

## **Community term (2)**

### **Introduction:**

The concept of community concerns to a particularly constituted set of social relationships, based on something which the participants have in common – usually a common sense of identity. It is to remember Talcott parsons, frequently used the term to indicate a wide ranging relationships of solidarity over rather undefined area of life and interests. There was a symbolism of community in the 19th century thoughts, which identified this form of social association of people with a good society and with all forms of relationships that are characterised by high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depthness, moral commitment, social cohesion and continuity in time. At the arrival of urban industrial society a fear of loss of community became central to the thought about society and culture.

### **Classical anthropological approaches:**

One of the renowned attempts of conceptualizing community belongs to that of Robert Redfield (1960), who identified four key qualities in community:

1. A smallness of social scale;
2. A homogeneity of activities and states of mind of members;
3. A self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and through time;  
and
4. A consciousness of distinctiveness.

Nevertheless, in 1955, Hillery could compile 94 social–scientific attempts at definition whose only substantive overlap was that all dealt with people (1955:117)! To overcome this problem, community is often further specified by a qualifying or amplifying phrase: the ‘local community’, the ‘West Indian community’, the ‘community of nations’ or ‘souls’. But this would seem only to beg further questions.

In anthropology, one might usefully isolate three broad variants of traditional approach. ‘Community’ is to be characterized in terms of: (i) common interests between people; or (ii) a common ecology and locality; or (iii) a common social system or structure.

For example, Frankenberg (1966) suggests that it is common interests in achievable things (economic, religious, or whatever) that give members of a community a common interest in one another. Living face–to–face, in a small group of people, with common interests in mind, eventuates in community members’ sharing many–stranded or multiplex relations with one another; also sharing a sentiment towards the locality and the group

itself. Hence, communities come to be marked by a fair degree of social coherence.

For Minar and Greer (1969), physical concentration (living and working) in one geographical territory is the key. The locale will throw up common problems and give rise to common perspectives, which lead to the development of organizations for joint action and activities, which in turn produces common attachments, feelings of inter-dependence, common commitment, loyalty and identity within a social group. Hence, communities come to exhibit homogeneity: members behaving similarly and working together, towards common aims, in one environment, whatever their familial or generational differences.

For Warner (1941), meanwhile, a community is essentially a socially functioning whole: a body of people bound to a common social structure which functions as a specific organism, and which is distinguishable from other such organisms. Consciousness of this distinction (the fact that they live with the same norms and within the same social organization) then gives community members a sense of belonging. So long as the parts of the functioning whole (families, agesets, status-groups, or whatever) work properly together, the structure of the community can be expected to continue over time.

Whether it be in terms of interests, ecology or social structure, then, anthropologists have traditionally emphasized an essential commonality as the logic underlying a community's origination and continuation. Communities have been regarded as empirical things-in-themselves (social organisms), as functioning wholes, and as things apart from other like things. This was in turn the logical basis of 'the community study': the tradition in anthropology of basing research on what could in some sense be treated as a bounded group of people, culturally homogeneous and resident in one locality, because this 'community' would provide a laboratory for the close observation of the interrelations, the continuing interfunctioning, between interests, sub-groups and institutions; and also serve as a microcosm of a bigger social picture which might prevail as societies grew in size and complexity. Anthropologists conventionally studied communities (villages, tribes, islands) because these were regarded as the key structural units of social life: what the elementary structures of kinship gave onto; what the complex structures of society were composed of.