

## 5. Culture

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### Introduction

The concept of culture is complicated and vague. The word culture has been used in a number of different ways both, by sociologists and in everyday conversation. Culture was popularly defined as the whole way of life found in a particular society. Culture is learned and shared by members of a society. What distinguishes humans from non-humans is the possession of culture.

The term 'culture' was first used by Edward Tylor in 1871. The word culture is derived from the Latin word 'cultura'. The meaning of cultura is 'growing', 'cultivation'. Therefore, when the word culture is used in our everyday conversation we tend to think of it as an equivalent to the higher or refined things of the mind or of life viz; art, music, philosophy etc. However, the sociological meaning of culture will include more than these. Sociologists don't look at culture as something that distinguishes individuals on the basis of refined tastes but as a way of life in which all members of society participate.

The term culture refers to the way of

life of a member of various societies or groups. It broadly includes dressing pattern, eating habits, language, mannerisms and etiquettes, patterns of work, religious practices, recreational activities, performing arts, literature, sports, scientific attitude, gender expression etc. Cultures are never finished products. Over the generations, some elements are added, deleted, expanded, rearranged and modified. This makes culture dynamic.

### ACTIVITY - 1

Culture varies from society to society. Each society or a group will have different culture. These cultures are sometimes overlapping and sometimes exclusive. Give examples.

### 5.1 Culture: Definitions and Type

#### 5.1.1 Definitions

1. **Edward Tylor** : "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."
2. **Oxford Dictionary** : "The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society."
3. **Bronislaw Malinowski** : "Culture is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and thinking our everyday intercourse, in art, in literature, in religion, in recreation and in enjoyment."

From above definitions, it is clear that

the term culture is used in a particular sense that is different from its everyday usage. Thus in Sociology, culture is...

- i. A way of thinking, feeling, believing
- ii. The total way of life of people
- iii. Learned behaviour
- iv. The social legacy that an individual acquires from one's group
- v. A mechanism for normative regulation of behaviour

### 5.1.2 Types of culture

Culture is divided into two types-material and non-material culture.

**Material culture:** Material culture consists of objects which are made by human beings. They are concrete and tangible in nature. It consists of manufactured objects like clothing, roads, jewellery, computers, airplanes, television, missiles etc. Material culture is crucial to enhance the quality of life.



Examples of material culture

**Non-material culture:** Non-material culture refers to ideas created by human beings. The nature of non-material culture is abstract and intangible. For e.g. norms, regulations, values, signs and symbols, knowledge, beliefs etc. Non-material culture is further divided into cognitive and normative aspects of culture. The *cognitive* aspects refer to understanding as well as, how we make sense of all the information around us. e.g. ideas, knowledge, beliefs. The *normative* aspects consist of folkways, mores, customs, conventions and laws. These are mainly values or rules that guide social behaviour.

The material aspect of culture changes very fast. In the process of becoming modern, adopting new ways of life is comparatively easy for members of the society. It is convenient to adapt to new fashion, eating habits, new technology. On the other hand, non-material culture which is abstract, is very difficult to change and accept. Knowledge, ideas and beliefs are rooted in society for many decades and centuries. Change in these aspects is not readily accepted by society, or certain sections of the society. There is a lot of resistance to change in non-material cultural aspects.

**Cultural lag:** Material culture changes fast as compared to non-material culture. Over a period of time there is a gap between material and non-material culture. This gap is known as 'Cultural lag'.

### ACTIVITY - 2

Observe cultural change around you and list examples of cultural lag in society.

## 5.2 Classification of Culture

1. **High culture:** High culture refers to cultural creations that have high status. They are considered as the epitome of the highest levels of human creativity. For many, high culture is seen as aesthetically superior to other forms of culture.

For example, work of classical composers like Mozart, Beethoven, Bhimsen Joshi, Hariprasad Chourasia, Ravi Shankar, or the literature of Shakespeare.

