

05. CULTURE

Culture

Culture has been defined in number of ways. Some of these definitions are given below

- 1) To **Sorokin**, culture stands for the moral, spiritual and intellectual attainments of man.
- 2) **David Bidney** defines the culture as the self cultivation of the natural geographical environment. He says that culture is a product of agrofacts (products of cultivation), artifacts (products of industry), sociofacts (social organisation), and manifacts (language, religion, art, etc.)
- 3) According to **Mac Iver** culture is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and our thinking, intercourse in our literature, in religion, in recreation and enjoyment.

In Sociology, the word culture is used to denote acquired behaviours, which are shared by and transmitted among the members of the society. The essential point in culture is that it is acquired by man as a member of society and persists through tradition.

Characteristics of Culture

i) Culture is an acquired quality

Culture is not innate, traits learned through socialisation habits and thoughts are called as culture. Culture is learned.

ii) Culture is social and not individual heritage of man

It is inclusive of the expectations of the members of the groups. It is a social product.

iii) Culture is idealistic

Culture embodies the ideas and norms of the group. It is a sum-total of the ideal patterns and norms of behaviour of a group.

iv) Culture is the total social heritage

Culture is linked with past. The past endures because it lives in culture. It is passed from one generation to another through tradition and customs.

v) Culture fulfils some needs

Culture fulfils those ethical and social needs of the groups which are ends in themselves.

vi) Culture is an integrated system

Culture possesses order and system. Its various parts are integrated with each other and any new element which is introduced is also integrated.

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

Ethnocentrism

It is the tendency of a society to consider its own culture as best, and others as inferiors. It is a feeling whereby the natives come to despise foreigners and feel superior to them.

Functions of culture

Culture is important for individual and group. So one has to consider the functions of culture under two heads.

- a) for individual and
- b) for groups.

Importance to the individual

- i. Culture makes man a human being, regulates his conduct and prepares him for group life. It provides him a complete design of living. It teaches him what type of food he should take and in what manner; how he should behave with and influence the people and how he should co-operate or compete with others. In short, the qualities required to live in a social life are acquired by man from his culture.
- ii. Culture provides solutions for complicated situations. Culture provides man with a set of behaviour even for complicated situations. Culture thoroughly influences him so that he does not require any external force to keep himself in conformity with social requirements. His actions become automatic (e.g.) forming a queue where there is a rush.
- iii. Culture provides traditional integrations to certain situation (e.g.) if a cat crosses his way he postpones the journey. These traditional interpretations differ from culture to culture.

For the group

i) Culture keeps social relationships intact

Culture is important not only for man but also for the group. Had there been no culture there would have been no group life. By regulating the behaviour of people and satisfying their primary drives pertaining to hunger, shelter, and sex it has been able to maintain group life. Infact life would have been poor, nasty, brutish and short if there had been no cultural regulations. It is culture which keeps all social relations intact.

ii) Culture broadens the vision of the individual

Culture has given a new vision to the individual by providing him a set of rules for the cooperation of the individuals. It provides him the concepts of family, state, nation and class and makes possible the coordination and division of labour.

iii) Culture creates new needs

Culture creates new needs and new drives, for example, thirst for knowledge and arranges for their satisfaction. It satisfies the aesthetic, moral and religious interests of the members. of the group. In this Way group owe much to culture.

Cultural Diffusion

Cultural diffusion is the processes by which the cultural traits invented or discovered in one society are spread directly or indirectly to other societies.

Exact origin of a specific cultural trait is difficult to trace, however, the diffusion of a trait can fairly be traced. In history certain societies have served as centres from which cultural traits have spread to other societies. Egypt was for many centuries a cultural centre. Subsequently Rome was a great cultural center from where Roman law spread in most countries of Europe. In Asia the Chinese Kingdom was considered from early time as the dominant culture center. Around fourteen century Western Europe became the dominant culture center. Now, the United States is exporting its culture to other countries.

