

# **Culture: Concept, Characteristics, Patterns and Theories of Culture**

Humanbeing defined as a social & cultural animal. In general terms, a culture can be said to include all the human phenomenon in a society that are not the products of biological inheritance. The ways in which we adopt to our environment are called collectively as culture.

Sociologists use the term culture to refer '**the way of life**' of the people or of groups within a society. This way of life is expressed in group's norms, customs and values and in the shared expression along with language.

**Edward Tylor** "Culture is that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

**Bronislaw malinowski** called a social heritage which consists of both material (tangible) and non material (non tangible) things

**Herskovits** "Culture is the man-made part of the environment,"

**Meade** "culture is the total shared, learned behavior of a society or a subgroup."

## **Characteristics of Culture**

- Culture is a social phenomenon. It is shared by members of a society.
- Culture is learned as well as acquired from the ancestors.
- Culture is transferable or transmissive.
- Culture is both super individual & super-organic.
- Culture is symbolic.
- Culture is Dynamic & adaptive.
- Culture is composed of ethos & edios both.

**Culture as Structure:-** A culture is not simply an accumulation of isolated elements such as values, norms, language, symbols, techonology etc. The elements

of culture are interrelated constituting a complex whole. It is an organised system of many interrelated parts or aspect i.e.:-

- **Culture traits** – A small particle or unit of a culture is known as culture trait. Culture is woven with so many of its traits these traits are material & immaterial both Ex. Pin.
- **Cultural Complex** – When a number of traits cluster together in a meaningful relationship & form an activity, it is known as culture complex example- Cricket game.
- **Cultural Pattern** – Combination of culture traits & complexes into a sort of generalised picture of the culture as a whole is known as culture pattern. It reflects the total structure of a society. While comparing one society with another, this culture pattern is also used.
- **Cultural area- Culture area** refers to a geography with one relatively homogeneous human activity or complex of activities. Such activities are often associated with an ethnolinguistic group and with the territory it inhabits.

#### **Other Related Concepts:-**

- **Cultural Relativism** - is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one's own culture. The anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) argued that each culture has an internally consistent pattern of thought and action, which alone could be the basis for judging the merits and morality of the culture's practices.
- **Ethnocentrism** - evaluating and judging another culture based on how it compares to one's own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism, as sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, involves a belief or attitude that one's own culture is better than all others.
- **Sub-Culture** – All societies are composed of many groups & communities. The ways of living & behaving peculiar to a large segment or group of a society are known as sub culture.
- **Counter Culture** – counter culture is a sub-culture that adheres to 'a set of norms & values that sharply contradict the dominant norms &

values of the society of which that group 'is a part'. It rejects societal norms & values of the prevailing culture and seek alternative lifestyles.

## **Cultural Lag Theory**

The concept of cultural lag was first introduced by W.F. Ogburn in his book *Social Change* which was published in 1922. Cultural Lag Theory suggests that a period of maladjustment occurs when the non-material culture is struggling to adapt to new material conditions.

(I) Material culture - includes all of the physical objects that people create and give meaning to. For example, cars, clothing, schools and computers. An object only becomes part of culture after meaning have been given to it. A computer has no meaning until it is used as a tool.

(II) Non-material culture- consists of thoughts and behaviour that people learn as part of the culture they live in. It includes politics, economics, language, rules, customs, family, religion or beliefs, values, and knowledge.

Cultural Lag theory resonates with the ideas of Technological Determinism, in that it assumes that technology has independent effects on society at large. Ogburn posited four stages of technical development: invention, accumulation, diffusion, and adjustment.

- *Invention* is the process by which new forms of technology are created. Inventions are collective contributions to an existing cultural base that cannot occur unless the society has already gained a certain level of knowledge and expertise in the particular area.
- *Accumulation* is the growth of technology because new things are invented more rapidly than old ones are forgotten, and some inventions (such as writing) promote this accumulation process.
- *Diffusion* is the spread of an idea from one cultural group to another, or from one field of activity to another, and as diffusion brings inventions together, they combine to form new inventions.

- *Adjustment* is the process by which the non-technical aspects of a culture respond to invention, and any retardation of this adjustment process causes cultural lag.

Cultural Lag is a common societal phenomenon due to the tendency of material culture to evolve and change rapidly while non-material culture tends to resist change and remain fixed for a far longer period of time. Due to the opposing nature of these two aspects of culture, adaptation of new technology becomes rather difficult. Cultural Lag creates problems for a society in a multitude of ways. Where new technologies are considered. For example, the advent of stem cell research has given rise to many new, potentially beneficial medical technologies; however these new technologies have also raised serious ethical questions about the use of stem cells in medicine.