
UNIT 1 CONCEPT OF SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of society and culture in anthropological perspective;
- describe some major characteristics of society and culture; and
- understand the relationship that exists between culture, society and individual behaviours.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Though the term society and culture is used today as a scientific concept by most of the social sciences, its most comprehensive definition has been provided in anthropology. Humans are social beings. That is why we live together in societies. Day-to-day we interact with each other and develop social relationships. Every society has a culture, no matter how simple that culture may be. Culture is shared. The members of every society share a common culture which they have to learn. Culture is not inherited it is transmitted from one generation to the other through the vehicle of language. Like societies, cultures differ all over the world. The two concepts society and culture are closely related and sometimes can be used interchangeably. This unit discusses the meaning and definition of society and culture in anthropological perspective. The unit also discusses some of the characteristics and elements of society and culture.

1.2 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIETY

In common parlance the word society is usually used to designate the members of specific in-group, persons rather than the social relationships of those persons. Sometimes the word society is used to designate institutions like Arya Samaj

(society) or Brahma Samaj. Society is a word used in routine life with a particular meaning. Everyone often defines society as an aggregation or collection of individuals. But in sociology and anthropology, the term is used in a different sense. The term “society” refers not just to a group of people but to a complex pattern of norms of interaction that exist among them. In terms of common sense, society is understood as a tangible object, whereas in sociology and anthropology it refers to an intangible entity. It is a mental construct, which we realise in every day life but cannot see it. The important aspect of society is the system of relationships, the pattern of the norms of interaction by which the members of the society maintain themselves. Some anthropologists say that society exists only when the members know each other and possess common interests or objects.

1.2.1 Meaning and Definition of Society

The roots of the term society can be traced to the Latin word *socius* which means companionship or friendship. George Simmel an eminent sociologists has stated that it is the element of sociability or companionship which defines the true essence of society. As Aristotle stated centuries ago man is a social animal, it brings into focus that man always lives in the company of other people. Society has become an essential condition for human life to continue. Herein, we will discuss some of the views of the social thinkers who had on society and how they have perceived the same.

August Comte viewed society as a social organism possessing a harmony of structure and function. Emile Durkheim regarded society as a reality in its own right. For Talcott Parson Society is a total complex of human relationships in so far as they grow out of the action in terms of means-end relationship intrinsic or symbolic. G.H Mead conceived society as an exchange of gestures which involves the use of symbols. Morris Ginsberg defines society as a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behaviour which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behaviour. Cole saw Society as the complex of organised associations and institutions with a community. MacIver and Page found it was a system of usages and procedures of authority and mutual aid of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and liberties; a web of social relationship. A society is generally conceived of as a human group which is relatively large, relatively independent or self-perpetuating in demographic terms, and which is relatively autonomous in its organisation of social relations. But it is the relativity of each society’s autonomy, independence and self-perpetuating nature which is the crucial factor, and the distinction of one society from another is often arbitrary. It is important in anthropology not to allow these arbitrary divisions to distort our vision of systems of local, regional, national and international social relations.

We can sum up the definitions of society into two types – the functional definition and the structural definition. From the functional point of view, society is defined as a complex of groups in reciprocal relationships, interacting upon one another, enabling human organisms to carry on their life-activities and helping each person to fulfill his wishes and accomplish his interests in association with his fellows. From the structural point of view, society is the total social heritage of folkways, mores and institutions; of habits, sentiments and ideals. Ginsberg, Giddings, Cole and Cuber take a structural view of society while McIver, Parsons, Lapiere, Cooley and Leacock have given functional definition of society.

The definition of society has undergone little variation from the standpoint of classical and modern scholars. For our understanding we can simply define society

as a group of people who share a common culture, occupy a particular territorial area and feel themselves to constitute a unified and distinct entity. It is the mutual interactions and interrelations of individuals and groups. Society is a group of people related to each other through persistent relations in terms of social status, roles and social networks. By extension, society denotes the people of a region or country, sometimes even the world, taken as a whole. Used in the sense of an association, a society is a body of individuals outlined by the bounds of functional interdependence, possibly comprising characteristics such as national or cultural identity, social solidarity, language or hierarchical organisation.

