

CHAPTER

8

Culture is knowledge, language, values, customs and material objects that are passed from person to person from one generation to next in a human group or society.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

According to Taylor, culture is "that complex-whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (plus material culture). Culture, according to Taylor, is a complete self-working system of human achievements. These achievements categorized into material and non-material objects are the elements of self-moving units of culture. By way of simplicity, we consider culture as an interrelated unit of its interdependent parts. This interdependence of composing elements makes a web of interrelationship within itself to make the system of culture work as a complex-whole.

Definitions

Herskovits defined culture as: "man-made part of environment".

According to Linton: "The culture is social heredity which is transmitted from, one generation to other with the accumulation of individual experiences."

Beals and Hoijer hold that a culture is "the totality of designs for living practiced by man at all places and times." Within all the time and space a culture is the mode of activities which differentiates the people of one society from another.

From Lowie's point of view a culture is "the whole of social tradition," which resembles in sense with Linton's attitude on the point.

Culture is "the continually changing patterns of learned behaviour and the products of

learned behaviour (including attitude, values, knowledge and material objects) which are shared by and transmitted among the members of the society."

Psychological point of view holds "learned portion of human behaviour" is culture.

Nadel supports that it is "the integrated totality of standardized behaviour patterns".

Kroeber defined culture as "the mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions: habits, techniques, ideas and values, and the behaviour they induct."
 Sensory actions

Kroeber's main idea is similar to that of Cuber expressed in his definition. Conclusively, "culture is the patterned behaviour resulting from social interaction to become a heritage for the succeeding generations."

In general, the culture is not a biological phenomenon but is learned by the members of society to follow a given way of life. It is the matter of adaptation in environment by people which paves their way of life in society.

✓ CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

The definitions cited above reveal some of the characteristics of culture. For a clear understanding of the concept of culture, it is necessary for us to know its main features,

✓ **i. Culture is Learnt:** Culture is not inherited biologically, but learnt socially by man. It is not an inborn tendency. There is no cultural instinct as such. Culture is often called 'learned ways of behaviour'. Unlearned behaviour, such as closing the eyes while sleeping, the eye blinking reflex and so on, are purely physiological and not cultural. Shaking hands or saying 'Salam' or 'thanks' and shaving.

✓ **ii. Culture is Social:** Culture does not exist in isolation. Neither is it an individual phenomenon. It is a product of society. It originates and develops through social interactions. It is shared by the members of society. No man can acquire culture without association with other human beings.

✓ **iii. Culture is Shared:** Culture in the sociological sense, is something shared. It is not something that an individual alone can possess. For example, customs, traditions, beliefs, ideas, values, morals, etc., are all shared by people of a group or society.

✓ **iv. Culture is Transmissive:** Culture is capable of being transmitted from one generation to the next. Parents pass on culture traits to their children and they in turn to their children, and so on. Culture is transmitted not through genes but by means of language. Language is the main vehicle of culture. Language in its-different forms like reading, writing and speaking makes it possible for the present generation to understand the achievements of earlier generations.

✓ **v. Culture is Continuous and Cumulative:** Culture exists as a continuous process. In its historical growth it tends to become cumulative. Culture is a 'growing whole' which includes in itself, the achievements of the past and the present and makes provision for the future achievements of mankind. "Culture may thus be conceived of as a kind of stream flowing down through the centuries from one generation to another".

✓ **vi. Culture is Consistent and Integrated:** Culture, in its development has revealed a tendency to be consistent. At the same time different parts of culture are interconnected. For

example, the value system of a society is closely connected with its other aspects such as morality, religion, customs, traditions, beliefs, and so on. Change in one part of culture will cause change in rest of the parts.

✓ vii. **Culture is Dynamic and Adaptive:** Though culture is relatively stable it is not altogether static. It is subject to slow but constant changes. Change and growth are latent in culture. Culture is *responsive* to the changing conditions of the physical world. It is *adaptive*. It also intervenes in the natural environment and helps man in his process of adjustment.

✓ viii. **Culture is Gratifying:** Culture provides proper opportunities and prescribes means for the satisfaction of our needs and desires. These needs may be biological or social in nature. Our need for food, shelter, and clothing on the one hand, and our desire for status, name, fame, money, mates, etc., are all, for example, fulfilled according to the cultural ways.

