UNIT 3: CULTURE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- know about the concept of culture.
- discuss the various social institutions
- understand the concept of primary social institution, that is, family, kinship and marriage
- explain kinship terminology
- explain types and forms of marriages
- discuss the characteristics and functions of family.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

When an individual grows up, he is taught about his culture, the way of life within the society. The individual also gets to know about the roles, duties in the society through the process of socialisation. In this unit we will learn

about the concept of culture as well as socialisation. We will also discuss the concept of social problems, like youth unrest, unemployment, crime and others.

3.3 CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Culture is a kind of learned behaviour. In Sociology, culture is all that which is transmitted socially rather than biologically within the society. Culture means the way of life of a social group. It includes those ideas, techniques and habits which are passed on by one generation to another. Culture is universal among all human groups and even exists among some primates. All cultures have to provide for the physical, emotional and social needs of their members, enculturate new members, resolve conflicts and promote survival for their members.



Culture is transmitted socially rather than biologically within the society.

The possession of a common culture and the ability to communicate and pass it on to others distinguishes human beings from other animals. Human beings are social animals. Human beings share a common culture, which they pass on by means of language. Language is also a product of culture itself.

Some important definitions of culture are as follows:

E.B. Tylor defines culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

According to Malinowski, "culture is the handiwork of man and the medium through which he achieves his ends."

R. Firth describes culture as the "component of accumulated resources, material as well as non-material, which the people inherit, employ, transmute, add to and transmit. "

MacIver and Page defines culture as "the expression of our nature on our modes of living, thinking, intercourse, religious ceremonies, literature and enjoyment".

According to Redfield, "culture is an organised body of conventional understanding, manifest in art and artifact, which persisting through tradition,

characterizes a human group".

Generally culture is classified into two groups:

The first category consists of concrete, physical and material culture. This aspect of culture is man-made, objective and material. It is called material culture. Material culture is similar to civilisation. These include homes, neighborhoods, cities, schools, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, offices, factories and plants, tools, means of production, goods and products, stores, and so forth. All of these physical aspects of a culture help to define its members' behaviors and perceptions. For example, technology is a vital aspect of material culture

The other aspect of culture is non-material, it is abstract as well as non-material. It includes ideas, knowledge, tradition, belief, art and so on. For example, religion consists of a set of ideas and beliefs about God, worship, morals, and ethics. These beliefs, then, determine how the culture responds to its religious topics, issues, and events.



ACTIVITY

Give examples of material and non-material culture from your own cultural group.

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3.3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

Some of the important characteristics of culture are:

Culture is learned. It is not biological; we do not inherit it. Much of learning culture is unconscious. We learn culture from families, peers, institutions, and media. The process of learning culture is known as

enculturation. While all humans have basic biological needs such as food, sleep, and sex, the way we fulfill those needs varies cross-culturally.

Culture is shared. We share culture with other members of our group and hence we are able to act in socially appropriate ways as well as predict how others will act. Despite the shared nature of culture, that doesn't mean that culture is homogenous (the same). There are variations within different cultural groups, each having their own set of beliefs, and practices.

- Culture is based on symbols. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Symbols vary cross-culturally and are arbitrary. They only have meaning when people in a culture agree on their use. Language, money and art are all symbols. Language is the most important symbolic component of culture.



Language is the most important symbolic component of culture.

- Culture is integrated. This is known as holism, or the various parts of a culture being interconnected. All aspects of a culture are related to one another and to truly understand a culture, one must learn about all of its parts, not only a few.

- Culture is dynamic. This simply means that cultures interact and change. Most cultures are in contact with other cultures, and hence they exchange ideas and symbols. All cultures change, otherwise, they would have problem adapting to changing environments.

3.3.2 FUNCTIONS OF CULTURE

After learning about the different characteristics of culture, we will now discuss the functions of culture.

- Culture makes man a human being. Culture provides us with a design for living. Culture helps man to regulate his conduct and preparing him for a group life.

- Culture provides solutions for complicated situations. It provides a kind of guide map for all our life activites. Culture prescribes the behaviour and way of life in the society. Hence for an individual, culture becomes his only solution to make a decision while facing different situations.

- Culture might also provide traditional solutions for certain situations. Such traditional interpretations differ from culture to culture.

- Culture provides a series of pattern by which biological and socio-cultural demands of group members are met e.g. food, shelter, and reproduction and relationship with group and individuals. This helps in keeping social relationships intact.
- Culture broadens the vision of the individual. Culture provides a set of rules to ensure co-operation of the individuals of a group in adjusting to different environmental situations. Culture teaches the individual to think of himself as a part of the larger whole.
- Culture creates new needs for the individual. It satisfies the aesthetic, moral and religious interests of the members of the group.
- Culture acts as a means of social control through norms, rules and regulations in the society. What is right, or wrong, or say socially acceptable is defined by culture.