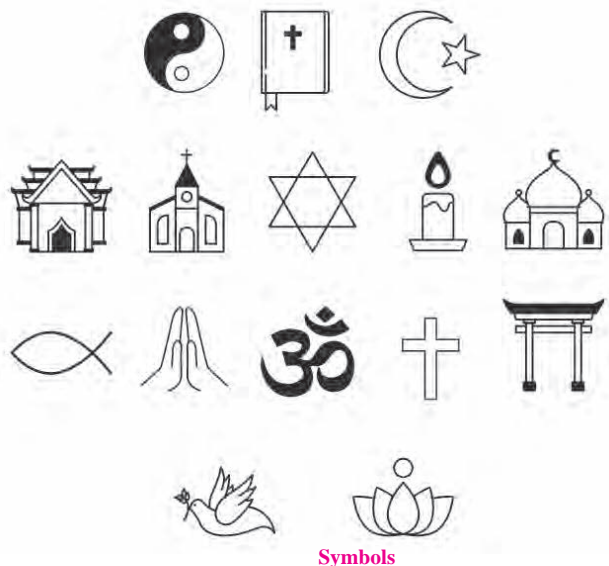
2. **Folk culture:** Folk culture refers to the culture of ordinary people, particularly those living in pre-industrial societies. It is an authentic culture. According to Srinati, it can never aspire to be an art but its distinctiveness is accepted and respected. For example, folk music, folk tales which are handed down from generation to generation; Bhangada in Punjab, Nautanki in Uttarpradesh and Lavani in Maharashtra.
3. **Mass culture:** If folk culture is seen as the characteristic of pre-industrial society, mass culture is a product of industrial societies. Mass culture is essentially a product of mass media. For example, popular feature films, TV soap-operas, recorded pop music.
4. **Popular culture:** Popular culture includes any cultural product appreciated by a large number of ordinary people (i.e. folk) with no great pretensions of cultural expertise. For example, mass market films such

as Star Wars or Titanic, Harry Potter books, Chandoba, Chhota Bhim etc.

5. **Subculture:** Subcultures refer to groups of people that have something in common with each other which distinguishes them from other social groups. For example, culture shared by religious groups, ethnic groups, youth groups.

## 5.3 Components of culture

1. **Symbols:** Every culture is filled with symbols, or things that stand for something else and that often evoke various reactions and emotions. The first element that exists in every culture is a variety of symbols. Culture is a system of symbols. Symbols are anything used to represent express and stand for an event or situation. A symbol is anything that is used to stand for something else. People who share a culture often attach a specific meaning to an object, gesture, sound, or image. For example, with the extensive use of mobile, emojis/emoticons are widely used to express and communicate various emotions. Emojis/smiley are combinations of keyboard characters that many use to represent their feelings online or through texting. Similarly, the Indian flag represents our entire country. A amber light at a traffic intersection is used to convey the message that one can be ready to stop/start one's vehicle. Some symbols are actually types of nonverbal communication, while other symbols are in fact material objects. Shared symbols make social interaction possible.



### Do you know ?

Story of the “bird language” of Black Sea villagers in northern Turkey.

In a remote mountain village high above Turkey’s Black Sea coast, there are villagers who still communicate across valleys by whistling. Not just whistling as in a non-verbal, “Hey, you!” But actually using what they call their “bird language,” Turkish words expressed as a series of piercing whistles. The village is Kuskoy, and it’s inhabited by farmers who raise tea, corn, beets and other crops, and also keep livestock. Watch youtube on bird language: Weblink: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQmF7kbOrmE>

2. **Language:** A group of words or ideas having common meaning and is shared in a social situation is called language. Language is a set of socially sound patterns, words, and sentences having specific meaning and terminology common to the same culture. Language is a source of communication to transmit messages from one person to another. It is the method to mould behaviour and experiences of a person. Language differs from culture to culture and is transmitted from one generation to another.

Language is like a vehicle through which we can carry out our complex social activities. Language is the foundation of culture. Animals don’t have culture because they have no specific language to transmit it to others. So, language is the key factor of social life.

3. **Knowledge:** Knowledge is one of the most important elements of culture. With the help of knowledge an individual knows how to cope with the existing social situation. Knowledge could be direct or indirect. Direct knowledge is immediate knowledge, whereas indirect knowledge is mediated knowledge. Knowledge comprises practical knowledge which is created and altered by every generation. It becomes part of that culture and is handed down from one generation to the next.

4. **Values and Beliefs:** Values are another important element of culture and involve standards of what is good or bad, and desirable or undesirable.

A culture’s values shape its norms. Values depend upon the culture. Culture varies from society to society and thus values are different in every social situation. Some values are



hereditary which we gain from our elders, books and parents. Culture is full of values and is transmitted from one generation to another. Beliefs are statements that people hold to be true. While values are abstract standards of goodness, beliefs are specific, particular matters that individual consider to be true or false. Both, cultural values and beliefs form the core of our moral world-view. We learn from families, schools and religious organisations to think and act according to approved principles.

- 5. Norms:** Norms are rules and behavioural expectations by which a society guides the behaviours of its members.

Some norms are proscriptive (what we shouldn't do) and some are prescriptive norms (which spell out what we should do). Most norms apply universally. For example, parents expect obedience from children. On the other hand, some norms are culture specific.

