

Culture: (course content- Meaning, characteristics, culture and Personality) chapter-3, Intermediate and B.A Part 2nd Subsidiary, Sociology

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Culture

Besides society, role, status and institution, culture is another important theme that engages the attention of sociologists. Ordinarily, even those, who are not at all familiar with sociology, are familiar with the word 'culture'. In our daily life, we may describe some people as very 'cultured'. We give such a label if persons concerned are refined and polished in their behaviour and manner. But sociologists do not use the term 'culture' in this sense. They have their own, special understanding of it.

In sociological terms, culture can be defined as the total sum of human activities, which are learnt. It is passed on from generation to generation through membership of a particular society. As various learning processes in human societies involve systems of tools, communications and symbols, we can also say that the concept of culture refers to a system of tools, communications and symbols. People in order to learn new activities require tools, language and symbols.

Cultures in human societies differ from one another and also, change over time. One of the gains of studying sociology is that besides giving an idea of various cultures, it also helps to develop an understanding of other cultures than one's own.

Culture and Human Behaviour/ Personality:

A little reflection will show that in similar situations, people of different cultures reveal differences in the way they meet these situations. For example, while greeting friends and

relatives, at home or on the street, men in our society may shake hands with other men but as a rule, not with women. Similarly, notwithstanding great hunger, a vegetarian refuses non-Vegetarian food. This is because culture influences our behaviour in given situations. Stated in sociological terms, culture is **normative**, that is, it provides standards of proper conduct, and also therefore, tells us, what is right or wrong. Concretely, these standards are provided to us by what are called **cultural norms**. Thus, while many college students smoke these days, they do not normally do so in the presence of their elders or teachers. In our culture, such an act is considered to be wrong, that is, contrary to our cultural norms. The content of the non-material culture of every society consists of a large number of norms. These norms are learnt and enforced by folkways and mores.

What culture is?

- (a) A way of thinking, feeling, believing.
- (b) The total way of life of a people.
- (c) An abstraction from behaviour.
- (d) Learned behaviour.
- (e) A storehouse of pooled learning.
- (f) The social legacy the individual acquires from his group.
- (g) A set of standardised orientations to recurrent problems.
- (h) A mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour.