Culture

- The term 'culture' is used to refer to the acquiring of refined taste in classical music, dance forms, painting. This refined taste was thought to distinguish people from the 'uncultured' masses, even concerning something we would today see as individual, like the preference for coffee over tea.
- By contrast, the sociologist looks at culture not as something that distinguishes individuals, but as a way of life in which all members of society exist.
- One early anthropological definition of culture comes from the British scholar Edward Tylor: "Culture or civilisation taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".
- Culture is:
  - A way of thinking
  - The total way of life of a people.
  - An abstraction from behaviour.
  - Learned behaviour.
  - A storehouse of pooled learning.
  - The social legacy the individual acquires from his group.
  - A set of standardised orientations to recurrent problems.
  - A mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour.

Major characteristics of Culture

- Culture is learned. It is an acquired behaviour.
- It is shared (cannot be possessed by an individual in isolation) and transmitted amongst.
- Culture is dynamic. It constantly changes. It makes each society and group unique or distinct.

Major components of Culture Two types:

1. Non-material (Cognitive and Normative)
2. Material

- While the cognitive and normative aspects of culture are non-material, the material dimension is crucial to increase production and enhance the quality of life.
- For integrated functioning of a culture the material and non-material dimensions must work together.

Non-material Culture: It refers to the abstract or intangible elements of culture, such as the ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. It includes the normative and cognitive dimensions of culture.

(A) Normative: This dimension includes social rules and social expectations, i.e. the norms and values of a society. Norms are socially approved guidelines which direct behaviours of members of a society or a social group. In other words, they are the social expectations of proper behaviour.
Norms usually vary across societies and even within the same society across different social groups. A social norm is not necessarily actual behaviour. ('Unwritten rules') Most of human actions is norm-governed. There are different types of norms, depending on how strict they are.

- **Folkways:** It refers to traditional customary ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Most people conform to folk ways out of habit. They are the lesser order of norms, as they are not as strictly enforced as mores or laws.
- **Mores:** Mores are higher order norms linked to the core values of a group. They are considered vital for the group and are expressed as 'must' or 'must not' behaviour. They are more strictly enforced as compared to folk ways. Violations of these are not taken lightly.
  Eg: Behaving in a decent manner when you go out; not eating non-veg when visiting religious places; maintaining silence in hospitals.
- **Laws:** Most formal definition of acceptable behaviour. They are the formal standardized expressions of norms. (Laws are codified norms and have been given a sanction).

Usually those norms are qualified as laws about which society feels strongly about.
Laws may be based on customs, but they are different from customs because:-
They are upheld by the authority of the state implied to all those accepting the authority of state.
They are backed by penal sanctions. Laws are enforced by the courts.
In a few cases where laws are contrary to the folkways and mores, the enforcement of law becomes difficult.

ANIMAL SOCIETY	HUMAN SOCIETY
Majority of behaviour is instinctive Inherited and genetically patterned behaviour are common to all the normal members of a species.	Majority of behaviour is acquired. The behaviour makes a particular group of society distinct and unique.

SOCIAL VALUES

- They are the standards that define what is good, desirable, worthwhile in society. They are the underlined principles guided by choices and actions.
- Any action contrary to cherished values is condemned.

  Difference between Norms and Values:

NORMS	VALUES
Norms are guidelines to actions which apply to specific situations.	More general guidelines.
A number of specific norms are a reflection of single value.	
E.g: Like a dress code for a function is a norm.	E.g.: Respecting elders (norms under this: touching feet)

Example. In Indian society there is a value of respect for seniors and from that a number of norms are derived regarding expected behaviour towards seniors, such as offering seats to elders, touching their feet, or greeting them, not addressing by first names.

Importance of Norms and Values:

1. Shared values and norms bring commonality in the outlook between members of society binding them together.
2. It makes social life orderly and predictable. E.g.: without norms, we would never know, whether to shake hands with a new acquaintance or give them an affectionate push.
3. Norms are essential because they regulate the behaviour of numbers of society or group. Without norms there would be chaos and disorder.

(B) Cognitive Dimension:
The cognitive dimension of culture refers to ideas which include beliefs, knowledge, myths, superstitions etc. of a society.

- In literate society, ideas are transcribed in books and documents.
- But in non-literate societies ideas are in the form of legends and myths which are committed to memory and transmitted orally.
- In the contemporary world ideas are also reflected in audio-visual media [ads, films]

Material aspect of Culture
It refers to the tangible, concrete products that members of society possess and make use of; e.g.-machines, buildings, jewellery, modes of transportation, technological gadgets.
Both material and non-material dimensions of culture undergo change over time. However, material or technological dimensions change faster than non-material aspects (values and norms are slower to change). This gives rise to "cultural lag" or a situation whereby non-material dimensions are unable to match the advances of technology (material dimension).

Cultural Lag

- When the material or technological dimensions change rapidly, the non-material aspects can lag behind in terms of values and norms.
- This can give rise to a situation of culture lag when the non-material dimensions are unable to match the advances of technology.
- For example, when internet becomes very popular it led to resistance from many social groups mentioning that it has corrupted the cultural values.

Sub cultures

Sub-cultural groups function as cohesive units which impart an identity to all group members.

Within such groups there can be leaders and followers but group members are bound by the purpose of the group and work together to achieve their objectives. Hence, sub cultural group identities are not inherited but achieved.

Ethnocentricism

- Ethnocentricism is the application of one's own cultural values in evaluating the behaviour and beliefs of people from other cultures.
- This means that the cultural values projected as the standard or norm are considered superior to that of the beliefs and values of other cultures.

Cosmopolitan Outlook of culture

- Cosmopolitan outlook of culture means valuing other cultures for their differences.
- A cosmopolitan outlook does not seek to evaluate the values and beliefs of other people according to one's own.
- It celebrates and accommodates different cultural propensities within its fold and promotes cultural exchange and borrowings to enrich one's own culture.