

**Introduction to Social  
and  
Cultural Anthropology**

## EXPERT COMMITTEE

Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava  
Former Professor and Head, Department  
of Anthropology, University of Delhi.  
Currently Director, Anthropological  
Survey of India.

Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa  
Former Professor, Department of  
Anthropology, University of Delhi. Delhi

Professor K.K. Misra  
Former Professor and Head, Department of  
Anthropology, University of Hyderabad  
Former Vice Chancellor, Utkal University  
of Culture, Odisha

Professor R. Siva Prasad  
Former Professor and Head, Department of  
Anthropology, University of Hyderabad

Professor Soumendra M. Patnaik  
Vice Chancellor Utkal University,  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Professor Mini Bhattacharya  
Department of Anthropology  
Gauhati University, Guwahati

Professor Nita Mathur  
Faculty of Sociology, SOSS,  
IGNOU, New Delhi

Prof. Rashmi Sinha  
Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS,  
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Rukshana Zaman  
Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS,  
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Palla Venkatramana  
Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS,  
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. K. Anil Kumar  
Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS,  
IGNOU, New Delhi

## COURSE PREPARATION TEAM

<b>Block 1 Nature And Scope</b>	
UNIT 1 Social and Cultural Anthropology: Meaning, Scope and Relevance	Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology University of Delhi
UNIT 2 History and Development of Social and Cultural Anthropology	Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi
UNIT 3 Relationship of Social and Cultural Anthropology: Other Branches of Anthropology and other Disciplines	Dr. Keya Pandey, Department of Anthropology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow <b>Unit 3 Edited by:</b> Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Former Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. Currently Director, Anthropological Survey of India.
<b>Block 2 Basic Concepts</b>	
UNIT 4 Society	Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Former Head and Professor. Department of Anthropology, Delhi, Currently Director, Anthropological Survey of India. Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU <b>Unit 5 and 6 Edited by:</b> Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.
UNIT 5 Culture	
UNIT 6 Institutions I: Kinship, Family, Marriage	
UNIT 7 Institutions II: Economic, Political Religious	
<b>Block 3 Theoretical Perspectives</b>	
UNIT 8 Classical Theories	Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology University of Delhi
UNIT 9 Theories of Structure and Function	Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Former Head and Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Currently Director, Anthropological Survey of India.
UNIT 10 Contemporary Theories	Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.
<b>Block 4 Fieldwork</b>	
UNIT 11 Fieldwork Traditions in Anthropology	Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Former Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Currently Director, Anthropological Survey of India. Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava and Dr. Rukshana Zaman <b>Unit 12 and 13 Edited by:</b> Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.
UNIT 12 Doing Fieldwork	
UNIT 13 Methods and Techniques	
<b>PRACTICAL MANUAL</b>	Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Faculty of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU <b>Practical Manual Edited by:</b> Prof. Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

**Course Coordinator : Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Discipline of Anthropology, IGNOU**

**General Editors : Dr. Rukshana Zaman and Dr. Mitoo Das, Discipline of Anthropology, IGNOU**

### Academic Consultants

Dr. Pankaj Upadhayay  
Dr. Monika Saini

### Cover Design

Dr. Avitoli Zhimo  
Photo Credit, Hardik, Gaurav, Davangi, Visual Anthropology Lab,  
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi

### PRINT PRODUCTION

Mr. Manjit Singh  
Section Officer (Pub.), SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

### Secretarial Assistant

Mr. Rampal Singh  
Mr. Naresh Kumar

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# Course Contents

<b>Block 1</b>	<b>NATURE AND SCOPE</b>	<b>Pages</b>
UNIT 1	Social and Cultural Anthropology: Meaning, Scope and Relevance	9
UNIT 2	History and Development of Social and Cultural Anthropology	21
UNIT 3	Relationship of Social and Cultural Anthropology: Other Branches of Anthropology and Other Disciplines	36
<b>Block 2</b>	<b>BASIC CONCEPTS</b>	
UNIT 4	Society	49
UNIT 5	Culture	64
UNIT 6	Institutions I: Kinship, Family and Marriage	77
UNIT 7	Institutions II: Economic, Political and Religious	92
<b>Block 3</b>	<b>THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES</b>	
UNIT 8	Classical Theories	107
UNIT 9	Theories of Structure and Function	121
UNIT 10	Contemporary Theories	133
<b>Block 4</b>	<b>FIELDWORK</b>	
UNIT 11	Fieldwork Traditions in Anthropology	147
UNIT 12	Doing Fieldwork	157
UNIT 13	Methods and Techniques	168
<b>PRACTICAL MANUAL</b>		<b>179</b>
<b>Suggested Reading</b>		<b>196</b>



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# BANC 102 INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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## Course Introduction

Social and cultural anthropology under its rubric encompasses the study of society and culture. The foremost contribution of the subject has been in the understanding of the various societies and cultures across the globe both objectively and subjectively, doing away with biases and prejudices, while presenting their relative importance. The main objective of the course is for the learners to understand in a holistic manner the social institutions and the cultural attributes that constructs human societies.

## Learning Outcomes

After reading the course the learner would be able to:

- i) explain the origin, historical background and foundation of social and cultural anthropology;
- ii) identify the various institutions in a society and relate to the cultural aspects present in societies;
- iii) discuss the theories and approaches to the social and cultural anthropology; and
- iv) describe how fieldwork is to be conducted in the field of social and cultural anthropology.

## Course Presentation

The course has been divided into four blocks and a practical manual. Each block has been thematically arranged units. In total there are thirteen units. Now let us see what we have discussed in each block.

**Block 1:** The first block will acquaint the learners with the basic understanding of the foundation of social and cultural anthropology along with its emergence as a scientific discipline. This block deals with the early developments that lead to the beginning of the discipline of social and cultural anthropology. Herein, the development of the subject in Britain and America has been dealt that presents the question of why the British anthropologists laid emphasis on society and the American anthropologists on culture. The growth and development of social and cultural anthropology in India is also reflected upon. The learners would also gain insight as to how the subject is different yet have similarities with some of the other disciplines like sociology, psychology, history, political science etc.

**Block 2:** The second block deals with the study of the forms and processes in the conceptualisation of society and culture. This block takes into account the social institutions that are the pillars of the society. Social groups; concepts of kinship, marriage and family; religious ideas and ritual practices; the production, consumption and exchange of necessities. The learners while reading this block would be able to comprehend how culture is entwined with the institutions forming an integral part of society. Institutions are universal in societies however, it is cultural variations that bring forth diversity.

**Block 3:** The third block presents the theories and approaches, some defunct some still in practice, that make up the study of human society and culture. From this block the learners would gain insight as to how the theories have changed with the perspectives that the anthropologists looked at societies. In the initial stages of the subject the focus was on how evolution had taken place, to diffusion, then the trend was to understand the functions and the structures within a society. In the twenty first century how the focus has shifted to modern and post modern phases and the inclusion of the female voice in anthropological writings.

**Block 4:** In the last block, the learner would be introduced to field traditions and fieldwork, the hallmark of anthropology. The nuances of how to conduct a fieldwork, the tools and techniques that are to be used during data collection in the field, compilation and analysing the data after returning from the field to writing and presentation of the dissertation, thesis or project report has been discussed in depth. This block would prepare the learner to take up anthropological fieldwork.

**Practical Manual:** The practical manual would assist the learners to prepare a synopsis. It is a guide for the learners to acquaint themselves with the process of preparing a synopsis. The manual would guide the learners to prepare a synopsis step by step right from the stage of conceptualising a topic to the style citing references.

All the best, happy reading and wish you success. Hope the course material act as a guide for you to achieve your goals.



**BLOCK 2**  
**BASIC CONCEPTS**

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**UNIT 4**

**Society**

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**UNIT 5**

**Culture**

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**UNIT 6**

**Institutions I: Kinship, Family and Marriage**

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**UNIT 7**

**Institutions II: Economic, Political and Religious**

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## UNIT 4 SOCIETY

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### Contents

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Relationship between social and cultural anthropology
- 4.2 Society
- 4.3 Group
- 4.4 Association
- 4.5 Community
- 4.6 Tribe and Caste
- 4.7 Status and Role
- 4.8 Social Stratification
- 4.9 Relationship between society and culture
- 4.10 Summary
- 4.11 References
- 4.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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This unit will help the learners to explain the:

- basic concepts in social anthropology;
- meaning and significance of the concept of society;
- aspects of society, such as group, association, community; and
- relationship between society and culture.

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### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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If there is any concept which is regarded as central to the discipline of anthropology (and also sociology), it is the concept of 'society'. Subscribing to the idea that society is found even at the level of sub-humans, the primates such as the monkeys and chimpanzees, anthropologists submit that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is the presence of culture among human communities; thus, human beings came to be characterised as 'beings with culture'. For understanding human beings, therefore, we have to look at the dynamics of society and culture. In this unit we will discuss the concepts that are central to the understanding of society, the key attributes that are an integral part of the society like group, association, community, tribe, caste, status and role and social stratification. We would also touch upon the relationship between society and culture.

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Contributor: Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Former Head and Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. Currently Director, Anthropological Survey of India.

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## 4.1 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Two concepts of principal importance in anthropology (and also sociology) are society and culture. Both of them are interlinked in the case of human society, whereas in the case of non-human society, the situation is different. The animal society is understood as without culture, although some activities among some of the non-human primates bear resemblance to culture. For instance, one of the great apes, chimpanzee, has been reported to be using rudimentary culture and some kind of language, for which the term 'meta-language' is used. Chimpanzees have been found to be fashioning some wooden tools for extracting food from the environment. This is exactly what Jane Goodall found in her study of chimpanzees in Tanzania.

Moreover, the products of non-human action – such as the nests the birds build – remain the same over time. The nest the baby bird will make in future when it grows up will be similar to what its mother made, or what the other members of its species make. Similarity in the structure and shape of the nest is believed to be an outcome of the instincts the non-human animals have. The products of their action will change when their genetic material changes. It does not happen in human beings, for the products of their action keep on changing and are independent of their bio-genetic substances.

For an anthropologist, culture is found only among human beings. No human society, past or present, or simple or complex, has ever been found to be without culture. Therefore, while the animal society can be conceptualised without culture, human society cannot be. That is why, Bronislaw Malinowski said that 'culture is uniquely human'.

The concepts of society and culture are our abstractions from the uninterrupted flow of human life. The concept of society lays emphasis on populations and the set of relationships between individuals. By comparison, culture refers to the customs and practices, the ways of doing and living which human beings have improvised over a period of time in order to survive. Thus, when speaking of society, we speak of relationships among people, and when speaking of culture, we refer to their ways of behaving, speaking, doing various things, and their accomplishments and achievements. For example, the relationship between the mother and the child is a social relationship, but how a mother is expected to behave (or behaves) towards her child and vice versa is a part of culture. Mother-child relationship is universal but mothers and children belonging to different cultures would differ greatly in their behaviour and the ways of carrying out various jobs and things. An American mother would be different from her counterpart in Philippines and this difference is a product of culture, and is passed down from one generation to the next.

In the history of anthropology, there has been a debate with respect to the priority of one concept over the other. For example, the American anthropologists thought that since culture was the central identifying characteristic of human beings, it deserved priority over the study of social relationships. Robert Lowie said that what culture is to anthropology is what the concept of zero is to the discipline of mathematics. In other words, he referred to the centrality of the concept of culture in the discipline of anthropology. Thus, American anthropology popularised the term 'cultural anthropology' to refer to that branch of knowledge that studied the ways of living, customs and practices of the contemporary societies, particularly tribal and indigenous.

The perspective of British anthropology was different. The key person in British Anthropology, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who was heavily influenced by the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, gave primary importance to the study of social structure (or what Durkheim called ‘social morphology’). The outcome of this was that British anthropology became more ‘social anthropological’, which was defined as the study of the social forms and relationships, as found among simple societies. The Chair of Social Anthropology was founded at Liverpool in 1905 and its first occupant was Sir James Frazer, the author of the famous text, *The Golden Bough*.

The debate between these two branches of anthropology soon proved to be futile, when it was argued that society and culture are sides of the same coin and one exists in relationship with the other. Clifford Geertz said that they are an anthropologist’s abstractions from the flow of social life. Thus instead of arguing in favour of the primacy of one over the other, the best course would be to think in terms of the relationship of one with the other, because human beings cannot live without culture and culture manifests itself through the complex of social relationships. Society and culture are two sides of the same coin. Against this backdrop, many scholars think not in terms of either social anthropology or cultural anthropology, but they prefer to call the discipline ‘socio-cultural anthropology’ (or ‘social and cultural anthropology’, ‘social/cultural anthropology’), a term that shows that equal importance is granted to the study of both society and culture.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1. Who stated culture is ‘uniquely human’?  
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2. “What culture is to anthropology is what the concept of zero is to the discipline of mathematics” which anthropologist made this comment?  
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3. Which British anthropologist was influenced by the work of the French sociologists Émile Durkheim?  
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 .....  
 .....
4. What is ‘social morphology’?  
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5. Where and in which year was the Chair of Social Anthropology founded?

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6. Who first occupied the Chair of Social Anthropology, what was the name of his famous text?

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## 4.2 SOCIETY

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The word ‘*society*’ comes from the Latin word *socius*, which means ‘sharing’. The idea here is that those who constitute society have a relationship of sharing among them. The concept of society is both empirical and abstract. At the empirical level, the concept of society implies that it is an entity comprising a congregation of individuals. An individual is a ‘solitary being’ who is capable of internalising social values, norms of behaviour, and the technology of work of the society of which he is part, and is also capable of establishing his relationships with the others. When an individual becomes a social object he may be called a ‘person’. In simple terms, the socialised human being, one who has learnt the social (or the shared) ways of living, is a person. Each person is related with the other persons. These interpersonal relationships constitute the basic material of society. Aristotle said that ‘*man is a political (i.e. social) animal*’, which means that human beings live together. He also said that *one who lives alone* is either a beast or God. Thus, no human being ever lives alone or in isolation. The worst punishment that can ever be given to a human being is solitary confinement. As an abstraction, society is a construct that anthropologists and sociologists have built for understanding human behaviour and analysing it.

