

**Conceptualization of Culture in Social Anthropology :  
A Critique of some Major Contributions**

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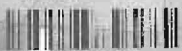
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**CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CULTURE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY :**  
**A CRITIQUE OF SOME MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

## CHAPTER - I

### ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF CULTURE : THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TRADITION

Anthropology, as is evident from its etymology, is essentially a science of man.<sup>1</sup> Its fundamental concern is to understand the human condition. Initially, anthropology attempted to understand and unravel the thread that connected the 'primitive' man to the civilised, in order to realise the essence of this human condition. Central to this was the idea that human beings are together in the overall movement of mankind and of history. However, anthropology now is seen more as a study of 'other cultures' or primitive cultures rather than as a study of humanity. This shift in perspective has many important repercussions. It is for this reason that it is useful to reflect on this aspect. But we will look into the problem through the concept of culture and how it is instrumental in shaping the regnant theories of anthropology.

The term 'culture' is an important part of

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1. The word 'man' here is used in a generic sense and no sexist bias is intended.

the vocabulary of anthropology and is implicit in most writings. As an omnibus term it has been put to many uses. It has become important not only to academicians but as Friedman says to "the state and the World Bank. Technologies, social formations, myths and mentalities have all become areas of inquiry" (Friedman, 1987 : 161). However, its importance has been accompanied by much confusion and debate. Kroeber and Kluckhohn have furnished an exhaustive list of over 100 definitions of culture (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952). Their list only gives an idea of how the concept of culture is at once both contentious and nebulous.

In general usage the term culture is used in the sense of the cultivation of mind. The term in its early usage was seen as " a noun of processes, cultivation of crops, rearing and breeding of animals and by extension (active cultivation) of the human mind" (Williams, 1981:10). Gradually it came to mean, especially in German and English tradition "a noun of configuration or generalisation of the 'spirit' which informed the whole 'way of life' of

a distinct people". (Ibid:11). This broad pluralistic term has proved to be very important to anthropology which studied strange customs. The realisation that there are a variety of societies set in motion a whole set of questions about the nature and origin of these cultures. Alternative answers to these questions have produced a range of explanations.

We will briefly sketch some of these explanations of theories. For convenience we will put them in two broad categories : a) Materialistic explanations and b) culturalogical explanations. Wolf offers a succinct statement of the ideal/material dichotomy. We shall merely recapitulate them here :

"The culturalist or (Idealist) attract all those who believe in the primacy of the mind, who see humankind spinning ever more complex webs of signification through autonomous process of the symbolic faculty. In this perspective, signification sets up the human relation with the material universe. On the other hand the materialist cleave to the belief that human affairs are caused by the way human beings cope with nature thus including the notion that culture forms a part of superstructure" (Wolf, 1982, quoted in Perlin, 1988: 383).



### Materialist explanations of Culture

One very important aspect of the materialistic view of culture is the view that culture is mainly an adaptive system. The cultural materialist like Marvin Harris, the ecologist such as Vayda and Rappaport, among the evolutionist scholars, such as Sahlins and Leslie White have all stressed on this adaptive aspect.<sup>2</sup> These theorists view that a) "cultures are systems of socially transmitted behaviour pattern that serve to relate human communities to their ecological settings" (Keesing, 1974:75) and, (b) culture, change is a process of adaptation.

However, as Keesing rightly points out "different conceptions of how this process operates separate the 'cultural materialism' of Harris from the social dialectics of more authentic Marxists or the 'cultural evolutionism' of Service and distinguish the cultural ecologist of the Steward tradition from human ecologist such as Rappaport and Vayda" (Ibid:76). But

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2. Keesing in his analysis of various theories on culture very aptly calls them the cultural adaptationist. He brings out some of the main propositions of cultural adaptationist and others. We follow him somewhat in setting out the main views.

in a sense they all hold that economics and their social correlates are primary and the ideational systems are in some sense their derivation.

The Marxist criticise the cultural materialist for neglecting the importance of social dialectics, of conflicts and contradictions in the social order. Thus, change for the Marxist is not merely an adaptive mechanism, but a result of the inner contradiction within the system. Culture in this sense is seen by traditional Marxist as a mechanism which hides the conflict of class interests.

