

Culture and Society

Department of Sociology

Learning material

Semester 1

Core Course CC1

1/UG-H/CC1: Introduction to Sociology

Contents

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Introduction

Society and culture two important concepts in sociology. We all live in societies and it is society which distinguishes human beings from animals.

Societies are universally found and involves a web of relationships among individual members who are in constant interaction with one another. They share a common way of life and it is this shared way of life which is referred to culture in sociology.

Definition

- MacIver has define **society** as “a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever-changing complex system we call society. It is a web of social relationships. And it is always changing”.
- E.B.Taylor has defined **culture** as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. It is the total way of life of a group.

Difference between society and society.

In everyday usage people do not usually make a distinction between “culture” and “society”, but the terms have different meanings in sociology.

Society

- It is a collection of individuals .
- It refers to a group of people who share a common territory.
- The individuals are united by a web of relations.
- They share a common way of life.
- There is mutual recognition and interaction between the members of a society.
- It is a set of institutions and is characterized by a social structure.

Culture

- It is the total way of life of the people.
- It is shared by a group of people. This shared way of life is what is referred to as culture.
- It includes non- material things like beliefs, values, norms etc. but also material things like tools, dress, food etc.
- It is learned and is transmitted from one generation to another

Characteristics of society

- Society is a web of social relationships and therefore two important features that characterize society are:
 - Mutual recognition.
 - A sense of belonging together or a consciousness of kind.
- Society is a structure which is maintained by social institutions. It is a complex structure of institutions.
- It is constituted of inter-related parts which work together for the survival of the society.
- Society is always changing and evolving from simple to complex with the changes in social relations.

Components of culture

- **Values and beliefs**- values are shared agreement among members of a society as to what is desirable and good what is not desirable and bad. It implies shared interests directed towards certain objects or practice. Beliefs are the convictions that people hold to be true.
- **Norms** – norms are rules of conduct which specify appropriate behaviour in a given range of social contexts. A norm either prescribes a certain type of behaviour or forbids it and is backed by sanctions. There are various types of norms:
 - **Folkways** – they are informal rules of behaviour which regulate everyday life and its violation is not severely punished.
 - **Mores** – they are norms which are considered vital and morally important for the well being of the group. They are internalised and their violation leads to severe sanctions.
 - **Laws** – laws are rules which are formally established by the state and are enforced by state agencies of social control.
 - **Customs and rituals** – they are long established traditional usages or practice common to members of a group and form their identity as a group. Rituals are social enactments in which a group's beliefs, values and norms are demonstrated with the context of a specific event e.g. A marriage ceremony.

Reference

- Bierstedt, Robert, 1974, *The Social Order*, New York: McGraw Hill Book Company Part 3, Chapter 5, 'The Meaning of Culture' Pp. 125-151, Chapter 6 , 'The Content of Culture Pp. 152 – 187, Chapter 7, 'The Acquisition of Culture', Pp. 188 - 212

Expected Questions

- Give E.B.Taylor's definition of culture.
- Define society. What are the important characteristics of society?
- Elaborate in detail the various components of culture.
- Differentiate between material and non-material culture.
- Bring out the important differences between society and culture.

Previous Years Questions

- What is culture? Define material and non-material culture.
- What is socialisation? Write in brief about the different stages of socialisation.