Social norms are further divided into **folkways** and **mores**. **Folkways** are mildly enforced social expectations, while mores are strictly held beliefs about behaviours. **Mores** are more compulsory to follow than are folkways. The time of meals, the number of meals per day, the manner of taking meals—lunch or dinner, the kind of food used, the manner of its preparations; the manner of speech; dressing; forms of etiquette and numerous other practices of daily life are some of examples of customary practices to which individuals conform in their personal habits. In simple terms, folkways are customary, normal and habitual ways of a

group, to meet certain needs or solving day-to-day problems. Mores, on the other hand, are more serious norms and also informal, like folkways. They are also unwritten customary ways of life. They have very serious binding on groups. Violation of mores is seen as a serious threat to social order. Folkways and mores are the basis of culture. They give us better understanding about a particular culture. They are most powerful and control the behaviour of individuals in society even more than State action.

#### 5.4 Characteristics of culture

- 1. Culture is acquired:** Culture is not innate or natural. It is learnt by each member through socialization. Cultural learning takes place through symbolic interaction - through signs, symbols and gestures. Thus, culture is not passed biologically from older generations to the newer ones. It is learned through experience. The members of a culture share certain ideals which shape their lives. The future generations learn to follow the same ideals. Culture is propagated through generations.
- 2. Culture is abstract:** Culture exists in the minds or habits of the members of society. Culture is the shared ways of doing and thinking. We cannot see culture as such but we can only see human behaviour. This behaviour occurs in a regular, patterned fashion and it is called culture.
- 3. Culture is shared:** Every culture is shared by a group of people, usually inhabiting the same part of the world. The region they live in, the geographical conditions around them,

their country's past, the belief system and values of its people, and the heritage they are proud of, constitute their culture. Being common to a group, these aspects develop a sense of unity and belonging among the people of that group. People of the same community share the same values, beliefs, and traditions. Their language and mannerisms, and the way they communicate is similar. That is why culture is not individual but shared.

4. **Culture is man-made:** Culture is not a force, operating by itself and independent of the human “actors”. Culture is a creation of society through interaction and depends for its existence upon the continuance of society. In a strict sense, culture does not ‘do’ anything on its own. Culture, in short, is a human product; it is not natural.
5. **Culture is idealistic:** Culture embodies the ideas and norms of a group. It is a sum-total of the ideal patterns and norms of behaviour of a group. Culture consists of the intellectual, artistic and social ideals and institutions which the members of the society profess and to which they strive to conform.
6. **Culture is transmitted among members of society:** Cultural ways are learned by persons from persons. Many of them are “handed down” by one’s elders, by parents, teachers, and others. In present times due to technological advancement we see that the older generation is learning from the youth. Some of the transmission of culture is among

peers. For example, the styles of dress, political views, and the use of new labour-saving devices. However, one does not acquire a behaviour pattern spontaneously.

7. **Culture is continually changing:** Culture undergoes a gradual change. With the passing of time, some beliefs change, certain traditions or rituals are eliminated, language and mannerisms of people change, and thus, their culture. English language has changed significantly with the use of WhatsApp for communication. The use of mobile phones has brought significant changes in traditional etiquettes of communication. Migration and globalisation leads to a mixing of cultures.

When people from different parts of the world come together, they influence each other and effectively, each other's cultures. These factors contribute to the formation of a multicultural society and sometimes, even new cultures develop.

Due to education and increased awareness, newer generations become flexible to change. So, some rituals or customs become less rigid; some are replaced by simpler ones, while some are discontinued.

All cultures change in time although their rate of change varies.

8. **Culture 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. For example, values, customs,

traditions, ideologies, religion, belief, practices are not similar but different in every society. However, the ways of eating, drinking, speaking, greeting, dressing etc differ from one social situation to another in the same time.

**9. Culture is an integrated system:**

Culture possesses an order and a system. Its various parts are integrated with each other and any new element which is introduced may be integrated. For example, the value system of a particular society is closely linked to its morality, religion, customs, traditions etc.

**10. Language is the chief vehicle of culture:**

We live not only in the present but also in the past and future. Language enables us to transmit what was learned in the past. It further enables one to transmit the accumulated knowledge to the next generation. A specialised language pattern serves as a common bond to the members of a particular group or subculture. Although culture is transmitted in a variety of ways, language is one of the most important vehicles for perpetuating cultural patterns.

