

Department of Political Science
Paper: General Sociology II
6TH Sem (Major)

Topic: Process of Socialisation (Unit IV)

Socialisation is a learning process that begins shortly after birth. Early childhood is the period of the most intense and the most crucial socialisation. It is then that we acquire language and learn the fundamentals of our culture. It is also when much of our personality takes shape. However, we continue to be socialised throughout our lives. As we age, we enter new statuses and need to learn the appropriate roles for them. We also have experiences that teach us lessons and potentially lead us to alter our expectations, beliefs, and personality. For instance, the experience of being raped is likely to cause a woman to be distrustful of others.

Looking around the world, we see that different cultures use different techniques to socialise their children. There are two broad types of teaching methods—formal and informal. Formal education is what primarily happens in a classroom. It usually is structured, controlled, and directed primarily by adult teachers who are professional "knowers." In contrast, informal education can occur anywhere. It involves imitation of what others do and say as well as experimentation and repetitive practice of basic skills. This is what happens when children role-play adult interactions in their games.

Socialisation is not confined to childhood; it is a lifelong process. It is no longer regarded as the exclusive preserve of childhood, with the primary agents being the family and school. It is now recognised that socialisation continues throughout the life-course. It begins at birth and continues until death.

Some earlier scholars like S. Freud and Jean Piaget have discussed the development process only up to childhood or adolescence. Freud has discussed a series of five stages through which a child develops. These are oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital. Piaget's stages of cognitive development are sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years), pre-operational stage (2 to 7 years), concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years) and formal operational stage (11 to 15 years).

According to Piaget, the first three stages of development are universal but not all adult reach the formal operational stage. Following Freud, renowned sociologist, Talcott Parsons has also discussed only four stages beginning from the period of infancy (oral, anal and latency) to adolescence period.

The four important stages of socialisation from infancy to old age are as follows:

1. **Infancy and childhood (oral, anal and latency):** This is a distinct stage of life which starts from birth to the onset of adolescence, i.e., a period beginning from 0 to 13-14 years of age. In the first year of life child's contact with the outside world, including its mother, is channeled through the mouth and lips. The mother is the first parent who begins the process of socialisation. It is from her that the earliest social stimuli to which a child is subjected come. He/she responds to these stimuli by imitating them. At this stage, the child makes no distinction between persons and things—the mother's breast and the nipple of the bottle are equally and solely means of organic satisfaction. Crying, smiling and eye movement in response to others are forms of early social behaviour. The roles of the mother and the infant are merged at this stage of development.

Near about the second year, the toilet and other training is initiated in many societies. During this period, the child learns how to eat their food and talk in a polite way. The child develops a sense of control over itself and its environment, although it is still dependent on its parents. He starts recognising the family relations. During this stage, the child internalises two roles—his own and that of his/her mother—now clearly separate.

The years from 3 to 5 (phallic stage) are a period of rapid physical development and locomotion, awareness of genital sensations. At this stage, the child learns to 'behave himself in various contexts of his activity, particularly when interacting with adults. Besides, child also internalises all the four roles of the family, viz., husband-father, wife-mother, son-brother and daughter-sister.

Then comes the latency stage which continues nearly about 5 years to 12-13 years. By about 5, the child becomes a fairly autonomous being, no longer just a baby but almost independent in the elementary routines of life at home. During these years, the child shifts his interests more and more from the social world of the family to the group life of his/her peers.

2. **Adolescence:** With puberty comes the beginning of adolescence. The biological changes involved in puberty (the point at which a person becomes capable of adult sexual activity and reproduction) are universal. It is a most important stage of socialisation which begins near about 14-15 years till 20-21 years. It is a transition stage from childhood to maturity during which new patterns of behaviour are developed to meet the demands of both the larger and more diversified life of his peers and of the adult society. During this period, the individual is more attracted towards the opposite sex. He feel interested in recreation, films, TV, sports etc.
3. **Adulthood:** Adulthood is considered to be attained when a person can support himself or herself entirely independently of the parental family. It is a period of great stress and strain. During this period, one has to take many life-decisions—

about the choice of marriage partners, about the choice of occupation, etc. It is a very critical stage of life. At this stage, the individual marries and starts working for livelihood. As a result, the individual has to assume many new statuses and has to learn roles according to these statuses.

When an individual marries, he/she has to face with a new series of accommodations in his personal conduct. The individual has to learn new habits, ideals, customs and notions to adjust with the spouse and his/her family. In due course of events, children may be born and the individual is faced with the new situation and necessity of new adjustments, i.e., those of parent.

Since the two parents were themselves brought up by different sets of parents, they will have learned different child rearing techniques and therefore will have to socialise each other to reach agreement about child care practices. All of this learning is a part of adult socialisation.

Another type of socialisation is occupational training, which teaches the attitudes and values associated with an occupation as well as skills. A doctor has to acquire technical knowledge required to practice medicine. A new employee in an office has to learn how to conform to the expectations of the other workers and to the written and unwritten rules. One has to learn the styles of dress, decor and people's conduct in the company of fellow employees.

Adulthood can be bifurcated into two stages—young adulthood and mature adulthood. Young adulthood is increasingly becoming a specific and important stage in the process of human development. This is a period of excitement and sexual development.

In modern societies, young adults in their twenties engage themselves in preparing for their professional education, seeking career and finding some job or occupation. Besides this they explore the possibilities of sexual, political and religious affiliation in this crucial period of their life.

The mature adults (middle aged at about the age of 40) often experience a stress of self-evaluation during this period. At this stage, people realise that they have not achieved basic goals and ambitions and have little time left to do so. It is seen that women experience fear and confusion in their middle years. During this period, adults requires the deep internalisation of norms and attitudes that run counter to norms already learned and assimilated.

- 4. Old age:** This is the final period of transition which occurs mostly between 60-65 years. While old age has typically been regarded as beginning at 60 or 65, but this definition of old age is not universally accepted. At this time many people begin restricting their occupational duties and preparing for retirement. With advancing age, the mind, as well as the body, seems to lose its suppleness.

Habits, as well as arteries, harden and refuse the strain of new demands. Those persons, who succeeds in adjusting to these new demands (physical-mental and social both), lead a pleasant life even in the old age. In such individuals socialisation may continue actively to the end of life.

In traditional societies like India, older people were normally accorded a great deal of respect. The elders used to have a major, often the final, say in the family matters and the community as a whole. They had a great role in socialising the younger children in the family. Individuals used to feel themselves to be part of a family and a community. But, now, things are swiftly changing. Older people do not receive that much of respect which they used to be.

They are even despised and are left alone to live at their own. No longer living with their children and ejected from the economic arena, it is not easy for older people to make the final period of their life rewarding. At the same time, it is no longer widely accepted that older people should simply sit around passively, waiting to die. Instead, there has been an increase in programmes to socialize the elderly for meaningful pursuits and continued happy living.