#### Culturalogical Explanations

As against the materialist interpretations of culture, we have a wide range of theorists who see culture as ideational systems. Cognitive anthropologists belong to this group. Ward Goodenough who is a respected member of this school sees culture as a system of knowledge. Goodenough writes : "A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to

its members. Culture is not a material phenomena; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organisation of these things. It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating and otherwise interpreting them" (Goodenough, 1957 quoted in Keesing, 1974 : 77). Keesing correctly interprets Goodenough's position when he notes that for Goodenough culture is a "system of codes lying behind... the observable events in the same realm as language(Saussure's langue or Chomsky's competence)" (Keesing 1974:76). Levi-Strauss in a slightly different vein sees a structure in culture, this structure is basically a process of mind which imposes a culturally patterned order. This structure transcends all boundaries that differentiate and divide people. Yet, collective representations reveal in their depth the structure of the individual mind as well.

Another approach to culture is the treatment of culture as shared symbols and meaning. This has been most extensively explored by Clifford Geertz, Louis Dumont and David Schneider. Unlike the cognitive

anthropologist and the structuralist, these scholars view that culture is found in real life, in lived experience. It is not disembodied myths or texts by symbolic actions. They see the structuralists and cognivitists as reductionists who are formalistic in their approach (see Gertz, 1973). Thus, for these theorists to study culture is to study it as shared symbols of meanings.

On the other hand, we have the American cultural anthropologists who see culture as a configuration, a design, a kind of spirit which informs the 'whole way of life' of particular people. For Kroeber this informing spirit is 'ethos'<sup>3</sup> (Kroeber, 1948 and 1952). Benedict (1934) refers to it as the 'pattern'. Notwithstanding the substantive differences, a parallel tradition exists among the British anthropologists especially Radcliffe-Brown who sees the pattern encapsulated in 'institutionalized standardized modes of behaviour and thought, socially recognised in explicit rules or norms to which the members of society tend to conform' (Radcliffe-Brown:1953).

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3. Kroeber contrasts the 'ethos' with 'eidos' which is the aggregate of separable constituents that make up its formal appearance. The eidos is the manifest discernible arena of culture. The mystery of the apparent cohesion is rooted in the plane of ethos, which is a sort of guiding 'spirit'.

Though we have put all these various strains of ideational theories in one camp, there exists a great deal of conceptual differences among them. However, it should be noted that underlying these differences the meeting ground is their fundamental concern with symbolic systems. For these scholars the symbolic systems are transcendental: as autonomous structures they guide human behaviour.

So far we have listed out, in brief, some of the theories on culture. But we have not discussed the merits and demerits of each of these. To cover this entire range, we feel, is little beyond the limited nature of this paper. Nevertheless, a conceptual sorting out is necessary and it is useful to identify the nature of disagreement that exist. By this, we hope to grapple, in some way with the traditional horns of the material and cultural dilemma. To take stock then of the various conceptualizations of culture, we examine the concept of culture in respect of culture in three main paradigms in anthropology/sociology. These paradigms are the functionalist, the interpretative and the critical Marxist. Our first chapter hence

is an analysis of the term in functionalist school. We have chosen Malinowski's work for discussion because he has worked extensively on culture. The chapter following that is on Geertz, who typifies the interpretative school. Finally, we have Bourdieu who stands in the broad tradition of the Marxian conflict school.

These discussions are meant to be in the nature of clearing the ground for further inquiry. We feel that there are certain uncertainties, questions and debates which seem to plague us, despite much refinement in theory. We hope to touch upon some of these pertinent issues, such as universalism vs. particularism, the nature of society and the man within it, and other related questions as they arise out of these discussions.

But before we go on to this exercise which is the main theme of this paper, we'd like to sketch the broad outlines of the traditional view of culture. We use the term 'traditional', in the sense of an active 'backdrop' within which modern scholarship continues to be positioned. The 'traditional' conception of culture emphatically connoted persistency,

legacy and social conformity. We take for our consideration the two scholars who retrospectively inspired two divergent traditions of social anthropology - the British and the American. The two scholars are Emile Durkheim and Franz Boas who, in the eyes of modern scholars founded the British and the American tradition respectively.

"Culture as a medium" or as an "imperative": The British and the American schools

The British and American anthropologists have disagreed quite strongly on the position of culture in anthropological studies. Lewis speaking for the British side sums it up when he says: "We study different cultures and communities that produce them, placing our primary emphasis on social relations and treating culture as a vehicle or medium for social interaction rather than an end in itself". The American school according to him "grant culture such imperative force that they tend to see social relations as the product of cultural patterning" (Lewis, 1984:21).