### **5.5 Importance of culture**

Culture is the essential character of a vibrant society which is often expressed through our mythological stories, paintings, sculptures, music, the way we celebrate and remember our past, entertain ourselves, and imagine our future. Culture has many social and economic benefits.

#### **Individual and social benefits of culture**

**1. Fundamental benefits:** Participating in culture can benefit individuals in

many different ways, some of which are deeply personal. Culture can provide emotionally and intellectually moving experiences. Culture is also a means of expressing creativity, producing an individual identity, and enhancing or preserving a community's sense of place.

Cultural experiences are opportunities for leisure, entertainment, learning, and sharing experiences with others. These benefits are intrinsic to culture. They are what attracts us and the reason why we participate.

**2. Improved learning and valuable skills for the future:**

In children and youth, participation in culture helps to develop thinking skills, build self-esteem, and improves resilience, all of which enhance educational outcomes. One can make strong linkages between culture and literacy and enhanced learning outcomes, in both, public education and in the development of valuable workforce skills.

**3. Better health and well-being:**

Participation in culture contributes to a healthy population in several ways. Creativity and cultural engagement have shown to improve both mental and physical health. A growing body of research also demonstrates that the participation in art forms like music or theatre can improve the health and well-being of children and adults. Participation in the arts can relieve isolation and promote identity formation and inter-cultural understanding.

**4. Social solidarity and cohesion:** The benefits of culture for individuals can

spill over to society as a whole. Culture helps build 'social capital' - the bond that holds communities together. Cultural activities such as festivals, fairs bring people together and build social solidarity and cohesion. It further fosters social inclusion, community empowerment, civic pride, and tolerance. Thus, culture is important for the vitality of all communities. Social networks created through cultural initiatives in the community resulted in direct economic benefits for the neighbourhood.

Further, our diverse cultural heritage resources tell the story of our shared past, promoting social cohesion. It develops a feeling of pride, identification with the past, and a sense of belonging to a wider community.

### Learn this

Culture makes a significant contribution to the tourism industry further creating new job opportunities and encouraging infrastructure development.

Many festivals and events hosted each year coupled with the region's museums, art galleries, and historic sites, are magnets for cultural tourists. There are significant opportunities to grow cultural tourism through marketing cultural heritage assets. For example, Mughal history and monuments like Taj Mahal, Char Minar, Qutub Minar, Lal Killa attracts many foreign tourists throughout the year; the colourful, vibrant Rajasthan with its unique music and Rajput warrior history associated with it, is a favourite vacation destination for many Indian and foreign tourists.

## 5.6 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the view that one's own culture is better than anyone else's culture. As a practice, it consists of evaluating other cultures from the perspective of one's own. **William Graham Sumner** coined the term 'ethnocentrism' in 1906. It refers to the tendency to assume that one's own culture and way of life are superior to all others. The ethnocentric person sees her or his own culture as the most important. That means one uses one's own culture as the center and evaluates other cultures based on it. she or he views all other cultures as deviations from what is 'normal' (their own). Today many sociologists identify ethnocentrism as a feature of all cultures.

Some social scientists argue that ethnocentrism can lead to a biased understanding of other cultures. According to conflict theorists, ethnocentrism denies equal opportunities. On the other hand, functionalist sociologists, claim that ethnocentrism serves to maintain a sense of solidarity. For example, demeaning other cultures can enhance one's feeling of pride in their own culture.

Thus, ethnocentrism has positive as well as negative side according to many scholars. The negative side is that the ethnocentrism can lead to arrogance and a tendency to ignore useful and superior knowledge. The positive side is that it offers confidence and assurance to the culture. It helps the group remain cohesive and centered.

## 5.7 Cultural hybridisation

Cultural hybridisation refers to the ways in which parts of one culture get recombined with the cultures of another.



In the globalisation process, some forms of new and different cultural practice or behaviour develops from the mixing of different cultural traditions. The groups do not necessarily give up their own culture but participate in various ways in each other's cultural activities. Cultural hybridisation is a universal process which is speeded up through globalisation. Easy flow of migration, information, goods and services and exchanges of traditions has made the hybridisation process quick. In this process, two originally distinct cultures come together and create something new and exciting. We see hybridisation in many aspects of culture like food, language, wedding practices, dressing habits so on and so forth. Today we may prefer Italian pizza with tandoori paneer as topping which indeed is very Indian. Celebration of Valentine's Day, language mixing, fusion music are examples of cultural hybridisation.

In order to understand cultural hybridisation, one needs to understand the process of *glocalisation*. Global processes interact with local processes. In contemporary society, global styles are given a unique local flavor. A global restaurant chain modifying their menus based on the unique culture they are in but maintaining their brand. For example, Indian spicy taste is incorporated in the otherwise differently flavoured burger of MacDonald's or Indianization of Chinese food.



