

# Anthropology

CSS-2016

Q#02

Define Culture and its major characteristics; also discuss how the discipline of Anthropology is different from other social sciences?

## Culture:-

Culture refers to the complex system of beliefs, values, behaviours, customs, traditions, symbols and artifacts that are shared by a group of people and transmitted from generation to generation. It encompasses the way of life, including language, religion, social norms, art, music, dress, food and various other aspects that shape and define a particular group's identity. Culture is a fundamental aspect of human existence and plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours.

## Characteristics of Culture:

Major characteristics of culture includes:-

### **i- Learned Behaviour:-**

Culture is not inherited genetically but acquired through socialization and learning. Individuals acquire their culture through interactions with family, peers, institutions and society at large.

### **ii- Shared and Symbolic:-**

Culture is shared by members of the particular ~~book~~ groups or society. It provides a common framework that facilitates communication, understanding and co-operation. Symbols, such as languages, gestures and rituals are used to convey meaning within a cultural context.

### **iii- Dynamic and adaptive:-**

Culture is not static, it evolves and changes over time. It adapts to new circumstances, technologies and social influences. Cultural changes can occur through external factors like

globalization or internal factors such as general change.

**Example:**

In Pakistan, one notable aspect of cultural dynamics and adaptability is seen in the evolution of traditional clothing styles. The adaptation of the Shalwar Kameez, a traditional attire consisting of loose trousers (shalwar) and a long tunic (kameez), which has been a staple in Pakistan for centuries is an example of the dynamic character of the culture, as the basic elements of the shalwar kameez remain the same, the style designs and fabric choices have evolved to reflect changing fashion preferences. In recent decades, there has been a growing influence of global fashion trends, resulting in the fusion of traditional and modern elements. Western fashion elements, such as shorter kameez lengths,

different necklines, and contemporary prints, have been incorporated into the traditional shalwar kameez, creating new style that cater to the evolving tastes of the younger generation. It shows the dynamic nature of culture in Pakistan.

#### iv- Integrated and patterned:

Culture is an integrated system, where various elements are interconnected and influence each other. Different aspects of culture, such as religion, economy, and social structure, form a coherent pattern that reflects the society's values and worldview. For

instance, Pakistani culture is a mixture of different ethnicities - (Sindhi, Balochi, Punjabi, Pashtoon etc).

#### v- Norms and values:-

Culture consists of norms, which are rules or guidelines for appropriate behaviour, and values, which are

shared beliefs about what is desirable and good. Norms and values provide a moral and ethnic framework for social interactions within a culture.

### vi- Enculturation and transmission:

Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through a process called enculturation. This process involves teaching and socialization within families, schools, religious institutes, and other social groups.

#### Examples:

In Pakistan, a common example of enculturation and cultural transmission is the practice of teaching children the Urdu language. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and holds significant cultural and linguistic importance. Within families, parents, educational institutes play a vital role in transmitting the Urdu language to younger generation.

## vii- Cultural Universals and Diversity:

While cultures vary across different societies, there are certain commonalities and universal patterns that exist. However, cultures also exhibit significant diversities, with a unique customs, practices and beliefs that distinguish one group from another. Cultural universals refers to common features or patterns that exist across cultures, regardless of their specific geo-graphic location or historical contexts. These universals are present in various aspects of culture, such as social organization, Family structures, language, art and rituals.

### Example:

One of the examples of cultural universal is the existence of marriage as a social institution. Marriage in various form exists in world wide. But the diversity of marriage practice across cultures is evident. For instance, in

Pakistan, the traditional form of marriage is known as "Nikah" that involves the signing of a marriage contract in the presence of witnesses. In contrast, in western countries cultures, a common form of marriage is a religious or civil ceremony followed by a reception, often accompanied by specific traditions like exchanging rings or cutting a wedding cake.

## Discipline of Anthropology: Different from other social sciences:-

Anthropology, as a discipline, is distinct from other social sciences in several ways:-

### i- Holistic Approach:-

Anthropology takes a holistic approach to the study of Human societies and cultures. It seeks to understand human beings in their entirety, considering biological, cultural, social and

historical aspects. While other social sciences may focus on specific aspects of human behaviour or society, anthropology aims to integrate and explore the interconnectedness of various factors, like physiology, biology, linguistics etc.

### ii- Cross-cultural perspective:-

Anthropology emphasizes the study of diverse cultures across time and space. It aims to understand the similarities, differences, and variations in human behaviour and cultural practices across different societies. This cross-cultural perspective allows anthropologists to compare and contrast different cultural systems and gain a broader understanding of the human diversity. While the other social science focuses on a specific aspect of culture.

### iii- Longitudinal and Ethnographic Research:-



Anthropologists often conduct long-term fieldwork immersing themselves in the community they study. This ethnographic research allows them to gain deep insight into cultural and social dynamics of the group under investigation. Unlike some social sciences that rely on surveys or experiments, anthropology emphasizes participation observation and qualitative methods to capture the nuances of human behaviour and cultural practices.

#### iv. Emphasis on cultural Relativism:-

Anthropology promotes cultural relativism, which means understanding and judging cultures based on their own values, rather than imposing external standards. This approach help to avoid ethnocentrism and encourages respect for cultural diversity. Anthropologists strives to understand cultural

practices within their specific cultural contexts and avoid making value judgements based on their own cultural norms. And this is a very different aspect from other social sciences.

### v- Applied and Engaged Research:-

Anthropology has a strong tradition of applied research, seeking to address real-world problems and challenges. Applied anthropologists work in various fields such as development, public health, education and social justice, applying their knowledge to create positive social change. Anthropologists focus on understanding culture and its practical applications sets it apart from other social sciences that may have a more theoretical or abstract orientation.

### vi- Interdisciplinary Nature:

Anthropology draws from multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, biology, linguistics, archaeology and history. It integrates various perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of human societies and cultures. This interdisciplinary approach allows anthropologists to analyze and interpret human behaviour from multiple angles, incorporating insights from different fields.

### Conclusion:-

While anthropology shares some commonalities with other social sciences, such as the study of human behaviour and society, its unique focus on cultural diversity, holistic approach, ethnographic methodology, cultural relativism, applied research and interdisciplinary nature distinguish it from disciplines like sociology, psychology, economics and political science.