Society may be defined as a congregation of individuals. However, not all congregations constitute society; for example, a crowd (or mob) is also an aggregation of individuals, but it disperses as soon as the stimulus which brought its constituents together disappears. In comparison, society as a collectivity of human beings endures over time, creating a sense of solidarity among its members. The members of a society have some kind of an attachment to their territory, which they try to defend collectively. They also have division of labour among them, with each unit entrusted with a different task and activity. Each society is divided into smaller entities which are called groups.

### Check Your Progress 2

7. The word society is derived from which Latin word?

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8. Who stated ‘man is a political animal’?

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9. What is society? Explain in your own words.

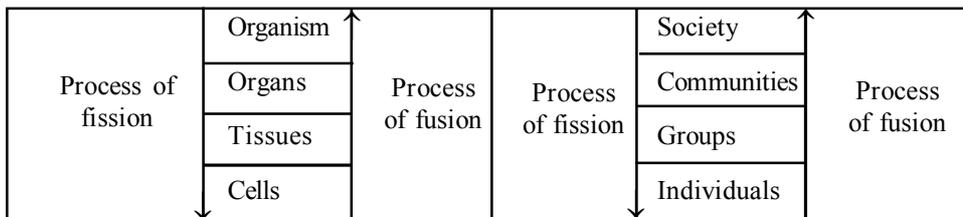
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### 4.3 GROUP

The concept of society is further developed by comparing it with an organism. This is known as organic analogy, which means that the model of an organism is used for understanding society. As an organism is divided into organs, which are in turn divided into tissues, which are further divided into cells, in the same way society is divided into communities which are divided into groups, and groups into individuals.



The individual (or person) is the basic unit but no individual can ever hope to survive in isolation. The individual enters into relationships and the collectivity of individuals is termed a group. A group is defined as a set of relationships between individuals who collectively carry out several functions. A group has been called a ‘social brick’ by George Homans, since a community results from a collection of groups.

An important contribution to the concept of group was made by C.S. Cooley. He gave the concept of primary group, which plays an irreplaceable role in the process of socialisation. A primary group is a small group, comprising not more than twenty-five individuals who have frequent interactions among them and share a feeling of unity. The idea behind ‘twenty-five individual’ is to be understood in the sense of a ‘small group of individuals’ among whom regular interaction is possible, and these individuals can also have a contiguous living. They can live in the same house, as one finds in case of joint families, or share the same neighbourhood. In other words, the idea of ‘twenty-five individuals’ is not to be taken literally.

The examples of primary group are family, peer group, and neighbourhood. By comparison to a primary group, sociologists have spoken of a kind of group which is known as secondary group, in which there are a large number of individuals and the interaction among them is not face-to-face; it is rather a means to ends type. This means that such groups involve exploitation of the other, and once the goals are met with, the group comes to an end. It does not have the kind of continuity that is ascribed to primary groups, which abound in traditional societies, such as tribal and rural, whereas secondary relations are large in number in urban society. Therefore, it may be said that a change from rural to urban society also means an increase in the number of secondary groups. From this, however, it should not be inferred that

modern societies do not have any primary groups. Family, which is an example of the primary group, is found universally. So is friendship.

Besides the division of groups into primary and secondary, some of its other classifications have also been proposed. For example, W.G Sumner has divided groups into ‘in-groups’ (the ‘groups of insiders’) and ‘out-groups’ (the ‘groups of outsiders’). The first is of those who are members of a group and have a feeling of oneness (or ‘we-ness’) among them. All those who are not a member of such a group are called ‘out-groups’. The other concept extremely popular is of reference group – it is a group of people which is emulated. This concept is useful in understanding the cases of upward (and also, downward) social mobility.

**Check Your Progress 3**

10. What is organic analogy?

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11. Who defined group as ‘social brick’?

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12. Who gave the concept of primary group?

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13. Give examples of primary groups.

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14. Define a secondary group.

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**4.4 ASSOCIATION**

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Closely related to the concept of group is the concept of association. The associations are created by individuals for attaining particular purposes; that is why the associations are also known as ‘special purpose groups’. Here territory and kinship are not important. Such groups are both voluntary and non-voluntary. The voluntary association is called so because the individual is free to join it, whereas in case of

non-voluntary association, such freedom is not permitted. For example, as the case in Singapore, every male has to be a member of the army. Here the individual cannot exercise his discretion. In a voluntary association, the freedom to join or not is given to the individual.

For instance, an individual can be a member of a caste group but not necessarily of caste association. Membership of a caste group is ascriptive, that is by virtue of one's birth to parents belonging to a caste that he becomes a member of that caste. By comparison, the membership of a caste association, which is a body founded with the sole aim of furthering the interests of the members of the caste, is voluntary. There is also a possibility that a caste may not have an association. The teachers' association, peasants' association, a political party, a chess players' association, a students' body, or a bald men's club are some examples of association. For some scholars, association is a type of group, and may be called an 'associational groups', whereas for others, an association is different from a group because it has a specific purpose to perform.

Associations are found in all types of societies, including the traditional. Many anthropologists call these 'sodality groups' or 'sodalities'. For example, age set is an association, so is magicians' society (what is also called the 'secret society'). In simple societies, associations are restricted in number. In complex societies, they increase in number, since there is a probability of founding an association, by an individual, for fulfilling any task.

#### Check Your Progress 4

15. Define an association.

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16. State the difference between voluntary and non-voluntary associations.

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17. Associations are also known as 'sodality groups'. State whether the following statement is true or false.

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## 4.5 COMMUNITY

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The collection of several groups may be called a community, however there are certain special characteristics by which a community is identified. Ferdinand Tönnies made a distinction between 'community' (*gemeinschaft*) and 'society' (*gesellschaft*). He believed that the former was a closely integrated entity which started breaking down because of several changes in society. A community is defined with respect to

**Basic Concepts**

a collectivity of individuals who share common sentiments; they all feel that they are a part of a closely related body. In other words, they share a sense of belongingness. MacIver and Page think that the members of a community share a common territory. This criterion is applicable in some cases, but not in others, especially those which have migrated from one area to the other, and in course of time have been divided into smaller communities. This happens particularly because the size of the original community becomes very large, putting pressure on the local area and its resources, and so some of its members split, moving to a different area and founding a different community. By inhabiting a different location, a community may be de-territorialised, but it will continue to share the same body of common sentiments. Thus, for defining a community, the characteristics pertaining to sharing the common sentiments are far more important.

Some social formations are regarded as ‘borderline communities’ – they share many characteristics of communities in common but are not ‘true communities’. Here one may cite the examples of boarding school, monastery and nunnery, prison, etc. These communities do not reproduce by a biological process as is the case with ‘true communities’; their members may leave, retire, die, or are freed, and their place is taken over by others. Thus, these communities have mechanisms for their continuity, but they need to be distinguished from villages, tribal settlements, and urban neighbourhoods.

**Check Your Progress 5**

18. Who made a distinction between ‘community’ (*gemeinschaft*) and ‘society’ (*gesellschaft*).

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19. Define a community.

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20. Who suggested that members of a community share a common territory?

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21. What are ‘borderline communities’?

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## 4.6 TRIBE AND CASTE

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Communities are not just confined to villages. They are also found in urban societies, where in an anonymous world, they are like cohesive structures ('honeycomb systems') which integrate the individual to the society. One may refer here to the example of two types of communities – the tribe and the caste.

The tribe is understood as a community comprising groups of family which live together, or have lived together, sharing the same territory and has a common language, culture, religion, and life styles. Such a community is politically autonomous, which means that each tribal community has its own political leader and all the matters of dispute are resolved internally. According to this conception, a tribal community is largely isolated from the outside world, and for its understanding, the knowledge of other societies is not needed. It was because of this a tribal community has come to be regarded as a 'cultural isolate', which means that it has its own distinct culture, which makes its bearers proud, and they are prepared to defend it against any kind of onslaught or criticisms from the external forces. This notion contributes to the idea of the resilience of culture, which resists all attempts to drive it out.

In reality, however, the tribal communities are rarely isolated. They have relations with their neighbours, although the quality and intensity of such relations varies from one context to the other. There are cases of tribal communities which are closely interdependent, supplying their produce to the others and receiving their produce in return. David Mandelbaum described one such situation from his study of the tribal communities in Nilgiri Hills. Other cases of the same type can be identified from the cases of the tribal peoples in North-East India. Even when a tribal community has relations with the other communities, and in the process becomes a part of the common culture that all of them share, it continues to have and further its own separate culture, which, as noted earlier, is steadfastly adhered to, since it gives the members of a community a sense of identity.

Tribes are found all over the world. In different parts of the world they are referred to by different names: in some they are called aborigines, Indians, minorities, indigenous people, or ethnic groups. In India, in addition to the term tribe, the term Scheduled Tribe is also used. The communities which have been identified for the benefits of reservation and the other developmental measures are known as Scheduled Tribes, which according to the Draft of the National Tribal Policy number around seven hundred.

Caste on the other hand is a principle of social organisation in Hindu South Asia. M.N. Srinivas regarded caste as the 'structural principle of Hinduism'. The system is legitimised by Hindu religious texts. The Tenth Section (*mandala*) of Rig Veda submits that different castes have emerged from different parts of god's body. Each caste is assigned different functions and is not expected to change its occupation. The members of a caste marry within their caste, the principle is known as caste endogamy.

Though tribe and caste constitute polar categories of a continuum, with tribe being egalitarian and caste being hierarchal, there have been cases of the tribes becoming castes and also some cases of castes becoming tribes. This is known as the tribe-caste continuum.

**Check Your Progress 6**

22. Define Tribe.

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23. Are tribal communities isolated?

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24. Define Scheduled Tribes.

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25. Who regarded caste as ‘structural principle of Hinduism’?

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26. What is caste endogamy?

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27. What is meant by tribe-caste continuum?

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**4.7 STATUS AND ROLE**

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We saw earlier that the congregation of individuals constitutes society. These individuals interact, exchange their goods and services, and carry out their behaviour with respect to the others according to the prevailing norms and rules. One of the ways of analysing society is in term of the reciprocal patterns of behaviour. In each interaction, the individual occupies a social position and behaves with respect to the other according to what is expected of the social position. For example, if I occupy the position of a teacher, then my job is to teach; the teacher is the social position that I occupy and the process of teaching that I carry out is my behaviour. My position as a teacher is placed somewhere in a generally accepted ranking of occupations in my society – it may be lower to a bureaucrat or above an office

clerk; but my work will be evaluated on the basis of how I perform it. I may be regarded as a ‘good teacher’ or a ‘bad teacher’, depending upon how my work is looked at by my students.

To understand this, Ralph Linton introduced two concepts, status and role. According to him, the term status is technically used for the social positions that an individual occupies in an interactive situation. Role refers to the behaviour an individual performs with respect to the position he occupies. Linton said role, is the ‘dynamic aspect of status’, which means that it is put into action. Status and role are two sides of the same coin, for one defines the position and second, the behaviour. A position is of no relevance unless it is put into action, and similarly behaviour is related to the position the individual occupies in a given interactive situation. Since an individual participates in a large number of situations, he may be conceptualised as a ‘collection of several statuses’, with each one of them coming into action in an appropriate situation. So, when in a bank, I occupy the status of a client, and when in a train, I am a passenger; in a classroom, I am the teacher. Each status is a bundle of rights and duties, defining the duties the individual has to perform and rights he has over others, because of the duties he performs.

Linton also divided statuses into two categories – those which are given by virtue of birth and those for which the individuals compete and acquire. Statuses which are given by birth are known as ascribed statuses, like birth in a caste group or a totemic clan or in a particular gender category. The positions which are left open to be filled by competition are known as achieved statuses. In a traditional society, ascribed statuses are far more important whereas in a complex society the achieved statuses are more in number. Although ascribed and achieved statuses are analytically separate, the ascribed status affects the achievement of a status. If I am born in an affluent family, my chances of studying abroad are far more than when I am born in a poor family.

**Check Your Progress 7**

28. Who introduced the concepts of status and roles?

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29. What is ascribed status?

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30. What is achieved status?

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## 4.8 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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The term social stratification implies the division of society into different layers (strata), one placed above the other. The term 'stratification' reminds one of the term 'stratum' (and its plural, 'strata') that is used in the earth science (that is geology). By comparison to its meaning in geology, in society, those which are placed above are far more privileged and advantaged than those which are lowly placed. In other words, social stratification deals with social inequality. However, not all inequalities are included under the title of social stratification. For example, societies are divided in accordance with age and gender, but these are not the aspects of social stratification. In fact, for inequalities of age and gender, the term used is social differentiation. Tribal societies have age and gender inequalities, but they do not have the inequalities of social stratification.

There are three principles of social stratification. The first is where the strata are divided according to the life styles the people lead. Certain life styles are regarded as superior to the others. For example, the life style of Brahmins is considered as superior to that of the other castes. This principle is called status. Caste is an example of a status group.

The second principle is the category called class. It deals with the aspects of production. It is concerned with the control over resources. According to Karl Marx, primarily there are two classes – those who own property (the 'owners'), and those who do not (the 'non-owners'). The latter work on the property that the members of the first class own. For their work, they get wages. They are the workers. Marx believed that all periods in human history, after the first stage of communism, when there were no classes, were characterised by the presence of these two classes. The first stage of classlessness was known as 'primitive communism', a term that Marx's collaborator, Fredrich Engels, suggested. The difference between status and class is that if the first is defined in terms of the modes of living – the modes of consumption – the second is defined with respect to its place in the system of production. In other words, status is understood as the 'way of living'; class, as the role it plays in production processes.