Hybrid version of Barbie

### Know this?

Glocalization is a combination of the words “globalization” and “localization”, used to describe a product or service that is developed and distributed globally, but is also adjusted to accommodate the user or consumer in a local market. The term first appeared in the late 1980s. The term was coined in the Harvard Business Review, in 1980, by sociologist Roland Robertson. He wrote that glocalization meant “the simultaneity - the co-presence - of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.”

Culture is all pervasive. It influences everything that we think, feel and do. You are now familiar with and can identify with aspects of culture that impact us as members of a given society. We hope you can also appreciate cultural diversity and cultural change and the challenges that they bring.

### ACTIVITY - 3

Look at your surrounding and list out the examples of cultural hybridisation in the areas of food, toys, religious practices, festivals, celebrations.

## SUMMARY

- The word culture has been used in a number of different ways both, by sociologists and in everyday conversation.
- Culture was popularly defined as a whole way of life; learned behaviour. Culture is the social legacy that an individual acquires from one's group.
- Culture is a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour
- Culture is divided into two types - material and non-material culture.
- Material culture consists of man-made objects which are concrete and tangible in nature.
- Non-material culture refers to the ideas created by human beings. The nature of non material culture is abstract and intangible.
- Culture consists of symbols and signs, values and beliefs, norms, language.
- Culture is acquired. Culture is not innate or natural. It is learnt by each member through socialization. Culture is a human product; it is not natural.
- Culture embodies the ideas and norms of a group. It is sum-total of the ideal patterns and norms of behaviour of a group.
- Culture is continually changing. Cultures undergo a gradual change. With passing time, some beliefs change, certain traditions or rituals are eliminated, language and mannerisms of people change, and thus their culture.
- Every society has its own culture and ways of behaving. It is not uniform everywhere but varies from society to society.
- Language is the chief vehicle of culture.
- Participating in culture can benefit individuals in many different ways. Culture helps build social solidarity and cohesion. Every culture displays a sense of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism means treating one's own culture as superior.
- Cultural hybridization refers to the ways in which parts of one culture get recombined with the culture of another.
- In hybridization process, two originally distinct cultures come together and create something new and exciting.

## EXERCISE

### 1. (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the statements.

- (1) Culture is \_\_\_\_\_. (natural, personal, adaptive)
- (2) Material culture is \_\_\_\_\_. (concrete, abstract, intangible)

- (3) Bollywood music is an example of \_\_\_\_\_. (high culture, popular culture, folk culture)

### 1. (B) Correct the incorrect pair.

- (1) (i) Classical singing of Bhimsen Joshi  
- High culture

- (ii) Shakespeare's literature - Folk culture
- (iii) Harry Potter book - Popular culture
- (iv) Religious group - Sub-culture

**1. (C) Identify the appropriate term from the given options.**

Folk culture, Material culture,  
Popular culture

- (1) Songs transmitted from one generation to the next.
- (2) Use of mobile phone today.

**1. (D) Correct underlined words and complete the sentence.**

- (1) Belief in superstition is an example of material culture.
- (2) E-commerce is an example of popular culture.

**2. Write short notes.**

- (1) Characteristics of culture
- (2) Social benefits of culture

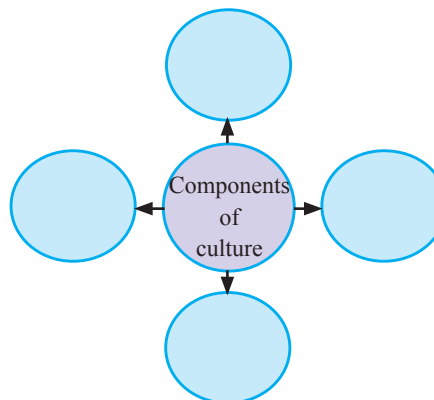
**3. Write differences.**

- (1) Material culture and Nonmaterial culture
- (2) Folkways and Mores

**4. Explain the following concept with an example.**

- (1) Subculture
- (2) Folk culture

**5. Complete the concept map.**



**6. Give your personal response.**

- (1) Very few people make an effort to learn Classical music today.
- (2) It is not easy to give up superstitious beliefs.

**ACTIVITY:**

Presentation: Groups of 5 students make a presentation in class, on any aspect of culture (e.g. language, dialect, dress, folklore, dances, music, art, food habits, architecture, literature, tribal life) of any State in India (e.g. Maharashtra, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir).