1.2.2 Characteristics of Society

According to McIver “society is a web of social relationships”, (McIver, 1931: 6) which may be of several types. To formulate a catalogue of social relationships would be an uphill task. The family alone is said to have as many relationships based on age, sex, gender, and generation. Outside the family there is no limit to the number of possible relationships.

McIver says “society means likeness”. Therefore, likeness is an essential prerequisite of society. The sense of likeness was focused in early society on kinship, that is, real or supposed blood relationships. In modern societies the conditions of social likeness have broadened out in the principle of nationality of one world. “Comradship, intimacy, association of any kind or degree would be impossible without some understanding of each by the other, and that understanding depends on the likeness which each apprehends in the other.

Society also implies difference but this sense of likeness does not exclude diversity or variation. Society also implies difference and it depends on the latter as much as on likeness. A society based exclusively on likeness and uniformity is bound to be loose in socialites. All our social systems involve relationships in which differences complement one another, for e.g., family rests upon the biological difference between sexes. Besides the difference in sex there are other natural differences of aptitude, of interest of capacity. While difference is necessary to society, difference by itself does not create society, **difference subordinate to likeness**. It has been argued that likeness is necessarily prior to the differentiation of social organisation. As McIver observed, – primary likeness and secondary difference create the greatest of all social institutions-the division of labour.

In addition to likeness, **interdependence** is another essential element to constitute society. Family, one of the important units of society with which we all are closely associated, is based on the biological inter-dependence of the sexes. None of the two sexes is complete by itself and therefore each seeks fulfillment by the aid of the other. The Social organisation diversifies the work of each, making each more dependent on others, in order that by the surrender of self sufficiency he may receive back thousand fold in fullness of life. This interdependence is both extensive as well as intensive.

Lastly, **cooperation** is also essential to constitute society. Without cooperation no society can exist. Unless people cooperate with each other, they cannot live a happy life. All social institutions rest on cooperation. The members in social institutions cooperate with one another to live happily and joyfully. Cooperation avoids mutual destructiveness and results in economy. For want of cooperation the entire fabric of society may collapse.

Thus likeness, interdependence and cooperation are the essential elements to constitute society. Besides these elements, McIver has also mentioned some other

elements of society; it is a system of usages and procedures, authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions; it controls human behaviour and liberties. This view brings in several other elements of society firstly, in every society there are some usages concerned with marriage, education, religion, food, and speech etc., which differ from society to society. Secondly, there are procedures i.e., the modes of action in every society which maintain its unity and organisation. Thirdly, the presence of an authority is necessary to maintain order in society. Fourthly, no society can be stable unless there is a feeling of mutual aid among its members. Fifthly, in a society there are several groupings and divisions such as family, city and village etc. sixthly, liberty and control go together in a society. Without liberty man cannot develop his personality. Control upon an individual's behaviour is not meant to destroy his liberty but to promote and protect it.

Society is not just a mere agency for the comfort of the beings but it is the whole system of social relationships. The social relation of mother and child, for example, is revealed in their attitude towards each other. It is this social fact and not the biological fact which constitute society. The true nature of society consists not in the external factors of interdependence of likeness or authority but in the state of mind of the beings which compose society. It is the pattern, not the people, which is termed society. It is not a group but a process of relationships. It is said society is the extension of individuality, the transcendence of self-closedness, the vehicle of personal identity, the means of the continuation of personality through the generations, the nurse of youth, the arena of manhood and womanhood.

All societies, as is clear from the above discussion, involve a certain level of association, a level closer and lesser complex than an organism. Like an organism, a society also is a system of relations, but in the society this relation exists between organisms rather than between "cells". The constituent parts of society give to it a continuity and structure of its own so that the study of society cannot be reduced merely to a study of its individual members. Some social thinkers like Spencer, Radcliffe-Brown and Durkheim have sought to compare society to an organism. The analogy between organism and society is at best an analogy and not an identity.