The third principle is of political power. In every society there are some who wield power over the others making the others do what they want. For Karl Marx, power was incumbent upon the control over resources. Thus, those who have control over economic resources also exercise political power. For Max Weber, class and power have dissociated in many societies. Those who have control over economic resources do not necessarily exercise political power. Marx gave the concept of ruling class. Weber regarded that the condition of the class was determined by the market situation. Class situation was the market position, so said Weber.

These three principles of stratification may overlap, in the sense that those who occupy the highest position in status hierarchy also control economy and exercise political power. Such a situation is of 'cumulative inequality', but when these principles do not overlap, it is 'dispersed inequality'. The study of Sripuram, a village in South India, which André Béteille had carried out, pointed out that change has been from cumulative to dispersed inequality. In the beginning, the Brahmins were the landowners and they also exercised political power. The non-Brahmin movement led to a situation where land passed from the control of the Brahmin to the control of the non-Brahmin. In this way, inequality became dispersed, in the sense that those who were at the top of the caste (i.e. status) hierarchy were not so in the hierarchy of class or power.

**Check Your Progress 8**

31. What is social stratification?

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32. What are the three principles of social stratification?

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33. Who discussed class in terms of power over resources?

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**4.9 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

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Human society is inconceivable without culture. The most succinct definition of culture, in the words of M.J. Herskovits, is that it is the ‘man-made part of environment’. Culture is a system of knowledge, created by the collective and cumulative efforts of human beings extending over generations. Culture is learned and transmitted from one generation to the next, and each generation adds a little to it and takes some bit of it away. In this way, because of collective and individual human actions, culture keeps on changing; unless changes of vast magnitude are introduced from outside, culture change is a slow process. Members of a society imbibe its culture. The process of learning culture, which is gradual and extended over time, is known as enculturation.

Culture is high in information but it does not act on its own. One who is high in energy is the individual. After the individual has internalised culture, he starts behaving, putting culture into action. Social life comes into existence because of the information of culture and the energy of the individual. The relationship between the individual (the unit), the congregation of individuals (society), and culture is fundamental to understanding human life. So, in the next unit we will deal with the concept of culture in depth.

**Check Your Progress 9**

34. Who stated culture is the ‘man made part of the environment’?

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## 4.10 SUMMARY

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In this unit, you have learned the basic concepts related to society. The anthropologists study various forms of society and culture, compare them, and try to arrive at the commonality among them. Each of these concepts can be divided further into other concepts. They are all modes of analysis, helping us in understanding societies and culture. Herein, we have discussed the meaning of society and the core concepts related to it, in the next unit we will try to understand in-depth the concept of culture, how anthropologists define and look at culture, and the various elements associated with culture.

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## 4.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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1. Bronislaw Malinowski.
2. Robert Lowie.
3. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown
4. See section 4.1
5. Founded at Liverpool in 1905.
6. Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* was his famous book
7. The Latin word *socius*, which means sharing.
8. Aristotle.
9. Read section 4.2 of this unit to write the answer.
10. See section 4.3
11. George Homans
12. C.S. Cooley.
13. See section 4.3
14. See section 4.3
15. See section 4.4
16. See section 4.4
17. True.

18. Ferdinand Tönnies
19. See Section 4.5
20. MacIver and Page
21. See Section 4.5
22. See section 4.6
23. Read Section 4.6
24. Read Section 4.6
25. M.N. Srinivas
26. The members of a caste marry within their caste, the principle is known as caste endogamy.
27. See section 4.6 last paragraph.
28. Ralph Linton
29. See section 4.7
30. See section 4.7
31. See section 4.8
32. Status, class and political power
33. Karl Marx
34. M.J. Herkovits

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## UNIT 5 CULTURE

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### Contents

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Culture: Meaning and Characteristics
  - 5.1.1 Culture is Unique to Human Society
  - 5.1.2 Culture is Universal
  - 5.1.3 Culture is Not Genetically Inherited
  - 5.1.4 Culture is Static Yet Dynamic
- 5.2 Definitions of Culture
- 5.3 Concepts in Culture
  - 5.3.1 Enculturation and Socialisation
  - 5.3.2 Culture Traits, Culture Complexes and Culture Areas
  - 5.3.3 Patterns of Culture
- 5.4 Mechanisms of Culture Change
  - 5.4.1 Diffusion
  - 5.4.2 Acculturation
  - 5.4.3 Assimilation
- 5.5 Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 References
- 5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit the learners would be able to comprehend:

- the meaning and characteristics of culture in anthropology;
- definitions of culture given by different anthropologists;
- the concept of culture in anthropology; and
- mechanisms of culture change.

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### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

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“You have no culture”, “You are uncultured” are terms which many of us must have come across. In layman’s term culture is attributed to refined behaviour, and a good taste in the finer qualities of life like classical music, dance, theatre etc. When we look at a person we try to gauge, ones behaviour towards another human being, one’s manners and etiquettes like how one sits at a dining table and uses the cutlery etc., which we attribute to polished behaviour or a suggestion that the person possesses culture. However, in anthropological terms the meaning of culture encompasses all behaviour; it basically represents the way of life of the people. Culture in anthropological parlance is not concerned only with finer refinement but ascribed as a part of everyday life which every society possess. The anthropological

emphasis on culture is to understand people's way of life, without giving relevance to terms like 'uncultured', as every society has a culture which might be simple or complex and differ from other cultures. Every culture is unique in itself. In this unit, we will take into account how anthropology looks at culture. We will begin with the definitions of culture that has been given by anthropologists through the ages to understand the meaning of culture as a way of life. The different attributes of culture and how it helps in understanding human beings would be a part of this unit.

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## 5.1 CULTURE: MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

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The word 'culture' is derived from the Latin word '*cultura*', a derivative of the verb *colo* that means 'to tend', 'to cultivate' or 'to till' among other things (Tucker, 1931). Culture is the way of life of the people. As explained in the introduction section, culture encompasses all human activities, so let us understand the characteristics of culture in this section.

### 5.1.1 Culture is Unique to Human Society

'Culture is unique to human society', we have come across this statement many times. Let's explore why culture is unique to human society. Apes and monkeys can replicate behaviour, if you pick up a stone and throw it at a monkey, the monkey will replicate your behaviour, however, it would replicate the behaviour without understanding the moral attributes to it and once he learns the behaviour it would be difficult for him to undo it. The amount of force to be applied while throwing the stone so that it does not cause serious injury to anyone, or what the size of the stone ought to be, these judgments between right and wrong is something which apes and monkeys cannot understand and correlate. However, if we teach a human baby to act in a particular way, the child will learn the behaviour and later s/he can also do away with that behaviour. Since culture is learned behaviour it can be unlearned also. So, the answer is yes, culture is unique to human society alone.

So what are the attributes that make a culture unique to human society? The attributes that have allowed human beings the leverage to create culture is rooted in our biological evolution- the opposable thumb, increase in our cranial capacity, bipedal locomotion and the development of unique cognitive capacities and ability for creative and abstract thinking. Humans alone seem to be capable of symbolic creative behaviour. Once we started our journey with our bipedal gait, our hands became free we were able to use our opposable thumb for grasping and creating products for our use. The use of the opposable thumb allowed human beings to create tools as they could now grasp and hold things with their fingers, thus making human beings 'tool using animal' as stated by E. B. Tylor (Herskovits, 1958). Our bipedal locomotion is also responsible for our spinal structure by which we were able to hold our head, freeing our larynx and thus, allowing us the power of speech. This is the beginning of our cultural journey. Language has been called as the vehicle of transmitting human culture, as it has made communication between two human beings comprehensible.

### 5.1.2 Culture is Universal

One of the earliest concepts of anthropological sciences is that the ends achieved by all human ways of life, or cultures, are basically similar (Herskovits, 1958). This universality of culture was postulated in the theories of evolution by the early

anthropologists like Herbert Spencer and E.B. Tylor who had stated it as ‘the psychic unity of mankind’. This view regarded the similarities in different cultures as owing to the similar capacities of human beings. For example in almost all cultures be it a preliterate or developed society the institutions of family, marriage and kinship are seen, though the patterns may vary.

Likewise, if we explore human history we will find a similar pattern used by human beings for procuring food. For example, the handaxes as a hunting tool recovered from many sites across the globe, Europe and Asia were much similar in structure and the nature of utility. Thus, showing that human beings have a similar capacity to engage in and make tools for survival, making culture a universal phenomena. Though, with time and exposure to different medium of technology, some societies progressed at a faster rate.

### **5.1.3 Culture is not Genetically Inherited**

Culture is not biologically or genetically transmitted from parents to children. Culture is a process that is acquired via learning and understanding symbols. Let’s try to understand this with an example, say if an Indian origin child is brought up in Japan by a Japanese couple, the language that the child would learn to speak would be Japanese and s/he would learn the Japanese tradition and be a part of the Japanese culture. However, if the same child was brought up in India by Indian parents the child would have learned one of the Indian languages and culture. Thus, culture is learned behaviour and not genetically transmitted, it is inherited and passed on from one generation to the other via the medium of learning and symbols wherein, language plays an important role.

### **5.1.4 Culture is Static yet Dynamic**

Culture has been described as the way of life and everyday activities of humans living in society. The basic premises of culture do not change, for example, the institutions like family, marriage, religion etc. are all a part of society and has been so for a long time. Our values, norms, beliefs and morals rarely change or slowly change, thus, making culture stable although not static. However, acculturation, diffusion, migration, etc. are forces that bring about changes in our culture making it dynamic. For example, with the coming of multinational companies to India, the Indian society saw a great shift in the working culture. Many of the multinational companies opened up call centers in India, where the working hours were mostly night shift as they were catering to clients outside India like the USA who have different time zone. This is a new cultural aspect that was earlier not found in Indian society. Likewise, in recent times, dining out on a weekend has become the norm for almost all families, which is termed as family time, when the family usually visits a shopping mall and spends much of the time, either shopping or window shopping, visiting the play area, watching a movie and eating at the range of restaurants that are there in the malls. However, till a few years back family time during weekends used to be a home cooked meal where the whole family gathered around the dining table and shared their thoughts and experiences or went for a picnic. Here also the concept of the family being together on weekend is still there only the place has changed with the changing times. Another example can be of marriage ceremonies, where today Bachelorette Party and Bachelor Party has become a part of the Indian marriage scene, a concept that has been borrowed from the western world, however, the rituals as per Hindu custom during marriage is still followed, preserving the tradition and culture. From the above examples, we can say that culture is static in the sense

that it stays true to its roots, yet allows room for changes and bringing in new aspects and components to the existing culture as and when required thus, making it dynamic.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1. Who stated that human beings are tool using/making animals?  
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2. What specific aspect of culture is regarded as the vehicle of human culture and communication?  
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3. Who referred to the universals in culture as the ‘psychic unity of mankind’?  
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4. Is culture a universal phenomena in human societies?  
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5. Is culture a learned behaviour or is it genetically transmitted?  
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6. Is culture dynamic? What are the factors responsible for culture change?  
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**5.2 DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE**

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Let us begin this section with understanding Sir Edward Burnett Tylor’s concept of culture, that he gave in his book, *Primitive Cultures*, published in 1871. Regarded as the father of social anthropology, Tylor held the first chair of Professor in Social

Anthropology in Oxford University; his main contribution was towards the concept of evolution of societies and culture. Tylor had stated “Culture or Civilization, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871 reprint 1958,). In this definition some of the important aspects of culture are i. complex whole, ii. capabilities acquired and iii. as a member of society.

So what does *complex whole* means? Herein, we can say that culture has many attributes to it, which includes tangible and intangible aspects, material and non-material aspects. Tangible aspects are those that we can see with our eyes like the dress pattern, food habits, rituals of birth, marriage and death that are observable. For example, if we look at the traditional dressing patterns of people we can identify their cultural roots, like a woman in a *saree* would be from India, a Korean and Japanese lady would wear a *hanbok* and *kimono*, respectively. Likewise, people from different cultures have different eating habits, Indians in north-east, eastern and southern parts of India eat with their hands, while Americans and Europeans use spoons, forks and knives to eat their food, while in China, Japan and Korea they use chopsticks for the same purpose. Intangible aspects are knowledge, values, morals, beliefs and customs; that cannot be seen with our eyes, but can be observed in our behaviour, such as technology, creative activities etc. Detailed aspects of material and non-material culture would be taken up in the section on nature and culture.

The second attribute is *capabilities acquired* which suggest that culture is not biologically inherited but acquired by human beings. As explained in section 5.1.3. culture is the learned aspect of human behaviour. It can be transmitted from one generation to the other via the medium of oral tradition that is language and symbols, but it is not a genetically inherited character.

The third component of Tylor’s definition states that culture is learned as a *member of society*, thus, to learn culture one has to be a part of a society. Herein, we can relate to the examples of Tarzan and Mowgli (fictional characters), human children that were lost in the forest and nurtured by wolves and other jungle animals. These human children learned how to hunt like a fox, swing from tree to tree like monkeys and even learned the war cries of howling like a jackal and a fox, however, they didn’t learn to speak languages like human beings or acquired the other attributes a child learns in the company of other human beings. Thus, to learn culture one needs to be a part of a human society. Culture cannot be learned in isolation.