The American cultural anthropologists defend their position and "believe that there are several reasons for anthropologists to retain the concept

of culture" (Kaplan and Manners, 1974:4). In the words of Kaplan and Manners:(i)" First of all social organization is not unique to man; other infra human social systems are highly variable and thus seem to clearly reflect the impact of a great variety of inherited traditions" (Ibid: 5-6).(ii) The other reason given is that culture is a design which relates a variety of things, not only the social but the natural, physical and geographical contexts too, in which societies are enclosed. Kroeber terms this integrative mechanism the 'ethos' - "the total quality of life" (Kroeber: 1948). The mystery of the apparent cohesion of the disparate elements in society is rooted in the plane of ethos. Though clothed in different conceptual terms, the idea that there is an 'entity beyond' which acts as an integrative mechanism is present in most theories of cultural anthropology. Another point of great importance with the American school is that (iii) humans alone are capable of symbolic representation. Bernard Stern in an early work on the subject wrote that the distinction between the organic and superorganic is homologous with the distinction between biological



and cultural <sup>4</sup> (1929 : 224).

As against this the British anthropologist who were highly influenced by Durkheim used the word 'social' in the Durkheimian sense. Also, one finds an equal influence of Spencer especially in the usage of the term 'structure' as used particularly by Radcliffe-Brown. In fact, it was Durkheim who took the biological analogy from Spencer, especially his notion of organism where all the parts are correlated and interdependent. But Durkheim differed from Spencer in his usage of the organismic analogy. For Spencer each part had a role to play because it was already prefigured. But for Durkheim "human societies present a new phenomena of special nature, which consists in the fact that certain ways of acting are imposed or atleast suggested from outside the individual and added on to his own nature. Such is the character of (social) institutions"

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4. A question remained more or less unanswered, however, (on the aspect of the capacity to symbolize) - whether culture is innate or acquired? If it is acquired, did it mean the existence of an entity above the individual? Kroeber tried to answer this question. Ingold in his book Social Life and Evolution has brought out this very deftly (see Ingold, 1986, Ch.3).

(1982 [1917] : 248). For Durkheim, therefore, the society is over and above the individual: it is supra-individual. Radcliffe-Brown who followed the Durkheimian mode of thought insisted on the separation of the 'social' from the 'cultural'. 'Social' for him meant the regulative structure of rules and norms, which are imposed on the individual. This socialness is uniquely human for it is distinct from instinctual organizational capacity. What is cultural then is the system of "collective representations" which is but a projection of this socialness. Thus the Radcliffe-Brownian notion of society composing of both organisation and culture is at the supra-biological domain.

But as we look into the main ideas of Boas and Durkheim in our discussion to follow, these differences will become clear, so also will the areas of similarity between them, notwithstanding the differences between the two traditions. The similarity lies in the fact that both the British and American schools, are insensitive to the question of the individual as an active and reflective being and to the question of cultural change.

Anti-Evolutionism of Franz Boas and Emile Durkheim

During the 19th Century most fields of social inquiry were highly influenced by evolutionary theories. The discovery of distant lands and exotic places with strange customs had enormously expanded the time scale within which man had formerly been considered. Writers like Morgan, Spencer and Taylor, among others, were mainly interested in reconstructing history by positioning the possible stages that mankind as a whole must have passed to arrive at the present.

To reconstruct history, the evolutionist resorted to a great deal of speculation. All these theories believed firmly in the idea of progression of societies. They advanced various mechanisms which operated as levers of this movement - ideological as well as materialistic. But, in the new milieu of scientific spirit, conjectural history had few takers and, consequently, the fundamental idea of unity of mankind which the evolutionist advanced was overlooked and in its place came a synchronic view of societies and of their culture. Boas and Durkheim were in accord over their

rejection of evolutionism. While Boas developed his cultural historicism, Durkheim advanced a theory which stated that society should be treated as integrated structure, as a whole.

According to Boas, when a population of human beings share a common heritage, then heritage itself is called culture. An important point of difference between the earlier formulation is that Boas referred to a particular population sharing common heritage given to them, and not of the culture of all mankind. This is because for Boas the contents of the mind vary from place to place depending upon the culture at hand. Culture is 'given', that comes into being, shaped by various geographical and historical forces: it is a heritage. For him cultural differences are not because of the way they are shaped by humans but because they change on their own due to external circumstances. How does culture change or why they change, is not important for Boas, as the fact that there exist variation.

