

Culture Social Structure

Dr. Deepali Sharma
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Durga Mahavidyalaya Raipur (CG)

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Culture consists of common knowledge, beliefs, values and norms, where as social structure consists of a set of social arrangements. A social cultural system refers to a self organised movement towards a predefined order, which encompasses the relationship between members and their connection to the whole. A social cultural view considers the organisation a voluntary association of purposeful members who manifest a choice of both ends and means. As a purposeful system, an organisation is part of a large purposeful whole, the society. The members of socio-cultural organisation are held together by one or more common objective and collectively acceptable ways of pursuing them. The members share values that are embedded in their culture. The culture is the cement that integrates the parts into a cohesive whole.

By analysing culture as a structural system, we can begin to see the invisible forces that shape our behaviour, perception and identities. One of the most influential thinkers to develop this theory is Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Cultural institutions - such as family, religion, education, government and the media-serve as the key components in this structural system. The idea of culture as a structural system offers a powerful way to understand the complexity of human behaviour. These cultural structures are not single external forces that control us, they are also products of our collective thought and behaviour, constantly evolving and adapting to the changing world.

Culture and social structure are two fundamental concepts in sociology.

- Culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, traditions, customs, and artifacts of a group.
- Social Structure refers to the organized pattern of social relationships and institutions that together compose society.

Both are interdependent: culture gives meaning to social relations, while social structure provides stability to cultural practices.

E.B. Tylor: “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.”

Culture is learned, shared, symbolic, integrated, and dynamic.

Elements of Culture

1. Material Culture – physical objects (tools, clothes, technology, art).
2. Non-Material Culture – values, beliefs, customs, traditions, language.
3. Symbols – anything that carries meaning (e.g., flag, religious icons).
4. Norms – rules of behavior:
 - Folkways (informal rules, e.g., manners)
 - Mores (moral significance, e.g., honesty)
 - Laws (formally codified rules).
5. Values – shared ideas about what is right, desirable, or good.

Characteristics of Culture

- Learned through socialization
- Shared by members of society
- Passed on from one generation to another (transmitted)
- Adaptive and constantly changing
- Provides identity to individuals

Social Structure

MacIver & Page: “The complex of human relationships constituted by living together in society.”

It is the framework of relationships, roles, and institutions that organize society.

Components of Social Structure

1. Statuses and Roles
 - Status: Position a person occupies (ascribed or achieved).
 - Role: Expected behavior attached to a status.
2. Institutions
 - Organized systems of norms around social needs (family, religion, education,

economy, polity).

3. Groups and Associations

- Primary Groups: intimate, personal (family, friends).
- Secondary Groups: formal, impersonal (schools, offices).

4. Social Stratification

- System of ranking individuals (caste, class, gender).

5. Social Control Mechanisms

- Informal (customs, gossip) and formal (laws, police).

Relationship between Culture and Social Structure

- Culture provides meaning to the structure, while social structure provides the framework for cultural expression.
- For example, family structure (social structure) transmits values, beliefs, and traditions (culture).
- Social institutions like religion, education, and economy function as carriers of cultural values.
- A change in culture (e.g., modernization, technology) often leads to change in social structure (e.g., nuclear families, new occupations).

Importance for Society

- Provides identity and belongingness
- Ensures social order and stability
- Helps in socialization of individuals
- Guides behavior and expectations
- Promotes continuity along with adaptation to change

Conclusion

Culture and social structure are inseparable aspects of human society. Culture gives life and meaning to society, while social structure ensures its organization and stability. For sociology students, understanding both concepts is crucial to analyze social life, social change, and human behavior.