In Herskovits’s definition, ‘culture . . . refers to that part of the total setting [of human existence] which includes the material objects of human manufacture, techniques, social orientations, points of view, and sanctioned ends that are immediate conditioning factors underlying behaviour’, or in simple terms it means, ‘Culture is the man-made part of the environment’ (Herskovits 1955 reprint 1958). In this definition one comes across the human-nature relationship and emphasis is on how human beings are dependent on nature for their day to day activities. It encompasses everything that human beings make and use materials that are available in nature for their everyday life. In this regard, let’s take an example of the bamboo tree in the lives of the people living in the north-eastern part of India. Bamboo was the mainstay in the lifestyle of the people of the north-eastern states before modernisation and globalisation took over. Bamboo was a part of the lifecycle process in the lives of the human being, right from being used to cut the umbilical cord that joins the mother and the child at birth to the making of the pyre at death. Bamboo containers were used for storing

water and cooking food like rice and meat, making curd, its shoot is still used to make pickle, while split bamboos are used as pipes to carry water to irrigate the fields. Thus, in this example we see one of the aspects of material culture, how a product of the environment is being used in everyday life.

Material culture comprises all the aspects that are tangible and made using some or the other aspect of nature. The material culture of a particular society has a relationship to its environment. For example, the houses of the people living in the Arctic region is made of ice (the only material available in nature) known as an igloo, whereas people living in the forest areas make their houses either using wood or bamboo that is easily available in the forest, most people make their houses using mud and straw also. These are the naturally available material in nature, however, in the present era, most of the houses made of mud and wood are now being replaced with concrete cement houses. The ideas that reflects in the building of a house or creating a tool for hunting animals or speaking about the present era that human beings use to better their lives is part of the non-material culture. The aspect of culture that we cannot see physically with our eyes, or touch them, but that gets manifested in our activities can be called as a non-material culture like ideas, knowledge, values, beliefs, norms that are an integral part of the society.

**Activity:**

Make a list of five material objects that are there in your study area/room.

Now let us explore some of the other definitions of culture

*Malinowski defined culture as an “instrumental reality, and apparatus for the satisfaction of the biological and derived need”. It is the integral whole consisting of implements in consumers’ goods, of constitutional characters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs” (Malinowski, 1944:1)*

*“...Culture in general as a descriptive concept means the accumulated treasury of human creation: books, paintings, buildings, and the like; the knowledge of ways of adjusting to our surroundings, both human and physical; language, customs, and systems of etiquette, ethics, religion and morals that have been built up through the ages” (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945:78)*

*Culture consists of patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values (Kluckhohn, 1951:86.)*

**Check Your Progress 2**

7. Name the famous work of E. B. Tylor in which he gives the concept and definition of Culture.

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8. What are the tangible aspects of culture? Explain with examples.

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9. What are the non-tangible aspects of culture?

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10. What is the relationship of culture to environment?

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### 5.3 CONCEPTS IN CULTURE

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#### 5.3.1 Enculturation and Socialisation

The process of transmission of culture via symbols, teaching from parents to their children involves Enculturation and Socialisation. Enculturation is a process by which a child learns and adapts to the ways, manners, habits and other attributes of her/his culture directly from parents and immediate family like siblings, grandparents and other caregivers and learns to fulfill the functions of her/his status and role. Enculturation as a process begins at home during the formative stage of a child before s/he is introduced to formal education in a public space like school. We learn about religion our beliefs, habits, etiquette and other culturally appropriate behaviour at home from our parents, siblings and elders like a grandparent. While the process of socialisation is a way in which the society integrates its members and the way by which an individual learns to adapt to society, it starts as soon as the child comes in contact with other members of the society, people other than her/his parents, like teachers and peer groups in school, uncles and aunts in family gathering etc. Socialisation enables the child to fulfill its role in society.

#### 5.3.2 Culture Traits, Culture Complexes and Culture Areas

Culture trait can be defined as the smallest identifiable unit in a culture. Kroeber has defined culture trait as the ‘minimal definable element of culture’. For example, Herskovits 1949 in ‘*Man and his Works...*’ gave the example of a chair that can be identified as a cultural trait. The chair can be a part of the living room chairs or can be from the study room or the dining area. Likewise, the dining table or the study table is a part of culture trait in itself. However, the chair as a culture trait becomes a part of the culture complex when it is identified in the larger context with other attributes like the practice of sitting on a higher level than on the floor, the habit of eating on a table and also using the posture of sitting for status related purposes, as the type of chair used designating the status of a person. This may also be related

to concepts of hierarchy and differences of status and role in society. All these traits like a chair, dining habits, sitting practices and even abstract notions like hierarchy, together make a culture complex.

However, when we explore parts of culture it becomes very difficult to identify the smallest unit, as the smallest unit can also be a culture complex. For example, if we take the dwelling i.e.; a house as a culture complex with its different partitions or rooms that is divided into different spaces like, living area where guest are entertained, the dining space where the family or guests sit together to eat a meal, the bedrooms the sleeping area which is usually a private space, the kitchen where food is cooked etc., then the dining table with the chairs is actually a cultural trait rather than a culture complex. Likewise, chairs can be removed from the culture complex of the dining area and used in the drawing area if the number of guests exceeds the number of chairs/sofas available in that space. Thus, a clear-cut division of a culture trait and culture complex is not possible. All the units can be rearranged.

Culture Area can be simply defined as the area in which similar cultures are found. Here area refers to a geographical location. For example, we can take the celebration of *Makar Sankranti* (it marks the first day of the sun’s transit to the *Makara* Capricorn, marking the end of the winter solstice and the beginning of longer days) in the month of January in many of the Indian states. It is known by such names as *Pongal* in Tamil Nadu, *Magh Bihu* in Assam, *Lohri* in Punjab. It is also related to the harvesting of crops, and in India where the mainstay of the economy is agriculture, this festival is celebrated with much fun fair. Though there are regional variations among the states, in terms of language and attributes, yet we see a similar culture. Nowadays it still lives on as a regional culture though in a more broadly conceptualised way. The concept of culture area was systematically treated by Clark Wissler and later by Kroeber in their works.

### 5.3.3 Patterns of Culture

In the earlier sections we have discussed the universals of cultural attributes, however in every culture, there emerges a pattern in its manifestation. In this aspect let’s take the example of marriage, which is universal, however, each culture varies in the ceremonial observations in terms of rituals. A Christian wedding takes place in a Church where the Pastor presides over the rituals, in a Muslim wedding the *Kazi* solemnizes the *Nikah* (contract marriage) while in Hindu wedding the *Pundit* (priest) performs the rituals. Thus, we see that the patterns differ in different cultures. Ruth Benedict while studying the Japanese prisoners of war described the patterns in their behaviour as systematic and integrated thus, referring it as a national character. Thus, stating cultures as collection of customs and beliefs that are integrated patterned systems.

#### Check Your Progress 3

11. What is enculturation?

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12. Define socialisation.

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13. What is a culture trait?

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14. Define culture complex.

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15. What is culture area?

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## 5.4 MECHANISMS OF CULTURE CHANGE

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In the earlier sections, we have learned that culture is universal. We have also discussed the processes by which culture is carried forward from one generation to the next. In this section, we would try to understand the different processes by which cultures change.

### 5.4.1 Diffusion

Diffusion is basically borrowing from other cultures. When two cultures come in contact with each other it leads to an exchange of information, ideas, products etc. People while travelling also takes traits with them. Since the earliest times, there has been movement and populations have travelled and spread across the globe. Thus, migration has been considered as one of the earliest modes of bringing about changes in a culture. Diffusion can be direct or indirect and also forced. Direct diffusion results from contact between two cultures via trade, marriage or even wars. In such a situation if both the cultures exchange traits amicably it is called direct diffusion, however, mostly in the case of wars, when the winning group i.e.; the dominant group imposes and subjugates through its culture on the defeated group, it is known as forced diffusion. Indirect diffusion occurs when items and traits pass on from one group to the other without first-hand contact but via a mediator. For example, the Bhotias of the Himalayan ranges during the winters come down to sell their products in the markets of Assam and in the process cultural exchange between the Bhotias and Assamese culture takes place. In today's age of mass media and internet technology most of the cultural exchanges happen in an indirect manner through the sharing of knowledge and information without direct contact in the virtual world.

### 5.4.2 Acculturation

The exchange of cultural features owing to continuous first-hand contact between two groups is known as acculturation. The cultures of either or both groups may be changed by this contact (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits, 1936). The development of a mixed language that helps different cultures in contact to communicate known as *pidgin* is a process of acculturation. For example in Tamil Nadu owing to the trade routes used by the Arabs a new dialect Arabi-Tamil came into being, which is a mixture of Arabic and Tamil (Pandian 1995). Likewise, Nagamese is a language which is a mixture of Naga and Assamese words. Such acculturation can take place in other aspects of cultural life, like for example the influence of Christianity in Nagaland when seen in terms of marriage ceremonies, where many of the marriages take place in the Church with the bride wearing the white bridal gown, rather than the traditional marriage ceremonies in their traditional Naga attires yet wear some insignia like a headband of their own culture. Thus owing to acculturation Christianity as a religion and its preachings and way of life was adopted and made a part of the local traditions of the Nagas.

### 5.4.3 Assimilation

Assimilation is the process by which a person or a group inculcates much of the habits, manners and ways, and starts resembling an existing group. Herein, we can consider the case of the Brahmins of Assam who had originally migrated from Kanauj and other eastern and northern regions during the Ahom rule as an example. The Brahmins of Assam, speak the Assamese language and their life cycle rituals like marriage follow the Assamese customs and dress. They are non-vegetarian and mostly eat fish, whereas in other parts of India, Brahmins are vegetarian. In the context of the present globalised world, Indians living abroad and also in India are seen to have assimilated many of the cultures of the Western world. Food is one such space where a lot of variation is seen, as the coming up of the fast food corners comprising of burgers, pizza etc. which is now a part of the Indian diet. In the first instance, the Brahmins from outside became a part of the local tradition of Assam, whereas in the second case the foreign food was made a part of the Indian tradition.

#### Check Your Progress 4

16. Name the different forces that bring about culture change.

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17. Define diffusion and name the different types of diffusion.

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18. What is acculturation?

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 .....  
 .....

19. Define assimilation.

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## 5.5 CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND ETHNOCENTRISM

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While studying and understanding other people’s culture two important concepts have emerged, a. Ethnocentrism and b. Cultural Relativism. In the earlier studies during the emergence of anthropology as a discipline the works on culture, which basically involved European authors the general tendency was to judge the culture that was being studied with the author’s own culture. This attitude has been reflected in works on tribal, aboriginal societies, where such societies were conjured as ‘strange’ or ‘exotic’ which were presented more in the lines of deviations from what is ‘normal’ in one’s own society. Such concepts and ideas helped in postulating the evolutionary theory that was much in use during that time. This aspect has been termed as ethnocentrism and was coined by sociologist William Graham Sumner in his book ‘Folkways’ published in 1906, where he stated ‘ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to assume that one’s culture and way of life are superior to all others’.

Franz Boas, American anthropologist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century postulated the Cultural Relativism or Cultural Determinism approach which studies behaviour of a particular group from the perspective of their own culture. The idea was to view a particular culture in relation to its own context and time. For example, polyandry in a particular society might seem at odds to a researcher’s own society. However, instead of judging this custom the researcher has to understand the functionalities of such a system in that society. As every culture has its own history and culture traits, that needs to be understood in terms of the cultural whole, as each society is different, and its customs depends on the other aspects of culture like environment, population etc. Cultural relativism, however, has had its own set of criticisms, if looked from human rights perspectives, many of the cultural practices in many societies are a violation of human rights. One such example can be female infanticide practiced in some societies or not letting women inherit property. Feminists have been particularly critical of the fact that most cultures encourage patriarchy in the name of tradition.

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## 5.6 SUMMARY

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In summing up let’s quickly review what we have been discussing in this unit. We have tried to understand how anthropologists describe and understand the term culture. For anthropologists, culture encompasses the lived experiences and behaviour of a group of people living within the boundaries of a society; the habits, knowledge, morals, values etc. that are learned and transmitted from one generation to the other via socialisation and enculturation. Language, signs and symbols are the medium through which culture is transmitted. Culture is learned behaviour and is not genetically inherited. Culture is static yet dynamic as it keeps adding new aspects to its fold through the medium of diffusion, acculturation and assimilation.

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## 5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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1. E. B. Tylor.
2. Language.
3. E.B. Tylor.
4. Yes.
5. Culture is learned behaviour and not genetically transmitted, for further details see section 5.1.3.
6. Yes. The forces that bring about changes in culture making it dynamic are acculturation, diffusion, migration, etc.
7. *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871.
8. See section 5.2 second paragraph.
9. Intangible aspects are knowledge, values, morals, beliefs, customs etc.
10. See section 5.2 paragraph six.
11. See section 5.3.1
12. See section 5.3.1 for more detail.
13. Culture trait can be defined as the smallest identifiable unit in a culture.
14. See section 5.3.2 for further detail.
15. Culture area can be simply defined as the area in which similar cultures are found.
16. Diffusion, Acculturation and Assimilation.
17. See section 5.4.1
18. The exchange of cultural features owing to continuous first-hand contact between two groups is known as Acculturation. For more details see section 5.4.2.
19. See section 5.4.3.

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# UNIT 6 INSTITUTIONS I: KINSHIP, FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

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## Contents

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Kinship
  - 6.1.1 Idea of Kinship
  - 6.1.2 Real Versus Fictive Kinship
  - 6.1.3 Incest Taboo
  - 6.1.4 Kinship affiliations
  - 6.1.5 Genealogy
- 6.2 Family
  - 6.2.1 Types of Families
  - 6.2.2 Household and Family
  - 6.2.3 Functions of a Family
- 6.3 Marriage
  - 6.3.1 Understanding Marriage
  - 6.3.2 Types of Marriages
  - 6.3.3 Whom to Marry?
  - 6.3.4 Ways of Acquiring a Mate
- 6.4 Summary
- 6.5 References
- 6.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit a learner would be able to describe:

- kinship terms, relations and how kinship is traced;
- the notion of marriage, types of marriages prevalent in different societies, rules of marriage in a society that defines whom to marry; and
- formation of a family, different types of families based on marriage and the rules of residence after marriage.

