

Glossary

Arithmetic progression: See 'progression - arithmetic'

Assimilation: A process of cultural unification and homogenisation by which newly entering or subordinate groups lose their distinctive culture and adopt the culture of the dominant majority. Assimilation may be forced or voluntary, and usually remains incomplete or blocked where the subordinate or entering group is not accorded full membership on equal terms. For example, if an immigrant community is discriminated against by the dominant majority, and is not allowed to intermarry.

Authoritarianism: A system of government that does not derive its legitimacy from the people. Not a democratic or republican form of government.

Birth Control: The use of techniques of contraception to prevent conception and birth.

BPO (Business Process Outsourcing): A practice whereby a particular part of the production process or component of a service industry is contracted out to be performed by a third party. For example, a telephone company that provides phone lines and services, may outsource its customer service division, i.e., get another smaller company to handle all calls and complaints by customers.

Capital: An accumulated fund of investible resources. Usually used for 'active' funds, i.e., funds that are not just being hoarded or saved, but are being held for investment. Capital seeks to grow, to add to itself – this is the process of accumulation.

Capitalism: A mode of production based on generalised commodity production, or a social system where (a) private property and the market have penetrated all sectors, converting everything including labour power into a saleable commodity; (b) two main classes exist – a mass of wage labourers who own nothing but their labour power (their capacity to perform labour), and a class of capitalists who, in order to survive as capitalists, must invest their capital and earn ever increasing profits in a competitive market economy.

Checks - positive: A term used by T.R. Malthus to refer to constraints on the rate of population growth that are imposed by nature regardless of the wishes of human beings. Examples of such checks include – famines, epidemics and other natural disasters.

Checks - preventive: A term used by T.R. Malthus to refer to constraints on the rate of population growth that are voluntarily imposed on themselves by human beings. Examples of such checks include – postponing marriage; and practicing celibacy or birth control.

Civil Society: The sphere of society that lies beyond the family but is not part of either state or market. The arena of voluntary associations and organisations formed for cultural, social, religious or other non-commercial and non-state collective pursuits.

Class: An economic grouping based on common or similar position in the social relations of production, levels of income and wealth, life style and political preferences.

Colonialism: The ideology by which a country seeks to conquer and colonise (forcibly settle, rule over) another. The colony becomes a subordinate part of the coloniser's country, and is exploited in various ways for the colonising country's gain. Related to imperialism, but involves a more sustained interest in settling down to live in and govern the colony (i.e., exercising detailed and local control) rather than (as with imperialism) plundering and departing, or ruling from a distance.

Commodification (or commoditisation): The transformation of a non-commodity (i.e., something that is not bought and sold for money in a market) into a commodity.

Commodity: A good or service that may be bought or sold in the market.

Commodity fetishism: A condition under capitalism under which social relations become expressed as relations between things.

Communalism: Chauvinism based on religious identity. The belief that religion supersedes all other aspects of a person's or group's identity. Usually accompanied by an aggressive and hostile attitude towards persons and groups of other religious (or non-religious) identities.

Community: A general term for any distinctive group whose members are connected to each other by consciously recognised commonalities and bonds of kinship, language, culture and so on. Belief in these commonalities is more important than actual proof of their existence.

Consumption: Final use of goods and services by people who have purchased them (consumers).

Democracy: A form of government which derives its legitimacy from the people, and relies on explicit popular endorsement through elections or other method of ascertaining the people's opinion.

Discourse: The framework of thinking in a particular area of social life. For instance, the discourse of criminality means how people in a given society think about criminality.

Discrimination: Practices, acts or activities resulting in the unjustified exclusion of the members of a particular group from access to goods, services, jobs, resources, etc., that are normally accessible to others. Discrimination has to be distinguished from prejudice, although the two are usually quite closely associated.

Diversity (Cultural Diversity): The presence within the larger national, regional or other context of many different kinds of cultural communities such as those defined by language, religion, region, ethnicity and so on. A multiplicity or plurality of identities.