Thus, we have discussed the different characteristics as well as functions of culture. Now we need to discuss another very important and closely related concept, which is social institution.

3.4 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The word institution means that which is established or constituted in society. In sociology, the term relates to organs that performs society's functions. Institution is an established way of behaving or an established form of procedure.

Sumner in 'Folkways' (1906) held that an institution consists of a concept (idea, nation, doctrine, interest) and structure. W. Hamilton in 'The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences' argues that institutions are group procedures, from which deviations by members will be sanctioned with various degrees of severity.

According to MacIver and Page, institutions may be defined as the "established forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity."

Institutions exist to discipline and regulate human behaviour. They have a permanent and binding character. Institutions are abstract and it determines the operation of society, association or organisation.

There are five primary institutions. **They are family, economy, religion, education and state.** All the five are closely interrelated and any change in one is bound to have impact on all the others.



Social Institutions uphold sanctioned procedures of behaviour in the society.

3.4.1 MEANING AND DEFINITION

In our daily life we do many work, we play several role as a son, as a daughter, as a student and as an employer. In performing such roles some knowledge about group procedures as what to do, and what not to do is already in our mind. The organs which have given us pre-conceived notion of what is right and what is wrong are social institutions.

Social institutions are sanctioned norms and procedures which we follow in our day to day life knowingly or unknowingly. In general understanding, an institution is a building or an organization. However in sociological sense, this is not the true definition of an institution. For example a school or an office building is an institution for common people, while in sociological usage the meaning of institution is broader. Sociologically an institution is a system of norms and a body of belief as well as behaviour which are to be followed by a group of people in important areas of social life. They are devised by the people for the smooth functioning of the society.

The institutions appeared into our social life due to social needs. These needs became institutions when it is acknowledged by the people. For example, the concept of family as an institution emerge out of the need for a common roof, mutual love and care, common ancestral property, and later becomes sanctioned institutions. Earlier, people used to live a nomadic life without a family. The nomadic life was often barbaric and people cannot depend on each other for mental security. The concept of parents, partner came into being and people thought of believing its needs. Thus, the concept of 'family' as a social institution came into being.

Hence from time to time, people united to give social confirmation to these different practices as they continue to develop and change. This is how social institution emerges.

There are different perspectives which say differently about social institutions. According to the functionalist perspective, social institution is a

set of social normns, beliefs, values and role relationship that arise in response to the need of the society. On the other hand, according to the conflict perspective social institutions, whether familial, religious, educational will operate in the interests of the dominant caste.

According to A.W. and H. Gouldner, "institutions are the standardised ways of solving society's problems."

According to Hamilton, "institutions are the group procedures, deviation from which is sanctioned with various degree of severity by its members."

The various characteristics of social institutions are:

- Social institutions are universal. This is common and found among all societies.
- Social institutions are devised by people out of repeated group activity.
- Social institutions are devised by people in response to certain basic human drives or needs. (such as sex, hunger, fear etc.)
- Social institutions are externally stored and handed down from one generation to the next for the smooth functioning of the society.

In the next section we will discuss the primary social institutions. These are family, kinship and marriage.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the five primary types of social institutions?

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Q 2: According to the functionalist perspective, define social institutions.

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3.4.2 TYPES OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

No society can exist without having institutions of family, kinship and marriage. These are regarded as the primary social institutions. Family, kinship and marriage are closely linked to one another, so much so that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Family as an institution puts together husband and wife, children and other relatives under the same roof. A family is often formed by marital ties along with blood ties which bind both the husband and the wife into mutual obligation and commitment.

Kinship determines the ways in which a person is related by blood and affinity and sets rules and regulations regarding culturally patterned relationship between kinsman, avoidance and inheritance of property. Thus, the study of family, kinship and marriage brings out not only issues of socio-cultural nature, but also it depicts one's relation to rights, claims, obligations, contract, agnation and co-operation etc. Now let us begin our discussion with the concept of family as a social institution.

a. FAMILY

Family is a basic social organisation and an universal social institution without which we cannot think of human society. Family is a group of people under one common roof and united by blood relations or marital ties or by adoption.

G.P Murdock defines "family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction."

Nimkoff says that family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without children or of a man or woman alone or with children.

Malinowski opined that the family is the institution through which the cultural traditions of a society is handed over to a new generation. On the other hand, Talcott Parsons put forward that families are factories which produce human personalities.

The word family is used in several different ways. According to A.M Shah there are four interrelated social situations of family in India. They

are:

- The body of persons who live in one house or under one head, including parents, children, servants etc.
- The group consisting of parents and their children, whether living together or not.
- In wider sense all those who are nearly related by blood and affinity.
- Those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor, a house, kindred, lineage.