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## 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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Every human being belongs to a society. They become the members of a society by virtue of their birth. It is the norms and values of a society that shapes the life of a human being. In this unit we will look into the relationships that constitute our core groups; kinship, family and marriage. How each relationship is intertwined and shapes our lives.

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## 6.1 KINSHIP

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### 6.1.1 Idea of Kinship

Let us attend a wedding to understand the core concepts of kinship, family and marriage as an example. Herein, taking a bride and groom as our example we would first try to identify the kin groups and relations one acquires by birth and by marriage. The understanding of kin groups is important as kinship is the basic principle which decides whom a person can marry and who is out of bounds. Kinship also determines the pattern of descent, lineage, inheritance, power and authority in a family. Some of the basic concepts and terminologies used in kinship would also be discussed herein. The genealogical method which helps in drawing the family tree would be explained in this section.

With the example of the wedding let us understand what kinship is. In a wedding we see two families- the groom's family and the bride's family. The people who attend the marriage are usually attached to either of the two families by birth or by marriage. These relations are known as kinship relations. So how do we acquire kinship relations? There are basically two ways of acquiring kinship relations **a. by birth** and **b. by marriage**.

### 6.1.2 Real versus Fictive Kinship

Taking the bride and the groom as example let us understand their kinship relations. Who are the relations by birth for the bride? The bride's immediate family- father, mother and her siblings (brothers and sisters) and her relations from paternal and maternal sides are relations by birth or blood. Anthropologically we call these relations **consanguineal** relationships. Whereas, the family relations the bride acquires after marriage from her husband's side, her father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law etc. are relations by marriage or **affinal** relationships. Likewise, for the groom, his wife's family becomes his affinal kin. When we speak about relations by blood the concept of cultural recognition comes into play and not necessarily connections that are made genetically. As with the case of adoption, fostering and step-relations these are culturally recognised blood relationships though not genetically related. These kinship relations are generally termed as real kinship.

In some societies like the Nāyar of South India as studied by Schneider and Gough (1974), the biological and the social father may not be the same. A Nayar woman is free to begin a *sambandham* (relationship) after her marriage. When a Nayar woman is pregnant either the husband or any of the lovers can claim paternity by paying the midwife and is recognised as the social father. Anthropologists for such cases have distinguished two types of parenthood for mother and father.

- genetrix- culturally recognised biological mother
- mater- social mother
- genitor- culturally recognised biological father
- pater-social father (Barnard 2007:101)

Now let's go back to the example of our wedding. Will it be true if we say only relations acquired by blood and marriage are the people who attend a wedding. Think about it. Besides these two groups of people there is another group known as friends and family friends who are part of a wedding ceremony. These groups of

people though not directly related by blood are in many ways closely associated with our day to day lives. For example in the Christian culture by becoming the ritual sponsor for the baptism ceremony one can become godparents of the child. Godparents take up the spiritual responsibility of a friend's child. They can also take up the responsibility of educating the child if the need arises. The question here in terms of kinship relation is where do we place them in the kins group? Such acquired relations are known as **fictive kinship** which is not real kinship but plays an important role in one's life. Other examples are the terms like 'sisters' in the feminist movement and addressing friends parents as 'uncles' and 'aunts' though not related by blood.

### 6.1.3 Incest Taboo

The basic rule of kinship is to keep the two categories- consanguineal and affinal relations separate. In simpler terms the blood relatives can never be joined by marriage and this fundamental rule is known as **incest taboo**. Mother son, father daughter, brother sister relationships in terms of marriage is considered taboo. However, exceptions to the rule has also been seen in earlier historical instances when in the Egyptian and Hawaiian royal families, the rule of incest taboo has not been followed. Marriage between siblings had been the norm so as to maintain the purity of the royal blood. Apart from the basic relationship of parents and children and siblings, there is a wide variation in the rules of incest taboo. Like in Hindu society one cannot marry within the same *gotra*. *Gotra* refers to the members who claim their descents from a common line of male ancestors. The *gotra* of husband and wife cannot be same. While in Northern India a marriage cannot take place between members of the same village.

### 6.1.4 Kinship Affiliations

Till now we have learnt that kinship is acquired either by blood or marriage. The rules of descent followed by a particular society decide the kinship affiliations. Descent is affiliation to ones kin group. Kin group is based on whether the society is matrilineal or patrilineal. In a matrilineal society descent is traced through the mother whereas in a patrilineal society descent is traced through the father. Descent determines the pattern of inheritance of property, authority and power. Affiliation to ones descent group is based on societal norms whether the society is matriarchal or patriarchal.

**6.1.4.1 Matriarchal society-** the term matriarchal comes from the word matriarchy meaning mother right. In present day societies complete rule of the mother is not seen. What we generally have is a matrilineal society based on lineage and inheritance pattern rather than on authority and power. For example among the Khasi people of Meghalaya, North East India the lineage is traced through the mother and the inheritance pattern specially of the ancestral house follows the matrilineal line wherein the inheritance is by the youngest daughter known as *Ka Khatdduh*. Inheritance by the youngest child is known as the rule of ultimogeniture. In case of authority in decision making it lies with the mother's brother. As the power and authority lies with the male line, rule of the female or mother right is not complete in the true sense of the term.

**6.1.4.2 Patriarchal society-** such a society is based on father right or patriarchy. In such societies the lineage, descent, inheritance, power and authority is traced through the father. Daughters are part of the father's lineage but in terms of inheritance, power and authority it moves from father to son. The rule of primogeniture is the norm that is the eldest male child becomes the heir. He inherits the property and becomes the head of the family after his father's death. In few patriarchal societies

the rule of ultimo geniture prevails wherein the youngest son inherits the ancestral property. Among the Kachin's of Burma the rule of ultimo geniture prevails.

### 6.1.5 Genealogy

In kinship studies the relationship between two persons can be established by drawing the family tree known as genealogy. Genealogy is basically tracing your ancestors either the father's or the mother's side to understand the line of descent. Let us understand here the principles of symbols used in drawing a genealogy.

1. A triangle represents a man  $\triangle$
2. A circle represents a woman  $\circ$
3. A box or a diamond represents a person whose sex is not known  $\square$  or  $\diamond$
4. A line above two symbols indicates a sibling relationship 
5. An equal sign between two symbols indicates marriage =
6. A horizontal line from the sign of marriage when it goes down indicates parent/child relationship  $\overline{\quad}$
7. A dotted or dashed line between two symbols indicates a sexual relationship other than marriage -----
8. A line through a symbol indicates a dead person  $\triangle$
9. A line that cuts horizontally the equal sign indicates a severed relationship (such as divorce)  $\neq$
10. An arrow near any symbol marks the Ego, the reference point of the genealogy  $\rightarrow$

Anthropologists use certain symbols to trace the exact relationship of an ego with the other members in a genealogical chart. Below the terms of reference are detailed herein for your understanding.

F= Father, M= Mother, P= Parent, B= brother, Z= sister, S= son, D= daughter, G= sibling, H= husband, W= wife, E= spouse, e= older (elder), y= younger, ss= same sex, os= opposite sex, gm= grandmother, gf= grandfather, zh= sister's husband, zs= sister's son, zd= sister's daughter, sla= son in law, dla= daughter in law (Barnard 2007:103, et al)

Let us draw here diagrams using the symbols to understand how to trace genealogy.

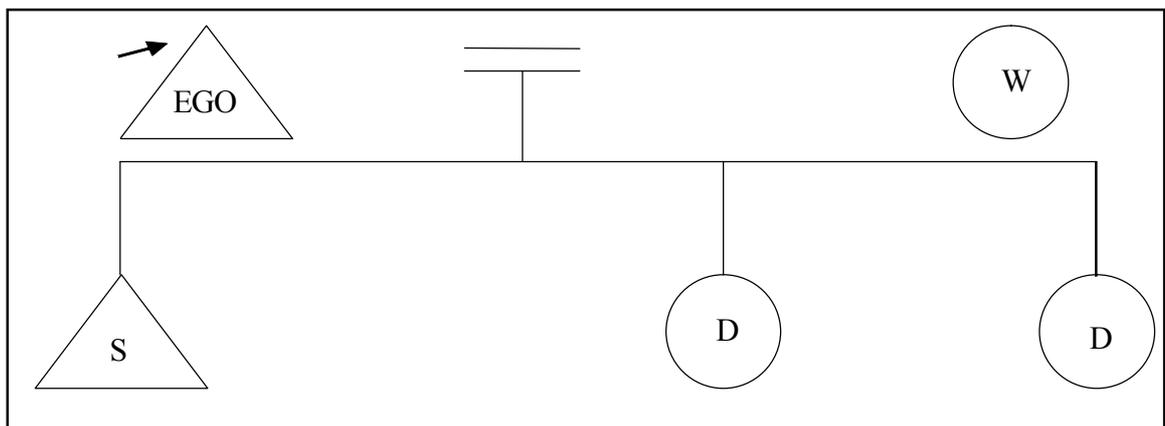


Fig. 1

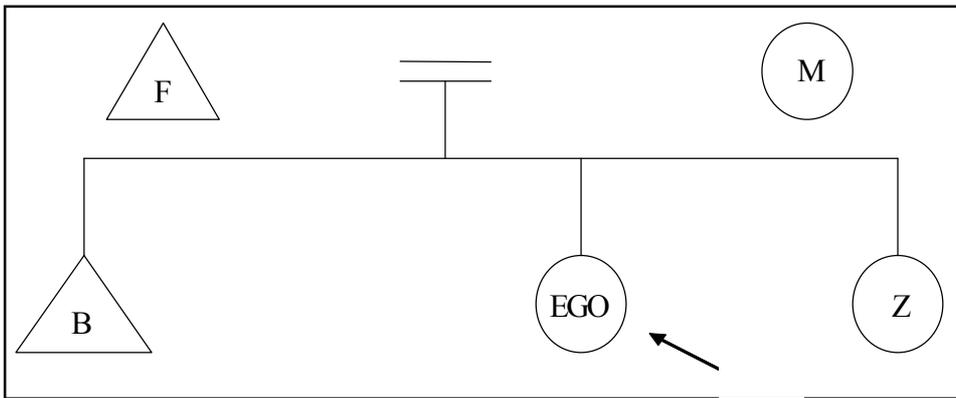


Fig. 2

If we look at Fig-1 and 2 they appear similar but when we read the symbols we see that the figures are not same. This is because of the ego. In a genealogy relationships are traced through the ego. In fig-1 ego's family comprises of his wife, a son and two daughters. In fig-2 ego's family comprises of father, mother, a brother and a sister. Thus, even if we are looking at the same genealogy, the perspective and relations would depend upon the ego from whom the family tree is being traced.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1. What are the two basic ways of acquiring kinship relations?  
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 .....
2. What are relations acquired by blood known as?  
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 .....  
 .....
3. What are relations acquired by marriage known as?  
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 .....
4. Define real kinship.  
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5. What is fictive kinship?  
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6. Define incest taboo.

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7. What is descent?

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8. How is descent in a matrilineal society different from a patrilineal society?

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9. Define the rules of primogeniture and ultimogeniture.

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10. What is a genealogy?

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**Activity: Trace the relationships in the genealogies given below**

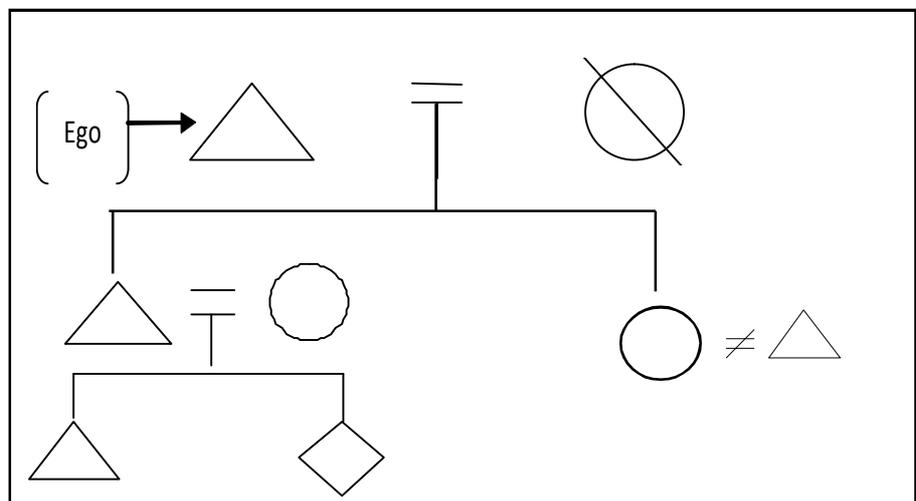


Fig. 3

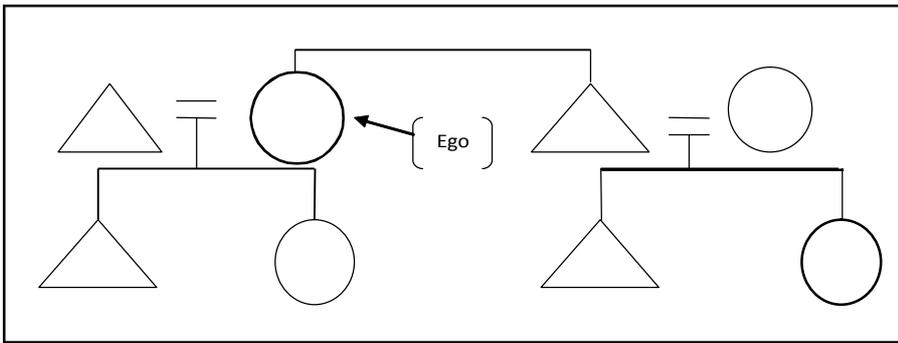


Fig. 4

## 6.2 FAMILY

In this section we would learn about the meaning of family and the different types of families that are seen in different societies. Our discussion would also pertain to understanding the terms family and household. Variations in the family types based on residence would also be taken up herein.