Sociologist Gerhard Lenski based on the level of technology, communication and economy had differentiated societies into: a) hunters and gatherers, b) simple agricultural, c) advanced agricultural d) industrial, and e) special (e.g. fishing societies or maritime societies). This classification is more or less similar to the system earlier developed by anthropologists like Fried and Service. They classified societies as foraging or hunter gatherer, horticultural, agricultural, industrial, and then information-age (post-industrial) societies. In order of increasing size and complexity, there are bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and state societies. Societies may also be organised according to their political structure. These structures may have varying degrees of political power, depending on the cultural geographical, and historical environments. The term *society* is currently used to cover a number of political and scientific connotations as well as a variety of associations.

Reflection and Action

Use your learning material to write a brief definition of society and its characteristics based on what you have just read.

1.3 THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Culture is a word, all of us use in our day to day parlance. In its daily usage, the

term culture refers to polished behaviour, personal refinements as classical music; the fine arts and world of philosophy etc. But anthropologists define and use the term in quite a different way. The term culture is used in a much broader sense by anthropologists as culture includes much more than just the “finer things in life.” There is no differentiation between “cultured” people and “uncultured” people, since all people have culture from the anthropological point of view.

1.3.1 Meaning and Definition of Culture

In an anthropological perspective every society has a culture, it is universal, though in some societies it may be simple, while complex in others. Likewise every human being is cultured and culture is an attribute of the genus Homo. Culture is design for living. It is the basis of human life. It rests on biology but is not biological. It is human biology such as a developed brain, nimble hands, and freely moving tongue which helped humans to acquire a design for living. What has been acquired as a design for living is not biological. It is a totality of mental, rational and material, technological processes and products. This totality is what anthropologists call culture.

It is not possible for human beings to live without the minimum material objects (tangible). Without a network of social relations among people, human life is impossible. Human existence is impracticable without ideas, rules, ideals, symbols and patterns of thinking (intangible). Symbols, ideas, rules, ideals, and patterns of thinking, network of social relations and material objects together comprise the mental, rational, and material, technological processes and products. They are integrated into a whole, the design of living. This design of living is called culture. It is the total way of life of the human being. Culture serves as a potential guide for human living. As a guide, it aids the human being to know what is good and bad, desirable, important and unimportant, rational and irrational.

Culture is a historically created design for living. Generation after generation new things are added to it and this is accountable for the development and change in culture. The culture we have at present combines what has been first created by our ancestors with what has been added to it by subsequent generations. To be brief, culture is dynamic in that, as time goes by, new items are added to those already existing.

Culture is unique to the human species. No species has ability like human beings in its complexity, i.e., to learn, to communicate and to store, process and use information to the same extent. Culture has moral force which serves as a guide for human action how to behave in a society. Neither monkeys nor apes have moral force in their life. Morality is a part of culture. Therefore human culture has moral foundation, but primate life has no moral basis.

Culture is a product of social learning rather than biological heredity which means **Culture is non-genetic.** It cannot be inherited by offspring from parents, but it can be transmitted socially from parents to children. Like animals, human cannot inherit behaviour. Animal behaviour is inborn. Animals inherit behaviour or at most, proto-culture, but humans acquire culture.

All people have culture, though not similar. Different groups of humans or societies have different cultures. This shows cultural diversity that means **Culture has unity as well as diversity.** All humans have culture, but all cultures are not alike. In this context, it is necessary to draw a distinction between “a culture” and “culture”. The term culture signifies the way of life of human societies as a whole and the

term “a culture” signifies the way of life of specific part of human society which is technically called a society.

