

Cultures build shelter,  
how to travel and  
transport,



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Cultures of all societies whether pre-literate or literate include a vast amount of knowledge about the physical and social world. The possession of this knowledge is referred to as the cognitive element. Even the most primitive or pre-literate peoples such as the A Daman and Trobriand Islanders must know about many things in order to survive.

Their knowledge is practical knowledge and never “ knowledge for its own sake”. Knowledge, relating, to how to get food, how to build shelter, how to travel and transport, how to protect themselves agilest storms, wild animals and hostile People is nothing but practical knowledge. Such knowledge is carefully taught to each generation. In modem advanced societies knowledge is so vast, deep and complex that no Single person can hope to master the whole of it. Further, every society has in its culture many ideas about its own social organisation and how it works.

2. Beliefs: Beliefs constitute another element of culture. Beliefs in empirical terms are neither true nor false. Examples: (i) The Eskimo shaman uses fetishes and goes into a loud trance in order to drive out the evil spirits from the body of a sick person, (ii) The Christian missionary who gives medicine to and advises the patient to take sufficient rest also utters a silent prayer for the speedy recovery of the patient. Such actions imply some kind of beliefs. The belief behind these actions cannot be confirmed or rejected on the basis of empirical evidence. For example, if the patient dies in spite of the efforts, of Shaman, he will have some “ explanation” that will make him to stick on to the belief in evil spirits.

Civilised men to create similar beliefs and pass them on to the succeeding generations. Tested empirical knowledge and untestable beliefs are “elements” of culture. Because, they are often mixed together in the same concrete acts.

Only through an intellectual analysis the different elements could be separated from one another. For example, the missionary says a silent prayer and at the same time administers modern medical tests to the patient. 3. Values and Norms: It is very difficult to enlist values and norms for they are so numerous and diverse. They are inseparable from attitudes, except perhaps, analytically. Values may be defined as measures of goodness or desirability. They are the group conceptions of relative desirability of things. In sociology we are most concerned with values that are directly or indirectly involved in social relationships; moral and religious values that have been to some extent institutionalised.

One way of understanding the values and their interconnections is to approach them through the four functional subsystems of society. This subsystems-are: government, family, economy and religion. The function or the social activities that these four interconnected subsystems perform are to a great extent shaped by values.

But these four subsystems are not equally stressed as equally important in all societies. The values most characteristic of one (or two) subsystem normally predominate in any society. It means political values,, or family values, or economic values or religious values normally predominate.

Example: In his study Bellah has shown that in Japan during the Tokugawa period (16th to 19th century A. D.) ' Political Values' were the most dominant ones. The emperor was at the top of hierarchy and enjoyed great power and respect. Merchants who pursued economic activities were given comparatively a low status. Even in the family loyalty to the nation and to the emperor was stressed as a great value. Japanese religion also stressed the dominance of political values. In Japan filial loyalty or piety which was equally both a religious and a social value, was subordinated to the loyalty of the state.

Shintoism and Zen-Buddhism, the two main religions of Japan stressed much the value of loyalty to the nation. Here " Other-worldly" religious doctrine and practice were subordinated to political values. In the same manner, in India religious values dominated Indian social system for hundreds of years. Even now it is quite dominant. But how can we know what values are dominant in society? Sociologist Williams has suggested the following criterion of dominant values: (i) Extensiveness of the value in the total activity of the System, (ii) Duration of the value, that is how persistently it has been important over a period of time, (iii) Intensity with which the value is sought or maintained, (iv) Prestige of the value carriers that is, of persons, objects, or organisations considered to be bearers of the value. Further, every society has secondary values in addition to its dominant values.

For example, in Japan, " aesthetic-emotional' values are secondary for there is a considerable stress on them. In India, political values have secondary place. Norms are closely associated with values. They are the group-shared

standards of behaviour. Norms impose restrictions on our behaviour. They are model practices; they determine, control and guide our behaviour.

In fact, values are cherished only through the observance of norms. Norms are established on the basis of values. Hence norms and values go together. For H. M. Johnson, " Values are general standards, and may be regarded as higher order norms ".

Norms and values together constitute an important element in culture. 4.

Signs: Signs include signals and symbols. " A signal (also means sign) indicates the existence -f past, present, or future - of a thing, event, or conditions ".

Example: A heap of half burnt particles of a house signalise that the house was caught by fire sometimes earlier. Similarly, wet streets are a signal that it has rained. Soldiers going to parade ground with uniform signal that they are going to have their parade. Thus, signal and its objects are both parts of a more complex event or unit. A number of invented or artificial symbols are used in social life when assume importance. Example: A shot may mean the beginning of a running race, the sighting of danger, the commencement of a parade, the starting of war, the killing^ )f a wild animal, a terrorist activity, and so on - Signals and symbols are slightly different. A placard bearing the words " No Parking" is a signal. It indicates the presence of a place where one is not supposed to park one's vehicles.

But the words in the placard represent symbols. Like a signal, a symbol means something to the interpreting. But it serves to bring a concept of something to his mind rather than to announce the presence of the thing

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itself. For example, 'deer' or 'dove' indicates such a concept. 'Deer' or 'dove' indicates an animal or a bird of a particular kind. Thus, "a signal is involved in a three-term relationship (interpretant, signal, object) while a symbol is involved in a four-term Relationship (interpretant, symbol, concept, object)".

Signals are involved in all our practical activities. Symbols are important in many kinds of communication and expression, including religion and art. In all societies language is an important symbol system. At the level of pre-literate people language is entirely oral. Written records have helped people as symbol system to depend upon the memories, of the aged, and knowledge of the past.

Because of his inability-to make use of symbols of written records, the mental horizon of the preliterate man is likely to be very low. The languages (such as English, Spanish, French and German) which have a vast collection, of books on a wide variety of subjects or topics have the key to an extremely rich culture. Speech an' aspect of language system consists of vocal and other kinds of gestures - bowing, shaking hands, saluting, kissing, blushing, etc. These gestures too have symbolic meanings which are mostly cultural.

For example, one smile at known persons, weeps when confronted with grief, laughs when happy, and so on. In such instances, the gestures are interpreted correctly as signals based on internalised symbols. But all the gestures are not necessarily connected intrinsically with the feeling it connotes, For example, one must smile at acquaintances whether one is really glad to see them or not. Jesus kissed Judas who betrayed him. In the

shared common system of symbols in addition to speech and gestures another factor is important and, that is, 'intentions' of the participants in any stabilised social interaction. It could be said that "Any object or aspect of objects that is involved in a stabilised social relationship may acquire a cultural symbolic meaning for the interacting participants".

Many material products or things are primarily symbol vehicles. Flags, pictures and statues serve here as examples. Similarly, a building or a camp, or a ship, or a tomb, or an idol, or physical place, etc., signifies a symbolic form, the meaning of which is cultural. 5. Non-Normative Ways of Behaving: Certain ways of behaving are not compulsory and are often unconscious. Such patterns do exist. Non-normative behaviour shades over into normative behaviour and symbolic behaviour.

For example, the Jewish gestures largely involve the hands, they tend to symbolise the subtle evolution of an argument, a train of thought. The Italian gestures involve the whole arm and they tend to express emotions. Both these symbol systems have tended to disappear in the second and later generations of the Jews and Italians in the United States.