### 6.2.1 Types of Families

When we use the term family our own family comes to mind. So let us start this section by listing out the members in our own family to understand the meaning of family. You can use the genealogical method that was described in the section 6.1 on kinship to create your family tree. Now if we are to check the family tree we would basically see that each one of us have included our parents and siblings with whom we live. Some of us might have also added grandparents either from the maternal or paternal side if they are living with us. Basically we list everyone living together in the same house as family. This composition of members living in a family will differ from society to society. Family comprises of people living together who are related either by blood (cognate) or marriage (agnate). Family can be divided into two broad categories- family of orientation and family of procreation. A child is born into the family of orientation where the process of socialisation and enculturation takes place. After marriage a family is created by husband and wife known as family of procreation where they can beget or adopt children. Let us understand the different types of families as described by Barnard (2007:94-95).

- nuclear family- comprises of one married couple with their children, own or adopted
- one parent family- family with only one parent either father or mother living with the children, own or adopted. It can be formed through separation, divorce or death of one of the spouse/widowhood.
- compound family- a central figure (typically a man), his or her spouses, sometimes concubines, and all their children. Such families are seen where polygamous marriage is prevalent.
- joint family- brothers and their wives and children all live together along with their parents. Usually, the authority lies with the father. In countries where agriculture is the main occupation such families are common like in India and China.

- extended family- today with changing times this word extended has lot of ambiguities, on the one hand it means a group of closely-related nuclear families that live together, while in urban and industrial societies it means a group which do not live together but keep in touch.

Now going back to our example of the wedding let's see what type of family is formed based on residence after marriage. In most societies there are rules that a newly wedded couple has to follow while taking up residence after marriage. Herein, we would discuss the types of families based on residence after marriage as described by Jha 1995.

- **neolocal residence** (that is a new place). A new family basically known as nuclear family is formed with only husband and wife after marriage and later on their children, own or adopted become a part of this family.
- **patrilocal or virilocal residence**- when the newly married couple takes up residence in the groom's father's house such a residence is known as patrilocal or virilocal residence.
- **matrilocal or uxoriocal residence**- is created when the couple takes up residence in a matrilocal family i.e. with the bride's family after marriage.
- **avunculocal residence** - in some societies like the Ashanti of Ghana studied by Meyer Fortes a couple after marriage resides with the groom's mother's brother's family or maternal uncles house.
- **ambilocal or bilocal residence**- when a married couple has the choice of living with relatives of either spouse (the husband or the wife) such residence is known as ambilocal or bilocal residence.
- **natolocal residence**- a couple after marriage when they do not reside together but stays with their family of orientation such residence is known as natolocal residence earlier found among the Garos of Meghalaya, the husband used to visit the wife at night and leave her place before sunrise. The authority for the children lies with the mother's brother that is a man is responsible for his sister's children and not his own.

### 6.2.2 Household and Family

Many a times there is confusion between the term family and household. So let's first try to understand the term household. Household has been defined by Haviland (2003) as the basic residential unit where economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter are organised and implemented. The members of a household at times share a common hearth. Let's take the example of the Mundurucu of the Amazon who organize themselves around a household. They have a unique system by which all men and boys above 13 years of age live together whereas all the women and children below 13 years of age live together (Haviland, 2003). Herein, we see that household is an extension of family, a family can be a household but a household need not be a family. To make this statement clear let's take another example from the present day situation. We see lot of students moving out of their native place and settling in some other city or going abroad for higher education. These students usually on low budget like to share accommodation with fellow students. Thus, two to three students take up residence and start sharing space and eating together. This makes them share a hearth but they are not necessarily members of the same family but belong to different families.

### 6.2.3 Functions of a Family

The family as a social group is universal in nature and its existence is seen at all levels of cultures. Thus, the family in society also has certain responsibilities and functions. The basic functions of a family are outlined below;

#### 6.2.3.1 Satisfaction of biological need

The family as an institution regularizes the satisfaction of biological needs, the primordial need among all humans. Family helps in channeling of sexual outlets by defining the norms with whom one can mate and who are out of bound in terms of incest taboo.

#### 6.2.3.2 Reproduction

A child as we have learnt is born into a family. As soon as a child is born into a family s/he is entitled to certain social position, system of beliefs, language, parents and kins as per the family system that s/he is born into.

#### 6.2.3.3 Economic

A family as a social group is responsible for satisfying the basic needs of its members like food, clothes and shelter. In order to achieve this objective all the members of a family cooperate and divide the work among themselves and make contribution towards the up keeping of the family.

#### 6.2.3.4 Educational

A family nurtures the child and imbibes in the child the ways of the society through the process of enculturation and socialisation, preparing the child to accept status of adulthood.

In case of family also we see new variations in the present day. Live-in relationships have come up as partners or couples live together without marriage. Such relationships are considered legal by law and the children born if any are considered legitimate by law. In India cases of domestic violence in live-in relationships are being taken up in the family court.

### Check Your Progress 2

11. Name the two broad categories into which family can be divided.

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12. Name the different types of families.

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13. Name the different types of residences based on different types of families.

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## 6.3 MARRIAGE

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Marriage is found in almost all human societies though the pattern, rituals and customs may vary. The debate still continues as to when marriage came into being and became an integral part of society. Early social thinkers had speculated that in the initial stages of human existence human beings lived in a state of promiscuity where marriage to an individual did not exist. There were no rules and regulations. All men had access to all women and thus, the children born were the responsibility of the society at large. This slowly gave way to group marriage and finally to single marriages. So in this section we would first try to define marriage and then understand the different types of marriages prevalent in different societies. Then move on to the norms and regulations that are to be ascribed to when looking for a match for marriage.

### 6.3.1 Understanding Marriage

What is marriage? Let us start this discussion with the definition of marriage as given in Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 111, “Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate offspring of both partners”. So basically marriage is a sanction which is accepted by the society for a man and a woman to have a relationship and gives them the social sanctity to beget or adopt children. However, let us now explore if in the present world this definition holds true and also try to understand the various types of marriages prevalent in societies. To begin with let’s start with the types of marriages that are prevalent in societies.

### 6.3.2. Types of Marriages

Broadly speaking marriage can be divided into two types a. Monogamy and b. Polygamy.

#### 6.3.2.1 Monogamy

Sanctions marriage to one partner/ person only. Monogamy is further divided into serial monogamy and non-serial monogamy.

- **Serial monogamy** pertains to a state where a man has a series of wives one after the other, but only one wife at any given point of time. For example in the United States where divorce rate is high but only monogamy is legal, serial monogamy is widely noticed.
- **Non-Serial monogamy**- in many societies like the Hindu society of India monogamy pertains to *non-serial monogamy* where a man has a single wife throughout his life. In such societies the divorce rate is rare and as such it is the preferred norm.

#### 6.3.2.2 Polygamy

Is a type of marriage where more than one partner is involved. Polygamy is of three types.

- **Polygyny:** If a man is married to more than one woman it is known as polygyny. The wives of a man if they are sisters or related is known as *sororal polygyny*. In many Islamic countries such marriages are seen. Among the Zulus of South Africa *sororal polygyny* is prevalent. When the wives are not related it is known as *non-sororal polygyny*. In the Coromo islands such marriages are practiced.

- **Polyandry:** When a woman is married to more than one man it is known as polyandry. The husbands if related by blood like brothers or clan brothers such a marriage is known as *fraternal or adelphic polyandry*. Account of fraternal polyandry in Indian Hindu society is seen in the great epic Mahabharata where the five Pandava brothers were married to princess Draupadi. Polyandry even today is found in certain regions of Tibet and Nepal as a socially accepted practice. When the husbands are not related by blood such a marriage is known as *non-fraternal polyandry*. In rare cases like among the Tibetans the husbands are father and sons known as *familial polyandry*. There are many speculations for such a marriage and one of them relates to the small population size of the Tibetans and the high altitude in which they live. A woman if taken as wife from the low altitude areas find it difficult to acclimatise.
- **Polygynandry:** Marriage of several men to several women or in simpler terms a man has many wives and a woman has many husbands at any given time is known as **polygynandry**. Such marriages were earlier prevalent among the Todas of the Nilgiri hills and the Khasas of Jaunsar Bawar of India.

In recent times a third category of marriage has come up known as gay marriages or same sex marriages. The couple comprises of persons belonging to the same sex either two males or two females. In such marriages the society sanctions the couple to legally adopt a child or beget one through surrogacy.

From the above discussed types of marriages we can sum up that the institution of marriage has different patterns. We have come to know that in some societies marriage might involve more than one couple. While in certain societies same sex couples can also marry. So let's just understand marriage as a social sanction given to a couple or a group of people to live together and to either beget or adopt children.

### 6.3.3 Whom to Marry?

In most societies it is the rule of kinship that defines whom to marry and who is out of bounds. Either prescriptive or preferential norms are followed while selecting a mate. When the rules and norms are strictly followed even when a few members of the category are available for marriage, such norms are described as **prescriptive**. The rules of endogamy and exogamy fall under this group.

#### 6.3.3.1 Endogamy

Is marriage within the believers of the same faith or religion, for example Hindus marry within the same caste group and the tribes marry within the same tribal population. In Hindu society the rules of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* are also prevalent. In the earlier Vedic times the rules of *anuloma* or hypergamy was prevalent where a boy from a higher caste could marry a girl from his own caste or from those below upto three varnas, however in such cases the status of the girl remains the same and only their children gets the father's status. On the other hand in the case of *partiloma* or hypogamy rule a man from a lower caste may marry a girl from a higher caste, however the girl in such cases loses her upper caste status and the children born are recognised by their father's caste. In earlier times *pratiloma* marriages were not permitted and faced resistance from society.

#### 6.3.3.2 Exogamy

Is marriage outside the group. In Hindu community one has to marry within the same caste group but outside the *gotra*. In societies where endogamy is prevalent parallel

cousin marriage is the preferential norm. Among such societies marriage between first cousins is permitted. Based on the rules of lineage exogamy cousins belonging to different lineage are preferred. For easy understanding the children of siblings of opposite sex (brother- sister) - are called *cross-cousins*; while the children of siblings of the same sex (brother-brother) are called *parallel cousins*. In many of the Islamic societies a man marries his father's brother's daughter known as *parallel cousin marriage* a very rare form of endogamy. The Kurds of eastern and southeastern Turkey still continue with the practice of parallel cousin marriage.

### 6.3.3.3 Preferential Marriages

Cross-cousin marriages are the preferential norms in societies where the rule of exogamy is adhered to. A man's lineage is traced either through his mother's or father's side. If the lineage is traced through the father than marriage with his aunt's (father's sisters) daughter is the preferred norm and when lineage is traced through the mother than the preferred norm for marriage is mother's brother's daughter. When a man marries his mother's brother's daughter it is known as *matrilateral cross-cousin marriage* while if he marries his father's sister's daughter it is known as *patrilateral cross-cousin marriage*. In societies where the authority lies with the mother's brother matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is the preferred norm.

Besides the above mentioned prescriptive and preferential marriages, levirate and sororate at times form a prescribed norm for widows and widowers in a few societies. *Levirate* is a marriage form in which after the decease of an elder brother the younger brother is obliged to marry the widow. The term levirate is derived from the Latin word *levir* meaning husband's brother. This is a type of marriage often seen in societies where exogamy is not prevalent. *Sororate* on the other hand is a practice in which a widower marries his deceased wife's sister.

### 6.3.4 Ways of Acquiring a Mate

The ways of acquiring a mate varies in different societies. In Hindu society of recent past arranged marriage or **marriage by negotiation** was the norm. A match was fixed by the parents of the bride and groom through a mediator. In such marriages either bride wealth or dowry used to come into play. Bride wealth is seen as a compensation given during marriage by the family of the groom to the bride's family. The compensation is made in terms of movable property like goods, currencies or livestock. Mostly seen among pastoral and semi nomadic groups, it is a compensation for the loss of labour in the bride's house. In such communities every member in the family is an asset in terms of labour. Dowry on the other hand is the transfer of goods and currencies from the bride's family to the groom's family. Previously it was a practiced norm in the Hindu society. The tradition of dowry was prohibited in 1961 under Indian civil law and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498A of the Indian Penal Code in India. The move was made to protect the women from dowry related harassment, domestic violence and even death.

**Marriage by exchange** is also a part of the marriage by negotiation system. Herein, the system of bride wealth or dowry is waived off when instead of goods daughters are exchanged between two families. Marriage by exchange was also prevalent in the olden days to ward off wars between two kings or groups. This was known as alliance.

**Marriage by service** is found among some of the tribes of North East India where a groom pays off the bride wealth through service at the bride's place instead of paying through goods or currencies.

**Marriage by capture** can either be ceremonial or by force. In the first case, as noted by anthropologist Verrier Elwin in the earlier times among the Nagas of Nagaland in India, during raids the men captured the women of the village who were of marriageable age and either married them or kept them as bonded labourers to work in the fields. Such a situation is ascribed as physical capture. In ceremonial capture a boy desiring to marry a girl propositions her in a community fair or festival and makes his intentions towards her known by either holding her hand or marking her with vermilion as was the case among the Kharia and the Birhor of Bihar.

**Marriage by intrusion** is a type of marriage wherein a girl forces her way into the boy's house and forces him to accept her as his spouse. Such marriages were seen among the Birhor and Ho of Bihar and also among the Kamars of Madhya Pradesh.