Culture is the basic concept of anthropology and is central to all the sub-branches of anthropology. Anthropologists have been discussing and debating definitions of culture since the origin of the discipline in the 19th century. The classic definition of culture is given by E.B. Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* in 1871. He stated ‘Culture or Civilization, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’ (p.1). This is a very broad definition of culture, encompassing almost everything about a person’s overall way of life, from “knowledge” to “habits”. Herein, emphasis is on the fact that culture is something individuals acquire as “a member of society,” meaning that people obtain their culture from growing up with and living among a particular group. The major contribution of Tylor’s definition is that he was able to establish the differences between biologically determined characteristics and those attributes which are socially learned. The phrase “acquired by man as a member of society” in his definition is very important. It is not any habit or capability of man as a biological being, but man as a member of a social group. The acquisition of culture is not through biological heredity but through socialisation which is called enculturation. Enculturation is specifically defined as the process by which an individual learns the rules and values of one’s culture which begins at the family level right from the moment a child is born.

From the beginning of the discipline hundreds of definitions have been proposed, and their number continues to grow steadily. Today there are more than 200 definitions of culture. Different definitions of “culture” reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity. Below a few definitions of culture are given for your understanding.

Reflection

Definitions of culture given by Anthropologists

Malinowski defined culture as an “instrumental reality, and apparatus for the satisfaction of the biological and derived need”. It is the integral whole consisting of implements in consumers’ goods, of constitutional characters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs” (Malinowski, 1944:1)

“...Culture in general as a descriptive concept means the accumulated treasury of human creation: books, paintings, buildings, and the like; the knowledge of ways of adjusting to our surroundings, both human and physical; language, customs, and systems of etiquette, ethics, religion and morals that have been built up through the ages” (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945: 78)

“Culture...refers to that part of the total setting [of human existence] which includes the material objects of human manufacture, techniques, social orientations, points of view, and sanctioned ends that are the immediate conditioning factors underlying behaviour” or in simple terms he says culture is the “Man made part of the environment” (Herskovits, 1948:17).

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 characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of a society (Harris 1975: 144).

“The concept of culture as everything that people have, think, and do as members of a society. This definition can be instructive because the three verbs correspond to the three major components of culture. That is, everything that people have refers to material possessions; everything that people think refers to those things they carry

around in their heads, such as ideas, values, and attitudes; and everything that people do refers to behaviour patterns. Thus all cultures comprise (a) material objects, (b) ideas, values, and attitudes, and (c) patterned ways of behaving” (Gary Ferraro, 1992:18-19).

Irrespective of the various definitions, conceptions and approaches to the understanding of the concept of culture, it is however agreed that culture is a way of life and morality is a part of culture. Practically all modern definitions share key features. Anthropologists say that culture is –

- *Learned, as each person must learn how to “be” a member of that culture*
- *Shared, as it offers all people ideas about behaviour*
- *Symbolic, as it is based on the manipulation of symbols*
- *Systemic and integrated, as the parts of culture work together in an integrated whole*

While summarizing the definition Bodley (1994) says culture is made up of at least three elements or components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. The problem with defining culture as shared values and beliefs, as some anthropologists do, is that there can be a vast difference between what people think they ought to do (value) and what they actually do (behaviour). Moreover, we get much of our evidence for what people do from what people make – that is, from material things (what archaeologists study). Besides these components, culture has several properties or characteristics. So there are many elements and characteristics in a definition of culture. We shall discuss these elements and characteristics of culture in the next section.

Reflection and Action

Define culture based on the definitions that you have just read in the discussion above.

1.3.2 Elements of Culture

A culture is more than the sum of its parts. A mere listing of customs and norms and the material objects associated with them would by no means give a true picture of the culture. For the sake of anthropological analysis, culture may be broken down into the following main elements. These elements or components are: types of norms, sanctions, values, culture trait, culture complex and culture pattern.

Values

What is considered as good, proper and desirable, or bad, improper or undesirable, in a culture can be called as values. It influence people’s behaviour and serve as a benchmark for evaluating the actions of others. There is often a direct relationship between the values, norms, and sanctions of a culture.

Norms

Norms refers to a standard pattern of behaviour that is accepted by a society. Norms may differ from society to society. Generally there are two types of norms formal norms and informal norms. Norms that are written down and violation of which can lead to punishment is referred to as formal norms. By contrast, informal norms are generally understood and followed by a society though not recorded in black and white.