Dominant Caste: A middle or upper-middle ranking caste with a large population and newly acquired land ownership rights. This combination makes these castes politically, economically and therefore socially dominant in the countryside in many regions of India. Dominant castes replace the older castes which exercised dominance; unlike these earlier castes, these are not 'twice born' castes (i.e., not from the brahmin, kshatriya or vaishya varnas).

Economic anthropology: A subfield of socio-cultural anthropology that studies the entire range of economies and cultures found in the prehistoric, historic and ethnographic records, especially non-market economic systems.

Embedded: (As in 'socially embedded') Existing within a larger context of society or culture which 'frame' or contextualise the process or phenomenon in question. To say that the economic institutions are embedded in society is to say that they exist within society and are able to function because of the background rules and arrangements made possible by society.

Endogamy: Requires an individual to marry within a culturally defined group of which he or she is already a member, as for example, caste.

Enumeration: Literally, 'numbering'; refers to processes of counting and measurement, specially those relating to people, such as a census or survey.

Epidemic and Pandemic: Derived from the Greek (epi = upon; demos = the people). Refers to a sudden increase in the rate at which a disease affects the people of a given geographic area at a specific time. The key factor here is that the rate of incidence (the number of fresh cases reported per unit of time, such as a day, week, or month) has to be substantially higher than the 'normal' rate. This can be a partly subjective judgement. If a disease has a high but constant rate of incidence in a specific geographical area (i.e., there is no sudden increase) it is called an *endemic* disease. An epidemic that is not restricted to a given geographical area but is more widespread (i.e., it is at a national, international or even global level) is called a *pandemic*.

Ethnic cleansing: The creation of ethnically homogenous territories through the mass expulsion of other ethnic populations.

Ethnicity: An ethnic group is one whose members share a distinct awareness of a common cultural identity, separating them from other groups around them.

Exogamy: Requires the individual to marry outside of his/her own group.

Family: Is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for children.

Fertility: In the context of human population, this refers to the ability of human beings to reproduce. Since reproduction is primarily a female-centred process, fertility is calculated with reference to the female population, that is, in the child-bearing age group.

Gender: In social theory, the term reserved for the socially and culturally produced differences between men and women. (As different from 'sex' which refers to the physical-biological differences between men and women) Nature creates sexes, society creates genders.

Geometric progression: See 'progression – geometric'

Globalisation: A complex series of economic, social, technological, cultural and political changes that have increased the interdependence, integration, and interaction among people and economic actors (companies) in disparate locations.

Integration: A process of cultural unification whereby cultural distinctions are relegated to the private domain and a common public culture is adopted for all groups. This usually involves the adoption of the dominant culture as the official culture. Expressions of cultural difference or distinctiveness are not encouraged or sometimes even prohibited in the public domain.

Jajmani system: Non-market exchange of produce, goods, and services within the (north) Indian village, without the use of money, based on the caste system and customary practices.

Jati: The word for caste; a region-specific hierarchical ordering of castes that marry within their boundaries, pursue hereditary occupations and are fixed by birth. This is the traditional system, but it has undergone many changes over time.

Kinship: Ties are connections between individuals, established either through marriage or through the lines of descent that connect blood relatives (mothers, fathers, siblings, offspring, etc.)

Labour power: Capacity for labour; the mental and physical capabilities of human beings that are used in the process of production. (As different from labour, which is work performed)

Laissez-faire: (French; literally, 'let be' or 'leave alone') – an economic philosophy that advocates free market system and minimal government intervention in economic matters.

Liberalisation: The process whereby state controls over economic activity are relaxed and left to the market forces to decide. In general, a process of making laws more liberal or permissive.

Life chances: The potential opportunities or possible achievements available to a person during their life.

Lifestyle: A way of life; more concretely, the specific kinds and levels of consumption that define the everyday life of particular social groups.

Marketisation: The use of market based solutions to solve social, political, or economic problems.

