

Culture, Its Concept and Various Characteristics

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CULTURE

The word culture is derived from the latin word 'cultural' means good manners and good taste. Culture is the sum total of human creations, expressions and experiences. It includes everything material and non-material created by man in the process of living. It is a kind of polished behaviour.

CULTURE HAS BEEN DEFINED IN NUMBER OR WAYS

1. Mahatma Gandhi- "Culture is the foundations of primary thing. It should shows itself in the smallest detail of your contact and personal behavior, how you sit, how you walk, how you drink etc."
2. Malinowski- "Culture is the handwork of man and the medium through which he achieves his ends."
3. E. A. Hoebel- "Culture is the sum total of integrated learned behavior patterns, which are characteristics of members of a society and which are, therefore, not the result of biological inheritance."
4. H. T. Mazumdar- "Culture is sum total of human achievements, material, capable of transmission, socio logically, i.e. by tradition and communication, vertically as well as horizontally."

CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Culture is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation of generation. This concept of culture points to its four characteristic:-

1. Symbolic Composition: The fundamental elements or building block of culture is the culture traits. Traits assume many forms

varying from material artifacts- tools, house structures, artworks- to behavioural regularities- family, interrelationship, economic exchanges and legal sanctions- to abstract concepts and beliefs. All of these diverse and complex manifestations share one feature in common; they are symbols and as such express meaning.

2. Systematic Patterning: Cultural elements as symbols assume their meaning in relationship to other symbols within a broader context of a meaning system. To interpret a symbol, therefore, anthropologists must investigate the interrelatedness of elements and presence of unifying principles that connect symbols to form larger patterns and cultural wholes.
3. Learned Transmission: Cultural traits and broader cultural patterns inclusive of language, technology, institutions, beliefs and values are transmitted across generations and maintain continuity through learning, technically termed as enculturation. Accordingly, learning abilities and intelligence are essential assets for all human groups and have replaced the role of biologically based genetic transmission of instincts in most other animal species. There is an important relation between biology and culture. Human biology has affected the development of culture, since symbolic and learning abilities depend upon the physical composition of the brain and other anatomical adaptations, such as vocal structures that can produce speech or manual abilities that can manufacture tools. This biological substratum supports a generalized capacity for culture among all humans and explain universal features, such as language learning abilities. However, biological factors do not determine specific cultural traits, such as the ability to speak; English, Hindi, All children are preprogrammed by genetics to learn language through a fixed series of stages,

but will acquire a specific language only through patient instruction.

Thus biology determines our general capacity for culture and is responsible for appears of some cultural universals, i.e. traits that appear in some form in every culture in the world. However, cultural variations among peoples are attributable to learned traditions and not to innate or genetic propensities.

4. Societal Grounding: Culture is observable only in the form of personal behavior but can be abstracted from individuals' actions and attributed to the social groups to which they belong. Accordingly, anthropologists underemphasize the importance of individual responsibility and creativity and focus on the common denominator of collective identity and symbols. This position counter some modern understanding of the importance of individual rights and actions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

1. Culture is Learned: Culture is not inherited biologically but it is learnt by man in a society. It is not an inborn tendency but acquired by man from the association of others; e.g. eating, dressing, walking, behaving etc. are all learnt by man.
2. Culture is Social: Culture is not an individual phenomenon, but it is the product of society. It develops in the society through social interaction.
3. Culture is shared: Culture is something shared. It is nothing that an individual can posses but shared by common people or a territory. For example, customs, values, traditions, beliefs are all shared by man in a social situation. These beliefs and practices are shared by all equally.
4. Culture is cumulative: All the elements of culture grows as a result of accumulation. Each generation preserve the old culture and we add something new in it. So the culture we have today is the total of all the additions made by our predecessors.
5. Culture is Preservative and Transmitive: Culture should preserve and transmit to the next generation. The transmission is necessary for the progress of mankind. If culture was not transmitted, all the human knowledge and experience would have been lost.
6. Culture is Continuous: It is a continuous process. It is like a stream which is flowing from one generation to another through

centuries. "Culture is the memory of human race."

7. Culture is integrated: All the cultural aspects are inter-connected with each others. The development of culture is the integration of its various parts. For example, value system is interlinked with morality, customs, beliefs and religion.
8. Culture is Diffusion: Diffusion means acceptance of cultural pattern. Culture is transmitted not only from generation to generation, but also from one generation, but also from one generation to another. Diffusion is determined by social contracts.
9. Social not Individual Heritage: It is inclusive of the expectations of the members of a group. It is a social product which is shared by most members of the group.
10. Culture fulfils some needs: Culture fulfils those ethical and social needs of the groups which are ends in themselves.
11. Culture is changing: Culture remains changing but not static. Cultural process undergoes changes. But with different speeds from society to society and generation to generation.
12. Varies from Society to Society: Every society has its own culture and ways of behaving. It is not uniform everywhere but occurs differently in various societies. Every culture is unique in itself in a specific society.
13. Culture is Responsive: Culture is responsive to the changing conditions of a physical world. It intervenes in a natural environment and helps man from all dangers and natural calamities e.g. our houses are responsible to give us shelter and safety from storm and heavy rains.
14. Culture is Gratifying: Culture is gratifying and provide all opportunities for needs and desires satisfaction. These needs may be biological or social, but it is responsible to satisfy it. Our needs are food, shelter, clothing, and desires are- status, fame, money, sex etc. are all the examples which are fulfilled accordingly to the cultural ways. Infact, it is defined as the process through which human being satisfy their needs and desires.
15. Language is the Chief Vehicle of Culture: Man lives not only in the present but also in the past and future. He is enabled to do so

because he possesses language which transmits to him what was learnt in the past and enables him to transmit the accumulated wisdom.

16. Culture is Multifaced: A person can belong to more than one culture. That is to say, culture is multifaced. We are never defined by just one character. People belong to many different cultural groups at any given time.
17. Classification of culture: Culture is classified in different ways by different authors. Some of the types are described below:-
 - i. Material Vs Non-material Culture: The material culture refers to such physical aspects like building, vehicles, tools, implements, dresses etc. Non-material culture relates to faiths, beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices, taboos, attitudes, bodies of knowledge etc.
 - ii. The Universals, the Alternatives and the Specialties: According to Linton, the universals are those aspects of culture, which are generally accepted and respected by a society such as the practices of the state, the economic system and the like.
 - iii. The alternatives are those aspects of culture in which the individuals have choices or certain permissive rights, e.g. every culture demands a legal marriage. It is left to the individuals to have it as per the custom or registered marriage or a social marriage.
 - iv. The specialists are those aspects of culture that involve the process of differentiation i.e. preparation for varied professions as medical practitioners, engineers, teachers, laweys and so on.
 - v. The Innate and the derived: The innate are such elements of culture that are related to the fundamental wants of human beings, such as those connected with food, sex, protection etc.

The derived are the cultural imperatives, according to Bronislaw Malinowski, which are illustrated by plays and sports, artistic and aesthetic pursuits, racial and religious experiences.

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