

TD 463

Lecture 6

Agents and The Web of Society

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Society and Households

Basic Unit: The Individual or the Household.

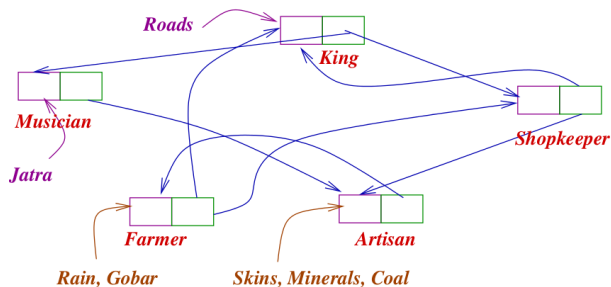
- Households: groups of individuals who are biologically interrelated and/or who depend on each other for emotional and biological needs. *The first collective unit.*
- Adequate for most situations but not always, e.g., *the role and conditions of women or girls*
- Proximate causes of these may emanate from outside the household, e.g., these may be cultural, economic or historic.

Needs

The development agenda then is to find social structures and practices which best suit the interests and **needs** of the households.

- environmental needs: food, water, shelter, and energy to cook food, for lighting and warmth and so on.
- cultural needs: relationship with other households and with nature. Needs for identity, dignity, community, intimacy and conviviality, coping with grief, narrative and meaning.
 - ▶ life would be boring
 - ▶ life would be impossible: **record, organize, transmit and reward knowledge.**
- **land etc. are auxiliary.** For example, food \Rightarrow need for land and for irrigation or for forests to hunt, and so on. *sadak* and *bijli*, or education or a ration shop.

The web of society



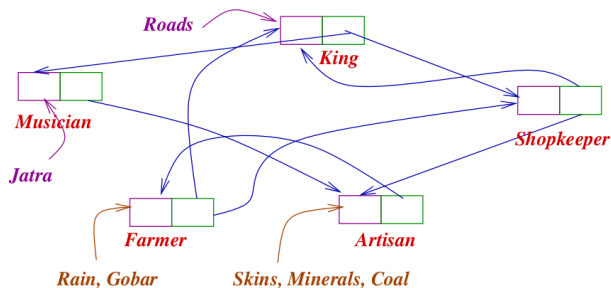
- Households interact with each other and assume specific roles.
- Every interaction has a *production* and a *consumption* of value, i.e., a transfer of a process of creation or *value-addition*.
- The interaction needs *assets*, which may be material or non-material, personal or common. **These are crucial**
- Typically in non-despotic societies or those with *comprehension*, every interaction is indeed enmeshed in a return loop.

Agents and Roles

- **Agents**: collection of households, thematically related. Need not be geographically or biologically related.
 - ▶ related by assets, knowledge, ownership, position, charter.
- **Examples**: Cultivators, Singers, *krishi sahayaks*, temple priests, shop-keepers, low-caste landless, ancillary industrialists.
- **Society** : Panoply of arrangements between agents to provide for basic needs of the households
 - ▶ **well-being** of different agents in a society may be very different.
- Thus, we may say that when agricultural prices fall **labourers** are better off, but **cultivators** are worse off and so are **artisans**.
- **Roles**: Their place in the web of society, their interaction with other agents.

Transactions

- **Transactions.** Their give-and-take. For example economic transactions involve commodities and money, temple priest does puja and accepts dakshina, gets grants from village and maintains temple.
- Transactions may be an exchange of many types of "goods": votes, appreciation, name, fame, money, cultural artefacts, commodities, security, water, food, service, transport.