✓ ix. **Culture Varies from Society to Society:** Every society has a culture of its own. It differs from society to society. Culture of every society is unique to itself. Cultures are not uniform. Cultural elements such as customs, traditions, morals, ideals, values, ideologies, beliefs, practices, philosophies, institutions, etc., are not uniform everywhere. Ways of eating, speaking, greeting, dressing, entertaining, living, etc., of different societies differ significantly. Culture varies from time to time also. No culture ever remains constant or changeless.

x. **Culture is Superorganic and Ideational:** Culture is sometimes called 'the *superorganic*'. By 'superorganic' *Herbert Spencer* meant that culture is neither organic nor inorganic in nature but above these two. The term implies the social meaning of physical objects and physiological acts. The social meaning may be independent of physiological and physical properties and characteristics. For example, the social meaning of a national flag is not just 'a piece of coloured cloth'. The flag represents a nation. Similarly, priests and prisoners, professors and professionals, players, engineers and doctors, farmers and soldiers, and others are not just biological beings. They are viewed in their society differently. Their social status and role can be understood only through culture.

Further, every society considers its culture as an *ideal*. It is regarded as an end in itself. It is intrinsically valuable. The people are also aware of their culture as an ideal one. They are proud of their cultural heritage.

ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

Following are the elements of culture:

1. **Norms:** (See Chapter 9)
2. **Values:** (See Chapter 11)
3. **Beliefs** (See Chapter 11)

TYPES OF CULTURE

A culture has four aspects, material and non-material culture and ideal & real culture. Material culture is related to tangible objects made by man. Buildings, furniture, books are the products of material culture. Non-material culture is related to the abstract things like emotions, attitudes, ideas and beliefs which we feel but cannot verify by observation. Peace, war, co-

operation, marriage, culture, lecture are the examples of non-material culture. A book is material culture but its words are non-material. Man is a material but his speech is non-material. Radio is material but its sound is non-material. It means material culture has its non-material aspect also.

✓ **Real Culture** refers to the values and standards of behaviour that people actually follow.

It is that culture which can be observed in our social life. The culture on which we act upon in our social life is real. The part of culture which the people adopt in their social life is their real culture. The whole of the culture is never real because a part of it remains without practice. How far we set upon Islam is our real culture. We are all Muslims but we do not follow Islam fully in our social life. It means the part of Islam which we follow is our real culture.

✓ **Ideal Culture** refers to the values and standards of behaviour that people in a society profess to hold.

The culture which is presented as a pattern or precedent to the people is called ideal. It is the goal of the society. It can never be achieved fully because some part of it remains out of practice. This culture is explained in books, speeches and guidances. The part of ideal culture practiced in social life is called real culture. Islam is our ideal culture. We claim to be true Muslims and this claim is our ideal culture but how far we are Muslims in practice is our real culture. Both the real and ideal cultures are related together and different from each other.

(i) Material Culture

Material culture consists of man-made objects such as tools, implements, furniture, automobiles, buildings, dams, roads, bridges, and in fact, the physical substance which has been changed and used by man. It is concerned with the external, mechanical and utilitarian objects. It includes technical and material equipments like a printing press, a locomotive, a telephone, a television, a tractor, a machine gun, etc. It includes our banks, parliaments, insurance schemes, currency systems, etc. It is referred to as civilization.

✓ (ii) Non-Material Culture

Subculture and Counter culture → last page

The term 'culture' when used in the ordinary sense, means 'non-material culture'. It is something internal and intrinsically valuable, reflects the inward nature of man. Non-material culture consists of the words the people use or the language they speak, the beliefs they hold, values and virtues they cherish, habits they follow, rituals and practices that they do and the ceremonies they observe. It also includes our customs and tastes, attitudes and outlook, in brief, our ways of acting, feeling and thinking.

FUNCTIONS OF CULTURE

Culture has been fulfilling a number of functions among which the following may be noted.

i. **Culture is the Treasury of Knowledge.** Culture provides knowledge which is essential for the physical, social and intellectual existence of man. Culture preserves knowledge and helps its transmission from generation to generation through its element, that is, language. Language helps not only the transmission of knowledge but also its preservation, accumulation and diffusion. On the contrary, animals do not have this advantage. Because, culture does not exist at sub-human level.