Sanctions

Sanctions consist of both rewards and penalties. It includes rewards for conducting the norms of the society as prescribed or penalties for defying the concerned social norms. Adherence to a norm can lead to positive sanctions such as a medal, a word of gratitude, or a pat on the back. Negative sanctions include fines, threats, imprisonment, and even unpleasant stares for contempt. The most cherished values of a culture will be most heavily sanctioned, whereas matters regarded as less critical will carry light and informal sanctions.

Culture Traits

Culture traits are the smallest (simplest) units of a particular culture. They are the building blocks of culture. Each trait can be material or non-material and it is analogous to the unit of the human body, the cell. Each cultural trait has a form, use, function and meaning. As several cells form a tissue, several traits form a complex culture.

1.3.3 Characteristics or Attributes of Culture

The classical definition of culture by Tylor was a turning point in the theoretical interpretation of culture, which attracted the attentions of various scholars from all over the world. Tylor postulated the theory of unilinear development of human culture ranging from savagery, barbarism to civilization, this sense of unilinear development attracted the attention of the like-minded scholars, who formed a big school of evolutionists, which will be discussed in detail in Block 3 unit I.

The study of Culture took a significant turn after Malinowski's fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders. Malinowski's definition of culture (as discussed above in definition paragraph) emphasised on the biological aspect of culture and explained the biological characteristics of human behaviour. He made distinction between "need" and "impulse" and emphasised on the satisfaction of need, which leads to a number of functions, Malinowski's interpretation of culture was not accepted by some of his contemporaries. Radcliffe-Brown for instance totally disagreed with Malinowski in the biological interpretation of culture. Radcliffe-Brown did not agree with the use of the word "culture" in studying social institution, but his analysis of "social structure" amounts to the wider perspective of culture, as it appears from the contents and themes of the subject dealt with on the social structure. Again, while discussing the social system in social structure he emphasised more on the arrangement of persons, who are the ultimate components of the study, rather than on the arrangement of activities (discussed in detail in Block 3 unit 2).

While the above British anthropologists were making different interpretations of culture and social systems, their counterparts in America emphasised more on the integral and psychological aspects of culture, which helped them develop various meanings and interpretations of culture, which led to the development of "pattern" and "culture and personality" school of thought (discussed in detail in Block 4 unit 1).

In the interpretations and study of culture in anthropology, anthropologists have identified several characteristics or attributes of culture which imply the qualities of culture and convey different meanings, which have further enriched the theories of culture. Some of these important concepts are given below for the benefit of learners.

Culture is socially learned

Culture is a natural outgrowth of the social interactions that constitute human groups whether in societies or organisations. Whenever and wherever people come together over time, culture develops. Culture is learned from our parents, surroundings, and friends and others through enculturation. And the learned behaviour is communicated in the group through forms of socialisation such as observation, instruction, reward, punishment and experience. The learning takes place in individual situation of experiences, social situation of imitating others and cultural situation of symbolic communication.

Culture is symbolic

Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. It is human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning. Symbols are the central components of culture. Symbols refer to anything to which people attach meaning and which one uses to communicate with others. More specifically, symbols are words, objects, gestures, sounds or images that represent something else rather than themselves. There is no obvious natural or necessary connection between a symbol and what it symbolizes. Culture thus works in the symbolic domain emphasising meaning, rather than the technical/practical rational side of human behaviour.

Culture is integrated

Elements or traits that make up a culture are not just a random assortment of customs but are mostly adjusted to or consistent with one another. *Traits* of a culture are attitudes, values, ideals, and rules for behaviour. All aspects of culture function as an inter-related whole. If one part of a culture changes it tends to affect another part.

Culture is adaptive and maladaptive

People adapt themselves to the environment using culture. The ability to adapt themselves to practically any ecological condition, unlike other animals, makes humans unique. This ability is attributed to human's capacity for creating and using culture. Culture has also maladaptive dimensions. That is, the very cultural creations and achievements of people may turn out to threaten their survival. When we see the contemporary problems of the environments, the side effects of rapid growth and in science and technology, etc, we see that culture is also maladaptive.