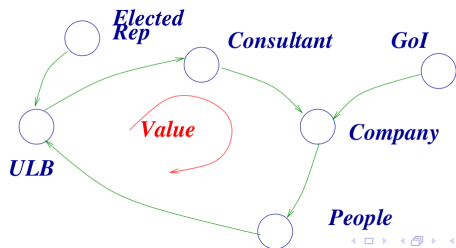


Mess Food

Agent	Gives	Gets	Agent	Based On
Students	Elect	Serves	Secretary	Quality
Students	Pay	Facility	Manager	Bill
Secretary	Supervises		Manager	Competence
Manager	Supervises		Worker	Output
Manager	Pays	Supplies	Supplier	Quality
Manager	Pays	Work	Workers	Hours
Workers	Serve		Students	Food

Social Practices

- Social Practice: **connected combination of agents and enterprises, processes and mechanisms.**
- Connected combination of agents: **social practice**
 - ▶ Simple: shoe-maker, Complex: Public transport system
- Enterprise: **Composite agent based on employees.**
- Good or bad outcomes are results of:
 - ▶ poor design of social structures and practices
 - ▶ poor functioning of these structures.



Agent Network Diagram

- Representation to analyse efficiency, sustainability and equity.

Society-Division of labour

- **Division of labour**: Different agents do a few activities in a social context, in return for wages or rewards.
- Possible because of (i) very specialized *tools* and or (ii) *mobility assets* such as roads and bridges and (iii) *institutions* such as rules of exchange, (iv) enforcement of contracts, (v) law and order (vi) **private property**
- Based on ease of repetition, cheaper, faster, better, dedicated infrastructure.
- Castes and *watan*. Guilds and the **charter**. The modern **open professional or trade education** based on *certification*.

Knowledge and Practice

Basis of classifying agents.

- **The Professional.** Body of knowledge. Charter and clients. Elements of design and implementation. Professional knowledge. Professional institutions, training and research. *Soundness and Rigour.*
- **The Artisan.** Precursor to the professional. Guildsman, if charter exists. Transmission of knowledge through house-holds or through guilds. *Factories* of medieval times.
- **The Enterprise.** A composite agent, i.e., activities and delivery of value. Division of labour as the basis.
- **The Employee.** Job description in a larger enterprise.
- **Tradesman.** Performance of pre-set activities. May or may not have his/her own tools. Specialized training in ITIs and trade schools. Certification. Adapts to changing scenarios.
- **The Informal Worker.** No set activities. No training. Based on general skills and access to privileges.

Structure of Society

Classification of social structures broadly, on (i) the types of transaction and (ii) *complex* collectives of agents.

Environment

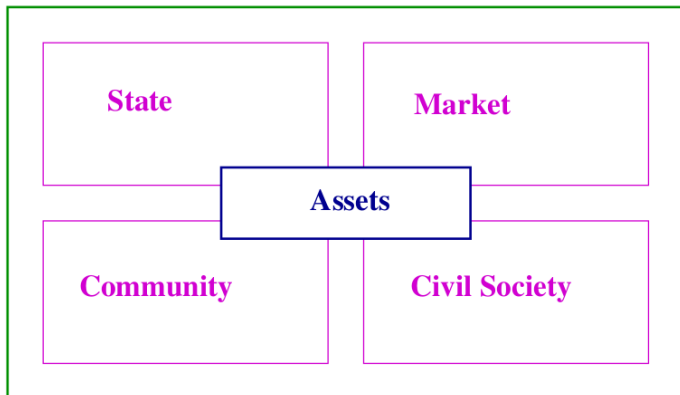


Figure : The basic structure of society

Exercise

Exercise. Identify a service or a product which is now provided by the market but which was earlier provided by civil society. Analyse the chronology and try and explain what may have happened?

Exercise. The word *exploitation*, e.g., of lower castes or economically weak members of society, is used frequently by social scientists. Analyse such a situation in terms of the value created by agents and the value received. Why has such a situation arisen?

Exercise. Suppose that you were hired to improve the hostel-mess service. Go through the development professional loop and make a brief analysis of the issues involved and the activities. Try this out for IIT admissions process.

Exercise: Draw the agent network diagram for an *anganwadi* and for a *taluka bus depot*.

Thanks

