

Cultural Anthropology

Module 2

Lecture 1

Cultural Anthropology

- Cultural anthropology is the term used in the USA (and some other countries), while social anthropology traces its origins to **Britain** and, to some extent, **France**.
- Historically, there have been certain differences between these traditions – social anthropology has its foundation in sociological theory, while cultural anthropology is more broadly based.

What is Culture?

- E.B Tylor in 1871: “Culture, or civilization, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”
- In 1952, the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled a list of 164 different definitions
- Another, more modern, definition of culture is, “a society’s shared and socially transmitted ideas, values and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience and generate behavior and are reflected in that behavior.”

- Marvin Harris (1975) “A culture is the total **socially acquired life-way or life-style of a group of people**. It consists of the patterned repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting that are characteristics of members of a particular society or segment of society”
- Clifford Greetz “ Culture consists of symbols, motivations, moods and thoughts” **shared meanings expressed through public communication**.
- Shared culture does not, in other words, entail that everybody has obtained exactly the same knowledge and acquired exactly the same skills, but that those who share a culture also share a world-view and speak the same language in both a literal and a metaphoric sense

Characteristics of Culture

Culture has five basic characteristics: It is learned, shared, based on symbols, integrated, and dynamic. All cultures share these basic features.

- Culture is learned. It is **not** biological; we do not inherit it. Much of learning culture is unconscious. We learn culture from families, peers, institutions, and media. The process of learning culture is known as **enculturation**.



- Culture is shared. Because we share culture with other members of our group, we are able to act in socially appropriate ways as well as predict how others will act.
- Culture is based on symbols. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Symbols vary cross-culturally and are arbitrary. They only have meaning when people in a culture agree on their use. Language, money and art are all symbols. **Language is the most important symbolic component of culture.**

- Culture is integrated. This is known as holism, or the various parts of a culture being interconnected. All aspects of a culture are related to one another and to truly understand a culture, **one must learn about all of its parts, not only a few.**
- Culture is dynamic. Cultures interact and change. Because most cultures are in contact with other cultures, they exchange ideas and symbols. All cultures change, otherwise, they would have problems adapting to changing environments. And because cultures are integrated, if one component in the system changes, it is likely that the entire system must adjust.

- **Culture and nature-** Culture takes the natural biological urges we share with other animals and teaches us how to express them in particular ways. People have to eat, but culture teaches us what, when, and how.
- **Culture Is Integrated-** Cultures are not haphazard collections of customs and beliefs. Cultures are integrated, patterned systems

Individual society and culture: Multiple cultural world

- Within large culture a variety of **microcultures** exist.
- Microculture: Or known as local culture refers to distinct patterns of **learned and shared behaviors** and ideas found in local regions and among particular groups.
- Microcultures may overlap or may be related to each other hierarchically in terms of power, status and rights.
- The contrast between **difference and hierarchy** is important. People and groups can be considered different from each other in terms of a particular characteristics.

Some bases of microculture

- **Class:** Class is a category based on peoples economic position in society, usually measured in terms of income or wealth and exhibited in terms of lifestyle.
- **Race:** Race refers to groups of people with supposedly homogenous biological traits. The term race is extremely complicated as it is used in diverse ways in different parts of the world.
- **Ethnicity:** Ethnicity refers to a sense of identity among a group based on a sense of common heritage, language, language, religion or other aspect of culture.

- **Gender, sexuality:** Gender refers to culturally constructed and learned behaviors and ideas attributed to males, females or sometime a blended third gender. (E.g. New Guinea extreme gender segregation)
- **Age:** The human life cycle, from birth to old age, takes people through cultural stages for which appropriate behavior and thinking must be learned anew. (E.g. African Herding society)
- **Institution:** Institutions or enduring groups settings formed for a particular purpose, have their own characteristics micro culture.