Following are the influential factors to the process of diffusion.

- a) Relation and communication
- b) Need and desire for new traits
- c) Competition with old traits
- d) The respect and recognition of those who bring new traits.

Cultural diffusion may be incidental or by direction. Wherever a person migrates from one culture area to another he carried culture patterns with him. Cultural diffusion by direction is normally done either by sending missionaries or by colonization.

Cultural lag

Cultural lag means that some parts of people's culture do not change as do other traits. It means that one or more phases of culture have moves ahead and that all other phases are lagging behind.

Marginal man

Difference in culture produces a marginal man. A person who is living in two cultures is likely to occupy not the center of either but by the margins of both. He is the man who belongs to two or more cultures but is not fully accepted in any. A migrant, who has moved into a decidedly different culture area from the one in which he grew to manhood, is likely to be marginal man.

Customs

Customs are socially prescribed forms of behaviour transmitted by tradition. Customs regulates the whole of man's action, his bathing, washing, cutting his hair, eating, drinking etc. customs are well established and difficult to change.

Classification of Customs

- i. Folkways and usage
- ii. Mores and Taboos
- iii. Conventions and
- iv. Rituals

i) Folkways and usage

They are approved forms of behaviour for specific situations. This is the expected way in which persons are to behave. It arises without prior intention (e.g.) petty acts. Observations of folk-ways is not a must. So violation of folkways are not punished severely.

ii) Conventions

Conventions are customs regulating more significant social behaviour.

- wearing cloths in public
- polite to others
- Eating using knife, fork and spoon instead of hand/fingers.

People care for the adoption. Conventions are less violated than folkways.

ii) Mores and Taboos

The difference between folkways and mores is the degree to which they are enforced.

Folkways may be broken without punishments but mores broken will be punished. Mores are defined as those of folkways which are essential to ethical or moral values of people.

Mores are positive action enforcing what ought to be done (e.g.) saluting the flag, standing during the playing of national anthem.

Taboos are negative action envisaging what ought not to be done (e.g.) not smoking in front of elders.

iv) Rituals

It is the pattern of behaviour or ceremonies, which has become the customary way of dealing with certain situations (e.g.) performing the marriage ceremonies.

Characteristics of culture

- i. It provides a series of patterns whereby the biological demands of the group members can be met, (e.g.) for subsistence, shelter and reproduction.
- ii. It provides a set of rules to ensure the cooperation of the individual of a group in adjusting to the environmental situations.
- iii. It provides channels of interaction for the individuals within the group.
- iv. Culture provides methods of adjustment of the group to its external and internal needs.
- v. For individuals in a society culture provides
 - a) ready-made adjustments to a number of situations and (b) a series of familiar stimuli to the individual, to which he has only to respond in a familiar way.

Role of culture in agriculture

Learning the customs, folkways, mores, taboos, etc. of a group of people will help one to predict what they will do in a given situation. Without such predictability expectations of what the other would do in a given situation the result would be a chaos in society.

Culture is not a static but dynamic, because of internal and external forces. Development programme are such external force which changes the culture of the society. Hence it is important for an extension worker to understand this fact. The scientific understanding of the culture of the people among whom extension worker operates is basic to the effective performance of his function (e.g.) if caste structure is there in the village, study the caste system and function.

Functions of culture

- i. Culture provides a series of patterns whereby the biological demands of the group members can be met, example for sustenance, shelter and reproduction.
- ii. Culture provides a set of rules to ensure the co-operation of the individuals of a group in adjusting to the environmental situation. The group is thus able to act in certain situation as a unit.
- iii. Culture provides channels of interaction for the individuals within the group.
- iv. Culture provides methods of adjustment of the group to its external and internal needs. It provides a pattern for the development of the individual.
- v. For the individual in a society, culture provides (a) ready made adjustments to a number of situations and (b) a series of familiar stimuli to the individual to which he has only to respond in a familiar way.

All the functions are controlled through norms or rules made in society.