Culture is all-encompassing

Culture encompasses all aspects, which affect people in their everyday lives. Culture comprises countless material and non-material aspects of human lives; thus, it includes man-made objects, ideas, activities whether those of traditional, of the past or those created lately. Culture is the sum total of human creation: intellectual, technical, artistic, physical, and moral.

Culture is inculcated

All animals are capable of learning but humans alone seem to have considerable measure to pass on their acquired habits to their children. The process known as enculturation has been discussed earlier.

Culture is gratifying

Culture always and necessarily satisfies the basic biological and social needs of human beings. Cultural elements continue so long as they satisfy the needs of humans. If they fail to fulfill the wants of humans, they may be changed or replaced

by new ones to secure the satisfaction of human wants. Gratification of needs reinforces, strengthens and perpetuates cultural elements.

Culture is structured

Culture has a definite and proper structure. This implies that there is definite arrangement of its components and units. The structural components of culture are called traits and complexes. A given culture has many traits and these traits form into complexes, and each one acts as a unit. These traits and complexes are arranged in a systematic manner. This arrangement is the plan or structure of a culture.

Culture is patterned

According to Ruth Benedict cultures are not haphazard collection of customs and beliefs, but are integrated, patterned systems. The parts are interrelated. Culture is an integrated whole, that is the parts of culture are interrelated to one another. No one single cultural trait has its meaning outside of its integrated context.

People use culture creatively

There is difference between ideal culture and real culture. What culture-rules say and what people do may be different; cultural rules tell us what to do and how to do it, but we don't always do what the rules dictate. We use culture creatively.

Culture is stable and yet it changes

Culture is stable when we consider what people hold valuable and are handing over to the next generation in order to maintain their norms and values. Cultures are dynamic they are ever-changing. The change in a society can be of two types: internal changes (invention) and external changes (cultural diffusion).

Culture in Region

Socio-cultural anthropologists talk about culture region which is the geographical territory in which a particular culture prevails. It is marked by all the characteristics of a culture, including modes of dress, building styles, farms and field and other material manifestation. That is there are sub-cultures, regional cultures, national cultures, and international cultures.

Cultural Universals, specialties and alternatives

Cultural *universals* are features that are found in every culture, those that distinguish *Homo sapiens* from other species. Anthropology assumes that all human beings are fundamentally alike and they share the same basic biological, psychological, social and other characteristics. People all over the world have certain common obligations towards one another. All people are members of a single community; they all have the same root and destiny. This belief is either explicit or implicit in most of the great world religions. Certain biological, psychological, social and cultural features of human beings are universal; others are merely generalities, common to several but not to all human groups. Still other cultural features are particularities unique to certain cultural traditions (for details see Hammond, 1971).

Culture Shock

All of us, to some extent or other, take for granted the cultural practices of our society. As a result, it can be surprising and disturbing to realise that other cultures do not follow the same way of life. Culture shock can be set off either by the physical items of an unfamiliar culture or by the ways that people act. Yet we can experience culture shock even in our own society. Culture shock is the psychological and social maladjustment at micro or macro level that is experienced for the first

time when people encounter new cultural elements such as new things, new ideas, new concepts, seemingly strange beliefs and practices. No person is protected from culture shock. However, individuals vary in their capacity to adapt and overcome the influence of culture shock (*Ibid*, Angeloni, 1998; Howrad and Dunaif-Hattis, 1992).

Overt and covert

Overt and covert refer to the qualities of culture as detected by an observer. The observer may be an anthropologist, or a member of a society who is unfamiliar with certain parts of the culture. Overt means easily detectable qualities of a culture. These include artifacts, actions, utterances, which can be perceived directly. Artifacts include houses, clothes, books, tools etc. actions imply postures in various situations, curing practices, sports, externally manifested signs of respect etc. utterances include speech, songs, proverbs etc. An observer can easily detect these qualities because one has plenty of opportunities to see them, experience them and record them. On the other hand covert implies those qualities of culture which are not easily detected by an outsider. Sentiments, beliefs, fears and values are some of the cultural items which cannot be easily detectable i.e., they are covert. They are not amenable to direct observation and moreover people cannot always explain what they feel. It is generally difficult to express these abstract ideas.