Main Characteristics of Family

- Family is universal. There is no such society where some form of family does not appear. A typical family consists of mother, father and their descendants and is found in all communities, savage, barbarian and civilised.
- The family is responsible for raising children to become contributing members of society.
- The family is grounded in emotions and sentiments. It is built upon sentiments of love and parental care, affection, sympathy, co-operation, and friendship. Family carries the responsibility of socialising a child and teaching them norms and values of the society.
- Family provides economic support for members of the family.

Types and forms of family

Family is universal, but it has different forms. On the basis of the structure, family can be classified into two main types, joint family and nuclear family.

- **Joint family :** A Joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked in one kitchen, who hold property in common, participate in common family worship and are related to one another.
- **Nuclear family :** Nuclear family consists of a man, his wife and their children. This is known as elementary family or nuclear family.

An elementary family includes members of two generations. For example parents and their children.

On the basis of ancestry or descent family is divided into matrilineal and patrilineal family.

- **Matrilineal family :** It follows its ancestry and descendants through the mother's side of the family.
- **Patrilineal family :** It follows its ancestry and descendants through the father side of the family.

  On the basis of the nature of relations among the family members families were divided into Conjugal family and Consanguine family.
- **Conjugal family :** Conjugal family is one family which is established on the basis of marriage or affinal ties. For example family composed by husband and wife.
- **Consanguine family :** Consanguine family is the one which is formed on the basis of the blood relations. For example unmarried children with single parent.

On the basis of the authority the family is divided into two types: Patriarchal family and Matriarchal family.

In patriarchal family, male occupies the soul position of in the family. It is most common and universal pattern of family.

In matriarchal families female occupies the position of sole decision maker of the family as well as authority. But it is most uncommon and rarely available. Example: Khasi people.

Functions of Family

- Family helps in reproduction or procreation of the human race asa whole.
- Protection and care of the young
- Family helps in socialisation process by teaching the child noms, values, beliefs and ideals of society.

In the next section we will discuss the concept of kinship as a social institution.



ACTIVITY

Can you identify and categorise the forms and types of your own family.

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b. KINSHIP

Kinship basically means relations between 'kin' related by blood (consanguine) or marital ties (affinity). Kinship provides categories for distinguishing between the people. Kinship categories helps in defining social relationship. These social relationships may be of authority and of subordination, of domestic co-operation, of ritual or ceremonial in nature.

Thus, kinship refers to the ways and means by which social ordering takes place. Kinship also plays a role in succession, inheritance of property, and divisions, rule of avoidance etc. Indian villages are well equipped with kinship categories like castes, subcastes, clan and lineages. Kinship provides a guide to many social relationship and provides a way of transmitting status and property from one generation to the next.

A.R Radcliffe Brown defines kinship as "a system of dynamic relations between people in a community, the behavior of any two persons in any of these relations being regulated in some way, and to a greater or less extent by social usage. " The system of kinship as we understood so far is the way in which relations between individuals and groups are organised. Kinship occupies a central place in all human societies.

While we are discussing the concept of kinship, we also need to understand certain related concepts. These are:

- **Clan :** A group of people who are believed to have descended from a common ancestor.
- **Descent :** A descent is any social group in which membership depends on a common ancestor.

- **Lineage :** A group recruited by common descent is called is called lineage. There may be several lineages in a given clan.
- **Kindred :** Kindred means body of persons, who are genealogically linked to the ego. For example my family members are kindred to me.
- **Cognates :** All the people who are related by blood in any way to an individual are known as cognates.
- **Affines :** Those who are related to a person by marriage are affines.

Types of Kin

So far we have understood that kinship is a web of social relationship. This social relationship is established by a particular lineage or descent and it suggests different types of kin groups. The different kin groups are:

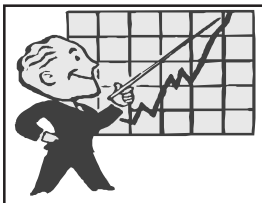
- **Primary kin :** Every individual who belongs to a nuclear family finds his primary kins within the family. For example, husband-wife, father-son, mother-son, father-daughter, mother-daughter, younger brother-elder brother, etc.
- **Secondary kin :** Secondary kins are close relatives outside the primary family. For example mother's brother, brother's wife, sister's husband, father's brother.
- **Tertiary kin :** Tertiary kins refer to the secondary relatives of our primary kins. For example wife's brother's son, sister's husband's brother and so on.

Although kinship looks concerned with biological connection between kins, yet it also gives social recognition to the relationship between parent and child. For example, relationship between cross-cousins (children of mother's brother or father's sister). In small scale societies kinship is very important. Kinship determines where a person would live, his group, his community membership. Kinship also defines the rules for marriage as well as inheritance of property.