Marriage: A socially acknowledged and approved sexual union between two adult individuals. When two people marry, they become *kin* to one another.

Minority groups: A group of people in a minority in a given society who, because of their distinct physical or cultural characteristics, find themselves in situations of inequality within that society. Such groups include ethnic minorities.

Mode of production: In Marx's historical materialism, a specific combination of forces of production and relations of production that create a historically distinct social formation.

Reciprocity: Informal, culturally regulated exchange (trade) of goods and services in a non-market economy.

Role Conflict: Conflict between the different social roles that the same individual is expected to play. For example, a working father may experience a role conflict between his role as a worker and his role as a father or husband.

Monogamy: Restricts the individual to one spouse at a time. Under this system, at any given time a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband.

Natal family: The family into which one is born, family of birth. (As different from the family into which one is married.)

Nation: A community that believes itself to be a community, based on several shared characteristics such as: common language, geographical location, history, religion, race, ethnicity, political aspirations, etc. However, nations may exist without one or more of such characteristics. A nation is comprised of its people, who are the ultimate guarantors of its existence, meaning and powers.

Nation - state: A particular type of state, characteristic of the modern world, in which a government has sovereign power within a defined territorial area, and the mass of the population are citizens who know themselves to be part of a single nation. Nation-states are closely associated with the rise of nationalism, although nationalist loyalties do not always conform to the boundaries of specific states that exist today. Nation-states developed as part of an emerging nation-state system, originating in Europe, but in current times spanning the whole globe.

Nationalism: Commitment, usually passionate commitment, to one's nation and everything related to it. Putting the nation first, being biased in its favour, etc. The ideology that commonalities of language, religion, history, race, ethnicity, etc., make the community distinctive and unique.

Prejudice: The holding of preconceived ideas about an individual or group, ideas that are resistant to change even in the face of new information. Prejudice may be either positive or negative, but the common usage is for negative or derogatory preconceptions.

Preventive - checks: See 'checks - preventive'

Productivity of agriculture: The amount of agricultural output (i.e., quantity of foodgrains or other crops) produced per unit area (e.g., acre, hectare, bigha, etc.). Increases in productivity refer to increases in agricultural output obtained solely through changes in the methods of farming and the quality of inputs, but without any expansion of the cultivated area. Examples of such changes include use of tractors, fertilisers, improved seeds, etc.

Progression - arithmetic: A series or sequence of numbers that may start with any number, but where each succeeding number is obtained by *adding* a fixed amount (number) to the preceding number. For example: 6, 10, 14, 18 and so on, where 6 is an arbitrary starting point, but $10 = 6 + 4$; $14 = 10 + 4$; $18 = 14 + 4$; and so on.

Progression - geometric: A series or sequence of numbers that may start with any number, but where each succeeding number is obtained by *multiplying* the preceding number by a constant multiple. For example: 4, 20, 100, 500 and so on, where 4 is an arbitrary starting point, but $20 = 4 \times 5$; $100 = 20 \times 5$; $500 = 100 \times 5$; and so on.

Reflexive: Literally, turning back on oneself. A reflexive (or self-reflexive) theory is one that seeks to explain not only the world but also its own operations within the world. Thus, a reflexive sociology will try to explain sociology itself as a social phenomenon, along with the other things it seeks to explain. Normally, theories seek to explain their object, not themselves.

Regionalism: The ideology of commitment to a particular regional identity which could be based on language, ethnicity and other characteristics in addition to geography.

Relations of production: Relations between people and groups with regard to production, especially those related to property and labour.

Replacement level: The level of fertility at which the existing generation produces just enough children to replace itself, so that the next generation is of the same size (total population) as the current one. This translates to the rule of thumb that a woman needs to have approximately 2.1 children to ensure that she and her spouse are 'replaced' (the extra 0.1 is required to compensate for the risk of unforeseen or accidental deaths). In other words, the replacement level of the total fertility rate is usually said to be 2.1.

