

## The concept of Culture:

The term **society** and **culture** as concepts, bearing, different meanings, but, ultimately related symbiotically. Since the terms are concepts, not only three dimensional objects, occupying “physical space”, but occupying a “**mental space**”. So more than one definition is used and compact descriptions are taken as definitions. Some of these definitions are discussed below for better understandings.

The earliest definition of culture was given by **Sir Edward Burnett Tylor**, in his famous publication namely, “**Primitive Culture**” (1871). According to him “...Culture or civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

A number of terms in his definition are clearly psychological in character; the concepts, such as knowledge and belief involve cognitive process, Capabilities and habits have to be acquired- imply learning and since those who acquired them are specified as member of a particular society. The learning implied a process known as ‘**socialization**’ or ‘**enculturation**’. Simultaneously, he defined religion as a belief in spirits that is he treated it as a ‘cognitive phenomenon’.

Later **Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose** defined culture as “..the crystallized phase of mans’ life activities,” (“**Cultural Anthropology**”, 1928). It includes certain forms of actions closely associated with particular objects and institutions, habituated attitudes of mind are transferable through persons with the aid of mental images, conveyed through symbols. Culture also includes certain material objects and techniques which help man in experiencing supreme emotion of pleasure and for their existence in the world. The expression of culture may be divided into three levels-

- 1) Material level- where man interacts with his natural environment.
- 2) Social level- where man interacts with man and they result family, marriage, kinship etc.
- 3) Ideological level- Where man interacts with super nature- it results magic, religion, philosophy of life etc.

Each level of culture consists of distinct and isolable units called-**CULTURE TRAITS**. The assemblage of the traits of those three levels is termed as Culture. A trait is an isolable and distinguishable unit of culture, which is intimate assemblage of certain actions, sentiments, attitudes and objects, each of those traits are composed of a number of **ELEMENTS**. Again the total affair o particular cultural level forms the **TRAIT COMPLEX**.

Thus he explained the structure of culture, using those interrelated concepts and simplified it through the example of RICE in Bengal.

According to **Bronislaw Kaspar Malinowski** ("**A scientific Theory of Culture and other Essays**", 1944) Culture comprises inherited artifacts, goods, technical process, ideas, habits and values. He also included social structure and social organization in analysis of culture, because, he opined that these could not be understood except as part of culture. He actually treated culture as a functioning integrated whole, where, a brief part of it performs certain functions.

On the other hand to **Alfred L Kroeber (1944)**, Culture is **super organic** and super individual, and as such it could be explained only in terms of its own laws. He further opined that, the creation and continuity of culture is not based on any individual, so, culture is **super individual**. On the other hand, super organic means, culture is totally abstract to organism; it is fully intelligible to us.

Now, the concept of culture began to be more analyzed by different anthropologists. On the next step, **Clyde Kluckhohn, (1945)** postulated that, culture is a historically derived system of explicit and implicit design for living which tend to be shared by all or specially designated members of a group. Cultures are learnt, they are not like racial characteristics genetically transmitted. Here the term, 'explicit' means which can be observed, like cultural products or material cultures. Similarly, the term 'implicit' is covert in nature, like, belief, knowledge, values etc.

In this context, **Ralph Linton (1947)** suggested that Culture is the configuration of learned behavior and results of behavior, whose elements are shared and transmitted by members of the particular society.

During this phase of development of the culture, **L.A. White (1959)**, proposed culture is an extra somatic temporal continuum of things and events dependent upon **symbolyng**. He used the term '**extra somatic**' to indicate that it is not genetically inherited, so, it should be learned through socialization. And the word '**Symbolyng**' consists of trafficking some meanings which decorate an object with more value behind it.

**SYMBOL= OBJECT+VALUE** (Either **shared** or **subjective**)

Gradually the concept of culture became modified to the view of culture as a system of meaning through the definition of **Clifford Geertz (1973)**. To him, human being produces behavior which is symbolic and so they reside in the webs of significance, which he himself spun. Those symbolic aspects or system of meaning is known as

culture. He postulated that, culture should be studied through interpretative approach, emphasizing on understanding the happenings of actions firstly, and next on explanation of the causes behind those actions.

During the development of the concept of culture to the system of meaning, some major characteristics features of culture may be drawn from those above discussions, which are as follows-

**The salient Features of Culture:**

- 1) Culture is acquired or **learned**
- 2) Culture is **shared**
- 3) Culture is **symbolic**
- 4) Culture is **patterned**
- 5) Culture is **universal**
- 6) Culture is **dynamic**
- 7) Culture is **integrated**

**Note:** the features of culture mentioned above needs explanation and exemplification from text books and/or reference books on cultural anthropology

**Functions of Culture:**

A culture cannot survive, if it does not fulfill the basic problems of human society. The primary functions of a culture are as follows....

- 1) A culture must provide the system of production and distribution of goods and services considered necessary for human existence.
- 2) It must provide biological continuity through the reproduction of its members by the institutions like marriage.
- 3) It must provide the transmission of norms – values and practices of a culture through the process of enculturation to the new members, so that; they can become functionally the adults.
- 4) It must maintain an order to its members by the system of social control, so that, its member can successfully claim the equal access of power, wealth and prestige.