The relationships defined under the kinship system is more of a culturally defined thing. All cultures distinguish between various categories of kin and

affines as well as rules of marriage. For example, in case of northern India, cross-cousin marriage among the Hindus is like a taboo; a thing which is to be avoided and considered unacceptable. But in south India, the process of cross-cousin marriage is common among Hindus. So we can see how various kinship patterns lead to various rules within the marriage system.

After we have dealt with the concept of kinship, in the next section we will try to understand marriage as a form of social institution.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Give the definition of a matrilineal family.

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Q 4: What do you mean by cognates and affines?

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Q 5: Define tertiary kins.

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c. MARRIAGE

Marriage is a social institution that recommends union between people. The definition of marriage varies according to different cultures, but is usually a social institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged. People marry for various reasons, like legal, social, emotional, economic, spiritual and religious. Among them, the social reason is prominent. This is because marriage provides sanctioned relationship to a man and woman and binds them in mutual obligations and rights essential for the functioning of a family, which is again essential for social life. Marriage might include family obligations, the protection of children

and public declaration of commitment.

Marriage as a social institution is universal, but different society has different forms and rules of marriages. In some societies, arranged marriages by the families are preferred. While in some other cases, marriage partners are of one's own choice. In India marriages are celebrated like festivals and arrange marriage are more popular.

Mazumdar defines "Marriage as a socially sanctioned union between male and female for the purpose of establishing a household, entering into sex relations, procreating and providing care for the offspring "

In 'History of Human Marriage', Westermarck defines marriage as "the more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring."

According to Malinowski "marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children."

According to Robert Lowie "marriage is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates."

However there are various rules governing the marriage system. Endogamy is one such rule of marriage in which the marriage partners are to be selected within one's own group. For example one has to marry within one's own caste. The other rule for marriage is exogamy in which an individual has to marry outside his own group. For instance, there can be no marital relations between those who are related by blood.

Types of Marriage

Basically, there are two main types of marriage: Monogamy and Polygamy.

In case of monogamy, marriage between several partners is restricted. In monogamy one man can have one wife and one woman can have one husband. According to Malinowski, "monogamy has been and will, remain the only true type of marriage." Monogamy is a popular marriage pattern in society and is accepted as natural and universal.

Polygamy is a form of marriage in which a person can marry more than one partner at a time. Polygamy can take either of two form that is

Polygyny and Polyandry.

Polygyny denotes one man's marriage with two or more women. Polygyny is ideal in some societies and a person's self esteem and wealth is judged according to the number of wives he has.

Polyandry is a rarely encountered form of marriage. This type of marriage takes place between one woman and two or more men.



3.5 LET US SUM UP

- E.B. Tylor defines culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. According to Malinowski, "culture is the handiwork of man and the medium through which he achieves his endsSocial institution is a system of norms and a body of believe and body of behavior.
- Institutions emerged out of social need and this need becomes institutions when it is accepted by the people and repeated through group activity.
- No society can exist without having institutions of family, kinship and marriage. These are regarded as the primary social institutions.
- Family is a group of people under one common roof united by blood relations or marital ties or by adoption.
- Family is universal and there are various forms of families across societies.
- Kinship means relations between 'kin' related by blood or marital ties.
- Kinship provides a guide to many social relationship and provides a way of transmitting status and property from one generation to the next.
- Marriage is a social institution that recommends union between people.

- Marriage as a social institution is universal, but different society has different forms and rules of marriages.
- There are mainly two types of marriage: monogamy and polygamy.

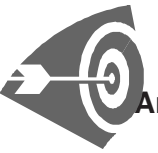


3.6 FURTHER READING

1. Ahuja R., 1993, *Indian Social System,* Vedam Book House, Jaipur.

2. Samuel Koening .Sociology - *An Introduction to the Science Of Society*. Ritzer and Goodman. 2003. S*ociological Theory (6th edition)*. New York: Mc Graw Hill Publication
3. Raymond, Williams. 1958. *Culture and Society*. Chatto and Windus Publishing

3.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'



Ans to Q No 1: The five primary social institutions are Family, Economy, Religion, Education and State.

Ans to Q No 2: According to the functionalist perspective, social institution is a set of social norms, beliefs, values and role relationship that arise in response to the need of the society.

Ans to Q No 3: Matrilineal family follows its ancestry and descendants through the mother's side of the family.

Ans to Q No 4: All the people who are related by blood in any way to an individual are known as cognates. Those who are related to a person by marriage are affines.

Ans to Q No 5: Tertiary kins refer to the secondary relatives of our primary kins. For example wife's brother's son, sister's husband's brother and so on. There are one fifty one types of tertiary kins.



3.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What are the functions of culture?

Q 2: Discuss the various concepts related to kinship.

Q 3: What are the four interrelated social situations of family in India?

C) Long Question (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the concept of social institutions. What are the various characteristics of social institutions?

Q 2: Discuss the main characteristics of culture.