Sanskritisation: A term invented by M.N. Srinivas to refer to the process by which middle or lower castes seek upward social mobility by imitating the ritual and social behaviour/practices of castes above themselves, usually brahmins or kshatriyas, also known as *Dwijia*.

Scavenging: The practice of manual cleaning of human excreta and other garbage and waste products. Still practiced where sewerage systems are not in place. This can also be a service that the untouchable castes are forced to perform.

Secularism: There are different versions: (a) The doctrine by which the state is kept strictly separate from religion, i.e., separation of 'church and state' as in western societies. (b) The doctrine by which the state does not discriminate between different religions and shows equal respect to all. (c) The popular sense of the anti-thesis of communalism, i.e., an attitude that is not biased in favour of or against any religion.

Social constructionism: The perspective that emphasises society over nature in explaining reality. It views social relations, values and interactions – rather than biology or nature – as being decisive in determining the meaning and content of reality. (For example, social constructionism believes that things like gender, old age, famine, etc., are more social than physical or natural.)

Social exclusion: The combined outcome of deprivation and discrimination, which prevent individuals or groups from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they live. Social exclusion is structural, i.e., the result of social processes and institutions rather than individual action.

Son preference: The social phenomenon where members of a community prefer to have sons rather than daughters, i.e., they value sons more than daughters. The existence of son preference can be established by observing social behaviour towards sons and daughters, or by asking people directly about their preferences and perceptions.

State: An abstract entity consisting of a set of political-legal institutions claiming control over a particular geographical territory and the people living in it. A set of interlinked institutions for maintaining a monopoly over the use of legitimate violence in a specified territorial area. Includes institutions like the legislature, judiciary, executive, the army, policy and administration. In another sense, the name given to a regional government within a larger national structure, as in state government of Tamil Nadu, etc.

Stereotype: A fixed and inflexible characterisation of a group of people.

Stratification: The hierarchical arrangement of different segments of society into 'strata' or sub-groups whose members share the same general position in the hierarchy. Stratification implies inequality; egalitarian societies are in theory lacking in strata, though they may have other forms of sub-grouping which are not arranged in hierarchical terms.

Stock Market: A market for 'stocks' or shares in companies. Joint stock companies raise capital by selling shares – a share is a specified portion of the company's assets. Share holders pay money to own shares in a company, and the company uses this money to conduct its business. The shareholders are paid dividends, or a share of the profits made by the company that is distributed according to the number of shares held by each shareholder. A stock market is the place or mechanism for the buying and selling of such shares.

Surplus value: Increase in the value of investment, or return to capital; under capitalism, surplus value is derived from surplus labour, or labour performed that is in excess of what is needed to equal the wage paid to the labourer.

Syncretism: A cultural phenomenon characterised by the inter-mingling or mixing of different religions or traditions. A hybrid of two distinct religious or cultural traditions.

Transgression: The violation of some rule or norm; going beyond socially or culturally determined rules and customs; breaking a social or cultural 'law' (which may not be a legal or formally written law).

Tribe: A social group consisting of collections of families and lineages (or clans) based on shared ties of kinship, ethnicity, common history or territorial-political organisation. Distinguished from a caste in that caste is a hierarchical system of mutually exclusive castes whereas a tribe is a single inclusive grouping (though it may have divisions based on clans or lineages).

Untouchability: A social practice within the caste system whereby members of the lowest castes are considered to be ritually impure to such an extent that they cause pollution by mere touch. Untouchable castes are at the bottom of the social scale and are excluded from most social institutions.

Varna: Literally, 'colour'; a nation-wide version of the caste system dividing society into four hierarchically ordered varnas or caste groups named – brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra.

Virtual market: A market that exists only electronically, and conducts transactions via computers and telecommunication media. The market does not exist in a physical sense, but only in terms of data that are stored electronically.

Will: Literally, volition or desire (the will to live, etc.). But as a noun, refers to a legal document specifying the wishes of person as to what should be done with her/his property after death. Usually involves inheritance – specification of the person to whom ownership of the dead person's assets are to be transferred.