures.
- Tension between work and family responsibilities.
- Changing family patterns and relationships due to wider social and economic changes.

C. Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the four major functions of religion.

Answer: Religion performs several important functions in society:

Social Integration — Religious beliefs and rituals create a sense of belonging and solidarity among believers.

Social Control — Religious norms and values influence behaviour by defining what is considered right and wrong.

Meaning and Emotional Support — Religion can provide individuals with explanations, values and support during difficult situations.

Social Change — Religious movements can sometimes challenge existing inequalities and contribute to social change, such as movements against caste or gender discrimination.

Conclusion: Religion is not merely a private matter of belief; it has an important social and public character and interacts with other institutions.

2. Discuss the problems and changes associated with the modern family.

Answer: The family is an important social institution, but it is not universal in one fixed form. Its structure and functioning vary across societies and change with economic, political and cultural developments.

Important changes and problems include:

- Gender inequality in household responsibilities and decision-making.
- Unequal burden of care work and domestic work.
- Migration and economic changes affecting family relationships.
- Changing patterns of marriage and family structure.
- Tension between work and family life.

At the same time, family continues to perform important functions such as care, support and socialisation. Thus, modern family life shows both change and continuity.

3. Differentiate between Agrarian Economy and Industrial Economy.

Agrarian Economy	Industrial Economy
Mainly based on agriculture	Mainly based on industry and specialised occupations
Work is largely connected with land and agriculture	Work is organised through specialised occupations
Production is often linked closely with the household	Work becomes increasingly separated from the household
Division of labour is comparatively less complex	Highly complex division of labour
Traditional craft and agricultural occupations are important	Industrial and service-sector occupations expand
Conclusion: Industrialisation brought major changes in the organisation and location of work and produced a much more complex division of labour.	

4. How can education bring change in society?

Answer:

Education can contribute to social change in several ways:

- ✓ It transmits knowledge, values and social practices to the next generation.
- ✓ It develops skills required by a complex and specialised society.
- ✓ It can provide individuals with opportunities for social mobility.
- ✓ It can challenge traditional beliefs and encourage new ideas and attitudes.
- ✓ It can promote greater awareness of social equality and rights.

By providing access to knowledge and opportunities, education can contribute to broader social transformation. However, education can also reproduce existing inequalities when access to quality education is unequal. Thus, education can be both an instrument of social continuity and an important force for social change.

5. Explain the difference between Functionalist and Conflict perspectives on social institutions.

Answer:

Functionalist Perspective

Social institutions arise in response to the needs of society.
They perform important functions.
They help maintain social order and stability.
Family, religion, education and other institutions fulfil different social needs.

Conflict Perspective

Society contains unequal distribution of power and resources.
Institutions may operate in the interests of dominant sections.
They can reproduce inequalities based on class, caste, tribe or gender.
Institutions may therefore benefit some groups more than others.

In short: **Functionalism** → needs, functions and social order | **Conflict perspective** → power, inequality and domination

6. How does sociology study religion?

Answer:

Sociology studies religion through three important approaches:

1. **Empirical method** — studying how religion actually functions in society without taking a judgemental approach.
2. **Comparative method** — comparing religious beliefs and practices across different societies.
3. **Sociological perspective** — studying religion in relation to other aspects of society such as family, economy, politics and culture.

Thus, sociology does not ask whether a religious belief is true or false. It examines how religion functions within society and how society influences religion.