**Marriage by trial** is a process in which the groom has to prove his strength and valour while claiming his bride. Such marriages by trial till recent times was found in many societies in India like the Bhils of Rajasthan and the Nagas of Nagaland. Marriage by trial has also been described in the two epics Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

**Marriage by Elopement** is a customary marriage in some societies whereas it is looked down in others. In some societies the cost of ritual offerings for the marriage is high and difficult for many families to bear the cost. In such societies marriage by elopement has come up as a customary practice. Such marriages were quite in vogue among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In other cases marriage by elopement takes place when either of the prospective groom or bride's family does not approve of the wedding or when marriage is fixed with a distasteful partner.

In the present era the ways of acquiring a mate is not strictly followed. Today owing to education, globalisation and modernisation in most of the metropolitan cities love matches are most commonly seen where the boy and girl decide on their own whom to marry. Yet in certain parts of India, the caste rigidity is still witnessed in the form of honour killing which have come up in the recent times as a major social concern. The system of live-in where a boy and a girl or same sex couples living together without marriage is also coming up in a big way in present societies.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

14. What are the two broad divisions of marriage?

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15. Name the divisions of monogamy.

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16. What are the different categories of polygamy?

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17. Define endogamy.

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18. Define exogamy.

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## 6.4 SUMMARY

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Kinship as we have studied till now is the social recognition of biological ties which includes adoption. Family and marriage are closely linked to kinship. In the present era kinship studies have become a challenge with the change in marriage and family systems. Today it is difficult to pinpoint a marriage pattern to a particular society or culture as the waves of modernisation and globalisation has touched almost all the societies. Anthropologists are presently more concerned with the changes in family and marriage that brings about changes in kinship and the use of kinship terminologies. Like due to remarriages, children now have more than one set of parents and grandparents and this brings a change in the kinship terminologies.

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## **6.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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1. Two ways of acquiring kinship relations are a. **by birth** and b. **by marriage**.
2. Consanguineal relationships.
3. Affinal relationships.
4. See section 6.1.2.
5. See section 6.1.2.
6. See section 6.1.3.
7. See section 6.1.4.
8. See section 6.1.4.1 and 6.1.4.2.
9. See section 6.1.4.1 and 6.1.4.2.
10. See section 6.1.5.
11. Family of orientation and Family of procreation
12. See section 6.2.1
13. See section 6.2.1
14. a. Monogamy and b. Polygamy
15. See section 6.3.2.1
16. Polygyny, Polyandry, Polygynandry
17. See section 6.3.3.1.
18. See section 6.3.3.2

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# UNIT 7 INSTITUTIONS II: ECONOMIC POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS

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## Contents

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Economic Institutions
  - 7.1.1 Production
  - 7.1.2 Consumption
  - 7.1.3 Exchange
- 7.2 Political Institutions
  - 7.2.1 Band
  - 7.2.2 Lineage Societies
  - 7.2.3 Chiefdoms
  - 7.2.4 State
- 7.3 Religious Institutions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 References
- 7.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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In this unit you will learn about the social institutions that are vital to the functioning of any society as they enable the members of the society to perform all the tasks that are required by them as social persons. The institutions that we will discuss are:

- economic;
- political; and
- religious.

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## 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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The term social institution is used when we are talking about the various functions that need to be performed when human beings live as members of society. As social persons they need to have a social identity and also ways to meet their material needs of food, shelter, security and also fulfill their desire for a meaningful life. All societies need some means of control, to ensure that members conform to the norms and rules that make society possible. There is also the important task of dealing with other groups and societies. As humans we also have unique distinction having higher order or esoteric needs for which all human societies have some conceptualisation of what we understand as other worldly concerns. We shall discuss how each of these requirements are met through the institutions of society, but it should also be understood that these institutions are not distinct but they often overlap as societies are systemic in nature.

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Contributor: Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

The institution of kinship, that is, where we locate the family and our relatives is the most primary institution of society as we derive our identity as a social person from our birth into a family, social group, ethnic group etc. A society is considered simple when it does not have too much differentiation between its various institutions. For example; in a simple society the family or household may act as an economic unit and the tribe or caste (a social group) may act as a political unit as well. As societies become more and more complex, functions such as education may be relegated to institutions that specialise only in education, like in our modern society; but in most pre-urban societies, education is the sole task of the family and the social group. This degree of differentiation between institutions is one major criteria for designating societies as simple or complex, but this differentiation in no way refers to the quality of life or cultural complexity of the society, it simply refers to the scale of the society and quite often to its demography. Let us now take up each of these institutions one by one.

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## **7.1 ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS**

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This has been often considered to be the most basic of human institutions as it has to do with physical survival such as provision of food and shelter. But to be human goes way beyond mere food, clothing and shelter and we shall see how this institution also regulates the way people relate to each other and how hierarchies and inequalities are formed in society on the basis of distribution and control of resources essential not only for survival but for locating persons on a scale of social importance.

The economic institutions are divided into three types depending upon which aspect of the economy they deal with. These are production, consumption and exchange. In more complex societies we add the aspect of social distribution also. In simple societies, distribution is confined to the household and kin group.

### **7.1.1 Production**

Production deals with the transformation of naturally occurring resources into a form that is fit for human use. For example production includes food getting and provision of shelter at the most essential level. But production may extend into levels far more complex than mere subsistence activities and may involve production for many different purposes, like the manufacture of a car or a computer is also a kind of productive activity.

All production, from the very basic to the most complex involves technology. As we have already mentioned, production or productive activities are those that extract usable material from the environment and transform them for human consumption. For this one needs to apply some knowledge and some ways of dealing with the problem of transformation of raw material (resources) to a more consumable form. It is this knowledge that we refer to as technology and it involves the making and use of tools and their application towards meaningful ends. Humans have evolved as tool using animals which mean that they are not dependent on raw nature but have the capacity to transform nature. This capacity takes the form of technology.

The application of technology, in whatever form is however not random but a systematic aspect of social relationships that we refer to as division of labour. It is this social dimension of technology that is both a derivative of and determinant of social identity. In simple terms it just means, ‘Who does what?’ but in real terms it means that this division of labour establishes rank and prestige and is a key variable in the location of people on a ladder of social privileges. For example this is one of

the major criteria of gender and other kinds of social differentiation. The division of labour exists at several levels, the most fundamental one being at the level of the family. We all know that in any family there are certain tasks that are normally undertaken by men and some others by women. But how this division is made is determined by the nature of society and the culture of that region or that group. Since culture is variable over time, the division of labour also varies. Today for example women are doing many things like flying aero planes and policing, which they did not do say even fifty years back. Although sex and age are the two most basic principles on which tasks are divided, we find there are many other levels and complex procedures for dividing work. The Indian *jati* (caste) system is one of the most elaborate systems of social division of labour, where occupations are designated as hereditary occupations of different communities. Not only are occupations distributed, they are also ranked.

Again, as humans we interpret everything on the basis of culture which means we assign a meaning and value to things that is not an essential aspect of their objective qualities. This applies to the division of labour as well. All tasks are associated with some prestige value and in stratified societies with unequal rewards. Thus a peon gets paid much less than the manager in an office because the former's task is considered of less importance but this does not reflect any real difference but only a culturally prescribed norm of valuation. In hunting food gathering societies for example, the food gathering activities of women are assigned less value than the hunting activities of men, but it is established that actual caloric value of women's gathering activities are higher and they are also more regular in their supply than the sporadic hunting activities of men that only supplement the basic nutrition provided by the women.

In the same way one often hears of higher and lesser technologies. But this too is misleading. Even among the simplest people like the hunting food gathering communities, the technology used by them have very high level of knowledge behind it, like the returning boomerang of the Australian Aborigines, which involves deep knowledge of aerodynamics. Even to make a stone hand axe involves a high level of expertise. The difference between simple and complex technology is only in terms of the number of steps and complexity of organisation. When a hunter makes a bow and arrow, he is involved in the process from beginning to end but when a motor car is manufactured it involves hundreds of people and thousands of steps and there is no relationship between the manufacturing process and the person who uses it.

### 7.1.2 Consumption

The next process is consumption. This involves social distribution of resources and notions of entitlement. The question to be asked for production was; "Who does what?" and for consumption it is; "Who gets what?" Consumption is also subdivided into various kinds, depending upon the social occasions and the cultural norms. Primarily there are two kinds of consumption; subsistence and conspicuous.

Subsistence consumption refers to the consumption for basic needs like food, shelter, medicines and resources diverted for making tools and equipment. The simplest known societies are those where the resources required for consumption are 'free goods'. These are of people who live in forests, deserts and mountains; where their basic requirements can be met by all the things that are found in their environment and can be used by anyone, without having to procure them or pay for them. However such societies are getting rare as most resources in the present day, including forests are under the control of some state or centralised power. What people produce, such as food grain or animal products, clothes or artifacts are either consumed

directly by them or exchanged for something that they may need. They may need some resources for building houses, or paying for rent of their fields and pastures, they also need some resources for replacing things that are worn out, broken or no longer useful. Some resources are also needed for performance of daily rituals and to feed those who are dependent on them. Within the household, that is the unit of production and consumption in many societies such as households of peasants, farmers and artisans; the resources are rarely equally divided. In many societies, members of the same unit may get unequal portions of choicest foods and coveted resources. For example, even in a hunting society, the animal that is to be eaten is divided among various members according to their social prestige and relationship.

In most societies there is a substantial amount of resources that may be produced for what is known as conspicuous consumption. These are activities performed for their prestige value, like the huge amounts of money people spend on weddings in our society, or people spend on performance of rituals in many other societies. These are not related to any basic requirements but meant only for status enhancement.

### **7.1.3 Exchange**

The third aspect of the economy is exchange. This has also been seen as a fundamental principle for society to form. If everyone was self-sufficient, there would be no need for relationships. Exchange can be reciprocal, redistributive and based on the principle of the market. According to Sahlins (1972) there can be three kinds of reciprocity; generalised, balanced and negative. Reciprocity refers to those exchanges that take place directly often between parties that are in a relationship. Thus generalised reciprocity is between those who have a close and emotional relationship, where there are no calculations involved, like those between members of a family or any primary group like a group of friends or a foraging band. Gift giving is a kind of generalised exchange. Balanced reciprocity is where there is a careful comparison of the value of the items exchanged, like when people exchange one item for another, either through barter or by using a generalised medium of exchange. In many societies, some item like cowries, pigs or bananas are used as medium of exchange. Negative reciprocity is the balancing of power against goods; like when tribute is made to a chief or offerings are made to a shaman or even to a deity. Here the goods are exchanged for a favour or as recognition of the superiority of the other person. In modern society one can compare it with the gift that one makes to one's boss.

**Ceremonial Exchange:** Kula is an exchange system among the people of Trobriand Island extensively studied Malinowski. He traced the network of exchanges with bracelets and necklaces across the Trobriand Islands, and established that they were part of a system of exchange (the Kula ring), and that this exchange system was clearly linked to political/social authority. For more details read the ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

Redistribution is a specific form of exchange where goods are first collected in a center and then given to a number of recipients. In India, the traditional *Jajmani* system was a form of redistribution. In an agricultural village, a portion of the grain is collected from all cultivating households and then given to the various non-cultivating households that perform various functions in the village, like to the Brahmin, the leatherworker, the barber and various other crafts persons and service providers. In some tribal societies, the chief would give a feast out of the tribute that is given to him. In the redistributive system, the goods are accumulated but not used by any one person; they are again given away and the person who gives them gets prestige and position in return.

**Basic Concepts**

The last form of exchange is market exchange where goods are circulated by evaluating them against a common denominator, a generalised medium of exchange. In pre-industrial societies, the market was also synonymous with a place, a market place, a designated spot where people would come to exchange their goods. Today the market is also a principle of exchange that characterises capitalist society. Money is the contemporary medium of exchange that has commodified all objects.

The economic system is not detached from the other institutions of society. It is linked to the political, religious, educational and all other institutions. Let us now go over to the next social institution, namely the political.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1. What are the three basic divisions of economic institutions?  
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2. What is division of Labour?  
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3. What are the two kinds of consumption?  
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4. What is meant by ‘free goods’?  
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5. Name some of the items used as medium of exchange in simple societies.  
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**7.2 POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

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All societies comprise of individuals but the social norms or the rules that bind people together often require that one has to rise above individual interests and pay heed to the group above one’s self. The political institution of any society has to deal with questions of regulation and management of social relations both inside the group and outside of it. The political institutions have to deal with power, as management of these relations may involve direct or indirect coercion. In very small face to face

societies like the band societies of foraging people, there may not be any identifiable political institutions but larger societies have some form of political institutions that function to regulate the internal functioning of the society and also manage the external relations. Regulation requires exertion of authority. Authority means the legitimate use of power. Authority can thus be distinguished from brute force in that it is power that is collectively recognised and accepted by all members of the society. Thus from the level of the family to that of the state, some forms of authority are recognised and those having this authority have the responsibility to keep the norms and values of the society functioning.

Depending upon the nature of complexity of the society, one may form a typology of political institutions. A widely prevalent one, often used is that of Band, Lineage Societies, Chiefdoms and State. The term Acephalous societies, meaning societies without recognisable state or political institutions was coined in the seminal work, *African Political Systems*, by E.E. Evans Pritchard and Meyer Fortes (1940). They used this term to designate those societies that did not have a state but used other institutions, mostly kinship institutions like lineages for political purposes.

### **7.2.1 Band**

In the face to face primary group type societies like the Band, with a small size, the regulatory functions are performed collectively by the entire group and may be labelled as Consensual. Whenever there is a decision to be made, whether regarding the misdemeanor of a member of the tribe, or with respect to relationship with another tribe, all members of the tribe may collectively come to a consensus as to what is to be done. Since these face to face small scale societies do not have any values of inequality there is no individual who can be given a higher position of authority to discharge political functions. Also because of the small size and primary group character of the society it is possible to have face to face interaction, to arrive at decisions.