Explicit and implicit

According to Kluckhohn explicit means the people's awareness of existence of the cultural items. Implicit implies the people's dim awareness or unawareness of certain cultural items. Explicitness and implicitness concern the experience of people possessing the culture, while overt and covert refer to the view of the observer. Explicit cultural items can be verbalised or criticized readily by the persons who possess them. But there are certain items of culture about which people are only dimly aware or unaware of. Hence they cannot give any clear accounts on such cultural items. These are implicit items of the culture.

Ideality and reality

Ideality of culture refers to how people say they should behave, or the way they would like to live. Reality is the actual way people behave. There is generally a discrepancy between ideality and reality.

Ethos and Eidos

Kroeber has drawn attention to these two aspects of culture. Ethos refers to the effective or emotional quality of a culture expressed in series of beliefs, thoughts and behaviour. It acts as a central force, interest theme or pattern and colors every item of culture. As it determines what people should have, do, think, and feel, prepares all the people in a culture to express the same emotional tone in all acts, thoughts and feelings. Whereas Eidos is the formal appearance of a culture derived from its constituents. Through cognitive processes operating within, a culture acquires its formal appearance or eidos. Eidos is the totality of items of culture. On the contrary ethos is the emotional quality coloring this totality. Ethos is affective but eidos is cognitive.

Organic and Superorganic

Culture is organic in the sense that it is ultimately rooted in the biological nature of human organism. Without humans to act, to think, to feel, or to make and use things, there would be no culture. Thus culture is organic. Culture is superorganic

while it is organic. Once created, culture acquires a superorganic quality or the quality by virtue of which culture exists on a level above that of the individuals who create and carry it. According to Kroeber, culture becomes a phenomenon in its own right, with its own laws and processed apart from the human carriers who sustain it. Culture is superorganic to the extent that it outlines the particular generation of people who carry it and so persists from one generation to another. This does not mean that its origin is other than biological. Culture is created by humans and it is dependent on human choice for its continuity. Culture can be altered through the decisions of human beings. But this does not mean it is easy to change culture. The superorganic may be injurious to the organic. Some cultural traits for instance, are definitely harmful to the organic life of the humans. The superorganic is an order of phenomenon different from the organic and goes its way with a certain amount of independence from the organic.

Universal and unique

Culture is universal in the sense that every man experiences it and uniqueness of culture implies its regional variations. Some cultural traits are necessary to all members of the society. These cultural traits are called cultural universals like for e.g. Incest taboo.

Civilization and Culture

The civilization represents a particular type of culture. The term “civilization” has been used almost synonymously with culture. This is because civilization and culture are different aspects of a single entity. Civilization can be viewed as the external manifestation, and culture as the internal character of a society. Thus, civilization is expressed in physical attributes, such as tool making, agriculture, buildings, technology, urban planning, social structure, social institutions, and so forth. Culture, on the other hand, refers to the social standards and norms of behaviour, the traditions, values, ethics, morality, and religious beliefs and practices that are held in common by members of the society. Both culture and civilization have been developed by the same human processes. Both are complimentary to each other. Culture needs a civilization for further growth. Civilization needs culture even for its vital force and survival. The two are therefore interdependent. Civilization cannot survive without strong stimulus and motive, however high may be its achievements in science.

Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism

The two concepts ethnocentrism and cultural relativism occupy key positions in socio-cultural anthropology. They are the most sensitive and controversial issues in sociology and socio-cultural anthropology. The general pattern is to judge the behaviour of other people in other groups by the standards of our own culture. In his book “Folkways” Sociologist William Graham Sumner coined the term *ethnocentrism* to refer to the tendency to assume that one’s culture and way of life are superior to all others. (Sumner 1906).