There is always the supernatural or superhuman, the spirits and deities who can be consulted and they may come into the body of the shaman or any other chosen person to make their opinion known. But these shamans are only seen as vehicles of the supernatural and not invested with any power in them. In ordinary times (that is when they are not possessed) they are treated as any other member of the society.

### **7.2.2 Lineage Societies**

At the second level are the lineage societies that may comprise of the Unilineal Descent Groups that also function as legal and political units. Such groups have been described by E.E. Evans Pritchard, among the *Nuer* (1940). As described by Meyer Fortes (1969), the Unilineal principle of descent can at times give rise to the Unilineal Descent groups that are bounded, since the membership is restricted to one kind of descendants only. These bounded groups then act as corporate, property holding groups that control and manage common property. One characteristic of such an organisation is that there is social equivalence of members according to the principle of unity of the sibling group. Thus all men of the lineage belonging to the same generation are equivalent for social purposes and all women as well. This gives rise to customs of Levirate and Sororate (for the concepts of levirate and sororate see unit 6 on Kinship, Family and Marriage).

The property of the lineage group and also its internal and external relations are managed by the elders of the lineage group. They settle disputes, negotiate marriages

between the lineages and also engage in war, peace-making and other activities involving other groups. Each descent group segment is politically and socially equivalent and since the tribe as a whole may be divided into several such groups, this kind of society is known as a Segmentary Lineage System. Complex mechanisms of redistribution of people and resources take place to keep the segments equivalent. In his classic work, *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1968), Roy Rappaport has described how this takes place among the Tsembaga of New Guinea. He describes how a combination of inter-group warfare, pig sacrifice and ancestor worship helps to redistribute land and get rid of excess of pigs and people from growing segments and how balance is restored periodically to keep the system including humans and nature in harmony.

### 7.2.3 Chiefdoms

From egalitarian societies we move to the societies with more organised and recognisable political institutions. In many tribal societies there exists the institution of chiefs. In most such societies, the chief, is one with only slightly higher rank than the ordinary person. To become a chief, one needs the ability to be able to gather followers and this can only be done by giving them feasts or performing rituals that enhance one's prestige. In most such societies the goods accumulated by the person who aspires for higher rank is distributed and dispersed and not used directly by the person who accumulates them. It can take the form of communal feasting or the spectacular Potlatch kind of ritual, as was practiced by the North-West coast native Indians of America.

#### **Reflection**

*Potlatch:* Potlatch has become synonymous with spectacular display and actually comprised of an ambitious person collecting large amounts of valuable items like yams, pigs, blankets as well as copper and also slaves to show his power and ability. Most of these goods were collectively consumed and given away or destroyed to show off the person's ability to collect them. It was this dispersal of goods, sometimes their destruction that legitimised a person's claim to higher rank.

However rank societies are different from truly hierarchical societies in that they did not leave the person of higher rank any richer or having any real power in terms of control over other persons. One's rank is also subject to his/her continued ability to retain his/her position by hard work and management. In his now classic work, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Edmund Leach (1954) introduced the concept of oscillating equilibrium, through his study of the Burmese people of highland Burma, who practice shifting cultivation on the hill sides and whose society may shift or oscillate between *Gumsa* (organised chieftainship) and *Gumlao* (anarchy) as chiefs gain and lose power.

One reason as to the lack of formation of any organised centralised political authority is the mode of production or subsistence base of the society being of the kind where a real surplus is not produced. The reverse can also be taken as true that societies that lack centralised political organisation and do not have to pay tribute often have no incentive to produce beyond subsistence level. Thus in hunting societies, thousands of nuts may be left rotting on the ground and not collected and in horticultural societies, large amounts of tubers are never harvested and left underground.

## 7.2.4 State

A centralised state appears when there is enough potential to produce a surplus to support a non-producing elite. Real powerful elite is marked by the fact that they live off the work of others. In a simple tribal society the chief works along with his fellowmen in the fields and so do his wives. But in a true centralised system, those who hold real power are able to use that power to extract from others, not only their basic needs but also large amounts of surplus to establish their superiority.

There are many theories of state formation. The paradox is how people who are not used to the notion of hierarchy and who live free lives agree to come under the power of others. One theory is that of conquest, that if a group get conquered by others, the victorious group is likely to turn the conquered ones into slaves or to a lower strata, forcing them to produce for them. Another associated theory is that of ecological constrictions. Thus a conquered people would only be enslaved if they cannot escape, that is if they are restricted by the sea, or mountains or deserts, across which they may not find it easy to move away. There is another theory based on internal evolution which hypothesizes that in any society, there would be crafts persons or persons with superior skills and knowledge, who would initially be willingly supported by the other members of the group for their superiority. But later such groups may close their boundaries, claim even greater superiority and form hereditary lineages that claim either divine descent or some other kind of usually supernatural association that will set them apart from those considered ordinary.

In any case for society to be stratified into higher and lower groups there is the need for a continuous supply of surplus food and other materials as well. As the elite sections gain in power, they use this material to reinforce their superiority. Karl Wittfogel has described the formation of what he refers to as Hydraulic Civilizations.

### *Reflection*

**Hydraulic Civilisations** are states that originated on the banks of great rivers where the perennial water of these rivers and the fertile banks were used for permanent cultivation based on building of irrigation canals. However the labour that was used to make both dams and canals was later diverted by the elite to build their palaces and symbols of superiority like the pyramids and temples in the ancient Egyptian civilisation.

Once a state is formed then full- fledged political institutions in the form of a ruler with coercive powers, his councils, his army and police take shape. An essential requirement of a functioning state is the collection of taxes and access to corvée or compulsory labour. For this the use of actual force is required and enforcing personnel like police and coercive institutions are required. The centralised state uses up or consumes the surplus that it extracts for its own purposes of conspicuous consumption and also display.

Along with organisation of power in institutions such as chiefdom and state, the realm of the political institutions also deal with the nature of power. According to Weber (1946), there are three kinds of authority that can be recognised in society; these are Traditional, Charismatic and Rational-Legal. In the societies that are relatively egalitarian like the Big Men of Melanesia, the leadership may be characterised as Charismatic that is it is earned by the leader by his own qualities. People who become leaders or acquire power by their own personalities are known as charismatic. Such people have magnetic personalities that draw people to them.

**Basic Concepts**

People we recognise as prophets or national and international leaders are those we can call as charismatic leaders. Traditional leadership is an ascribed status that is usually inherited or acquired by a person by virtue of some culturally assigned character. We can here take the example of the Dalai Lama who is chosen for his role as an infant because of some culturally prescribed characters. Rational-Legal authority is found in traditional state or feudal societies and is an intrinsic part of modern society. This is an acquired form of legitimate authority found among office bearers, bureaucrats and various functionaries who are capable of taking charge of different functions required to be performed by society.

Although these are analytically different kinds of leadership, in actual situations more than one of these qualities can be found in one person; for example a traditional leader can be also charismatic, and so can a rational-legal leader. A traditional leader can acquire rational-legal qualifications also.

**Check Your Progress 2**

6. Give the typology of political institutions that is widely prevalent.

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7. Who coined the term acephalous societies?

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8. Discuss the decision making process in a Band society.

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9. Who authored the work *Pigs for the Ancestors*?

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10. Name the work of Edmund Leach based on the people of highland Burma.

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11. Give the gist of oscillating equilibrium.

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12. Who gave the concept of Hydraulic Civilizations?

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13. Name the three types of authority as stated by Weber?

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### 7.3 RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

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Like kinship, religion is an essential aspect of human societies and is located in the special qualities of the human brain and the capacity of Homo Sapiens for abstract thinking and imagination. As a social institution, religion has been analysed to serve critical functions in human societies. The early ancient states like those in Egypt and China were theological states, or the person or the ruler was regarded as divine. In ancient India, power was divided between the persons of different *Varna*, so while secular power was invested in the King, divine power was controlled by the Brahmin.

Religion has two aspects; beliefs and practices. The former provide the cosmological basis for any society, giving explanations about life, death, the meanings of existence, the nature of the world, the place of humans, non-humans and nature and their relationship with each other. Even psychoanalytical theory recognises religion as providing an essential component of the human psyche, the super-ego or the capacity for moral behaviour.

As an institution religion has the strongest regulatory function to keep social beings in place. As Durkheim (1915) had theorised based on his analysis of totemic rituals of the Australian Aborigines, what people regard as religious is actually the social. Thus religious beliefs tend to protect the interests of society, and religious rituals serve to create and maintain social solidarity. The power of religious beliefs and rituals lie in their connection to what humans consider most superior and powerful; the sacred or other worldly realm. Humans attribute all those phenomenon that they cannot entirely explain by their knowledge and experience to religion. Religion also provides solace for suffering and enables social human beings to get a meaning for their lives. Since human suffering is ubiquitous and human knowledge is limited, religion provides psychological support and a positive attitude towards life.

Religion essentially involves what Spiro has referred to as superhuman beings. Although most religions have a multitude of such beings, there is also an accompanying belief in one Supreme Being; which too is common to most religions. Religious practices engage the humans in relationships with these superhuman beings and they both seek to do as they think the super human's desire them to act as well as they may perform rituals and acts to please them.

In most societies especially which are more complex and have well designated religious institutions; the religious institutions act like any other social institutions. There are religious specialists who may work full time or part time to act as mediators between the superhuman and the mundane world.

## Basic Concepts

Shamans are usually found in simpler societies and they act as medium for the descent of the deities into their bodies. Such a process is known as possession and such rituals are very commonly found. The shamans may also possess knowledge of medicines and act as healers. Some shamans like those among the Native Americans and the Eskimos have the power to travel to the other world and get their power from there. But shamans can be part time specialists and may be otherwise engaged in subsistence activities like everyone else.

Priests are full time specialists and are part of organised religions where they occupy legitimate status with prescribed duties and follow normative behaviour. Priests perform duties and regular rituals and practices. Examples of priests are the Hindu temple priests and Christian Church functionaries. They do not engage in ecstatic and inspired performances like the shamans. The priests are mostly paid servants of the religious institutions of which they are a part. They are only facilitators to allow members of the church to perform rituals and offer prayers etc.

A religion requires that all who are followers of that religion be well versed in the rituals and beliefs of that religion. According to Durkheim, this can be called as a Church. A Church comprises of all those people who share the same beliefs and practices with respect to the same set of supernatural beings. In small scale societies, this comprises of a small group of people who have been socialised into the particular set of beliefs. In case of universal religions that have large following, these beliefs and practices are often written down or form well established oral texts. Such religions where beliefs and practices are inscribed and documented are known as doctrinal religions. The institutional mechanisms such as the priests are entrusted with the responsibility of propagating and preserving these doctrines. There is often one major text that is the repository of the major rules and norms of the religion; like the Bible for the Christians and the Q'uran for the Muslims. These texts are authenticated as having a divine origin. All religions, tribal or universal legitimise their beliefs and values through myths. Myths are timeless narrations that lend authenticity to the beliefs and provide their rationale.

### Check Your Progress 3

14. What is the role of religious beliefs and rituals?

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15. What are myths?

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## 7.4 SUMMARY

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In this Unit the student has been familiarised with three of the major institutions of human society. Humans live in societies with prescribed norms and values; they produce and consume goods, distribute and exchange their produce. They also are concerned with the things other than what is felt and seen by the senses. Humans are

capable of abstract thinking and they think beyond things of immediate concern. They seek meaning to their lives, the purpose of life and what it means to be alive or dead. It is this capacity for reflective thought that enables them to live in society, to be sociable and form relationships based on norms and values.

To accomplish all these ends they have institutions that perform these tasks. In more complex societies there may be separate and distinct institutions with their designated personnel, norms and goals for the performance of tasks such as economic, political and religious; but in small scale, simpler societies these may be performed by the most basic of human institutions of kinship and religion.

As we have seen in this Unit, institutions vary in their form and complexity both over time and over space. The differentiation of institutions is directly proportional to the level of complexity of the society. However complexity is not an indicator of efficiency and simple societies with undifferentiated social institutions are as functional and perhaps more stable and harmonious than more complex societies. The economic, political and religious institutions, along with kinship are the most fundamental of all human institutions and make society as we know it possible.

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## 7.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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1. Production, consumption and exchange.
2. See Section 7.1.1 paragraph 3
3. The two kinds of consumption are subsistence and conspicuous. For more details refer to 7.1.2.
4. The simplest known societies are those where the resources required for consumption are 'free goods' that is those resources that are freely available in nature.
5. Cowries, pigs or bananas are some of the items that are used as medium of exchange in simple societies.
6. The widely prevalent typology used for political institutions are Band, Lineage societies, Chiefdoms and State.
7. The term Acephalous was coined by E.E. Evans Pritchard and Meyer Fortes (1940).
8. In a band society which comprises of very few members, decision making is collective consensus or unanimously taken.
9. Roy Rappaport.
10. *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954).
11. The concept of oscillating equilibrium was given by Edmund Leach in his study of the Burmese people of highland Burma. They practice shifting cultivation on the hill sides and their society may shift or oscillate between *Gumsa* (organised chieftainship) and *Gumlao* (anarchy) as chiefs gain and lose power.
12. Karl Wittfogel.
13. According to Weber (1946), there are three kinds of authority that can be recognised in society; these are Traditional, Charismatic and Rational-Legal.
14. The role of religious beliefs is to protect the interests of society, and religious rituals serve to create and maintain social solidarity.
15. Myths are timeless narrations that lend authenticity to the beliefs and provide their rationale.

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