The ethnocentric person sees his or her own group as the center or defining point of culture and views all other cultures as deviations from what is “normal.” Anthropologists endeavor as far as possible to avoid ethnocentrism. *Cultural Relativism/ Cultural determinism* approach was first formulated by Franz Boas in North America in 19th century. He says no culture should be judged by the standards of another. *Cultural relativism* views people’s behaviour from the perspective of their own culture. It places a priority on *understanding* other cultures, rather than dismissing them as “strange” or “exotic.” Any part of a culture

must be viewed from within its cultural context-not that of the observer or the notion that there are no universal standards by which all cultures may be evaluated. Cultures must be analyzed with reference to their own histories and culture traits understood in terms of the cultural whole.

Reflection and Action

Do you think some cultures are 'superior' while others are 'inferior'? Discuss.

1.3.4 Culture and Society

Culture is the sum total of learned, shared and socially transmitted behaviour that includes ideas, values, and customs of groups of people. A fairly large number of people living in the same territory constitute a *society*. Members of a society share a common language, which facilitates day-to-day exchanges with others and participate in a common culture. Nadel in his work says it is necessary to make a distinction between "Culture" from its companion term "society." According to him culture is the way of life of the people; while a society is an organised, interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life. In simple terms a society is composed of people; the way they behave is their culture. (Nadel, S.F. 2006)

Since the time of Boas, culture became a tool for understanding and describing the exotic society. Anthropological study on cultural relativism allows a comparison of culture without assuming evolutionary hierarchies. It means that every culture has in its own rights to be different and does not stand for the purpose of other culture. In other words, all cultures express validity in their perspective of the world. Thus, it could be in-appropriate to judge cannibalism activity among society even if we use universal notion on violence. What we can do is try to understand the reason and rationalise such activity.

Early notion of culture was popularised among Anthropologist in order to understand homogeneous societies. In the modern world the relationship between culture and society is a complex one. Culture is produced and reproduced within the society and society acts in certain way in a culture. But how does culture work in the complex societies? Early Anthropologists used culture as the set of practical and contingent significations, while postmodernists use it to mark the domain of signifying practices.

According to Pertierra, (2004) society can be seen as the collection of individual members pursuing their interest in the context of formal rules administered by specialists and implemented by the state. It was also a constant state of self-constitution, whose members are engaged in individual life projects marked by purposive and value rationality. Society consists of individuals mostly unknown to one another but nevertheless linked through abstract categories such as class, nation, or gender. In this case society assumed as the real place or arena, an institution in which individuals play their roles in order to achieve their different objectives. When we see the relation between society and culture, society and culture are two elements that are complementing each other. Society expresses itself through culture. We can associate the group of people or society from the culture they practice, such as Asian society is characterised by Asian culture, or Javanese society with its Javanese culture.

Furthermore, culture is manifested in the socio economic structures as frames for the organisation of social relationship, it is embedded both in the material setting

and the social institutions of society. Material experiences are organised and group relations are structured through culture. But culture has also the medium through which the social world is experienced, interpreted and understood. In this sense, culture is something more basic than ideological superstructure. Culture is produced in a given society within the framework set by the socio-economic structure. The cultural process perpetually occurs among the different groups and classes in a society, and also affects social structure (Erna Herawati 2006).

1.4 SUMMARY

In this unit we have studied the anthropological meaning of the concept society and culture. It is derived from the Latin word *socius* which means companionship or friendship. We have come to know that a society comprises of a group of people who share a common culture, live in a particular area and feel themselves to constitute a unified and distinct entity. Society or human society is a group of people related to each other through persistent relations such as kinship, marriage, social status, roles and social networks. By extension, society denotes the people of a region or country, sometimes even the world, taken as a whole.

Culture is one of the basic concepts of anthropology. Anthropologists have been discussing and debating definitions of culture since the origin of the discipline in the 19th century. To review, we may say that culture is— *Learned*, as each person must learn how to “be” a member of that culture, *Shared*, as it offers all people ideas about behaviour, *Symbolic*, as it is based on the manipulation of symbols, and *Systemic and integrated*, as the parts of culture work together in an integrated whole.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Define anthropological meaning of the concept of culture.
- 2) Discuss the key characteristics or attributes of culture.
- 3) Discuss the relationship between society and culture.