The Boasian scheme recognised a plurality of discrete cultures, "each a particular configuration of elements of diverse origin" (Ingold, 1986:44) These various cultures have come to exist on their own. They impress themselves on the human mind, which is the same all over the world. Thus to "belong to a culture is to bear the stamp of tradition not of one's making, to be imprisoned in one's thoughts and actions within a framework of received categories that - remaining unconscious - cannot be transcended" (Boas, 1911: 225-9).

In Boas's framework man is everywhere the same as far as his receptive mind goes. His mind is 'tabula rasa' upon which culture 'inscribes its design'. The thought and action of a Boasian individual reflects an internalized cultural logic. For Boas the individual is related to culture as 'content to container'. The "Boasian man is basically a creature of habit....searching for reason after the event." (Ingold, 1986; 66). Boas concluded explicitly that the "origins of custom of primitive man must not be looked for in rational process" (1911:227-8).

Man came to be seen by Boas and many of his followers - "not as a rational so much as rationalizing being" (Stocking, 1968: 232).

Thus in Boas's culture there is no conscious being participating. Culture comes on its own on account of a logic which is its own. When Boas wrote that "in order to understand history it is necessary to know not only how things are but how they came to be" (quoted in Ingold, 1986:67), he was not however looking for "conscious striving". As Ingold rightly points out, Boas merely treats the present as a precipitate or a cumulative of previous events. This cumulative build up is given to the individual which is faithfully replicated, neither with any deliberations nor with any rational selection. Therefore, the only possible source of any change lies in occasional chance occurrence. Tradition then acts as a bulwark against any possible change because of its hold on human beings.

This fundamental idea of a social legacy shaping the individual set a trend not just among his immediate followers like Benedict, Lowie, Mead, Kroeber, etc. but among many others as well. The reversal of

evolutionary theories pushed the concern for change out of focus. This is evident in Durkheim's work too.

Durkheim's main dictum was that a social phenomena can only be studied by looking into its social factors, that is, by looking for causal facts which lie outside the individual organism. As already pointed out in our previous discussion, Durkheim used the concept of society to denote a reality beyond the individual but exerting a force that would submit the individual to the collective whole. For Durkheim, society came into being on its own accord - 'sui generis'. Durkheim's conception of society is essentialist. The influence of Cuvier on Durkheim is quite pronounced. It was Cuvier who proposed that each and every organism manifests one of a total set of logically possible working combinations of basic organs. Following this idea, Durkheim argued that societies could be arranged taxonomically for comparison, for each is a different structural combination of parts. Unlike Boas who emphasized the uniqueness of culture, Durkheim stressed instead on the aspects of functional correlation.

Durkheim's most fundamental principle was "the objective reality of social facts" (1982 [1985]: vii). By terming the existing factual order as "objective and real", the tendencies that negate the existing order to bring in change are obscured. Also, this principle tends to exaggerate the degree to which social facts are independent of individual will thus reifying the concept of society. Durkheim's project is very similar in this sense to Boas. Both constructed an idea of society/culture which is independent of the individual's conscious and reflexive acts. Let us sort these similarities out.

Firstly, like Boas, Durkheim held that people internalise characteristic ways of feeling and thinking and acting from the social milieu in which they are brought up. Thus Boas's 'culture bearing' individual resonates in Durkheim's view about education as a process through which the social being is fashioned. (1982 [1895]:54). Secondly, Durkheim's society is conceived in the sense that it had taken shape on its own accord. The society is over and above



the individual. In Boas too the individual is a mere culture-bearer and has no part in its shaping or origin. Thirdly, for both of them, by the logic of their argument, it follows that any change that takes place is always extraneous, a chance happening or a pure mechanical movement. Finally, both Boas and Durkheim submitted the human being totally to the entity whether it be culture or society. In seeking objectivity, they have fused abstraction to a reality thereby reifying society in one case and culture in the other.

The issues that these two early scholars have highlighted such as persistency, legacy and social conformity are relevant to us even now. We are not always cautious to avoid the implications of this traditional understanding of culture. Thus, while we reject some of the early theories or their concepts, we may unconsciously still accept some of the implications of their definitions and views of culture. One such implication which seems to persist is the view that societies exist in distinct configurations and are

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clearly different from one another. This promotes a classification and typification of societies and of their people.

Typification of Societies and Mankind

Anthropologists have categorized societies in much the same way as biologists have. Thus there are a multitude of cultures and an equal number of human cultural types, resulting from these cultures.

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The belief that societies are found in their discrete configuration was partly the result of anthropological work on island societies. Durkheim wrote that what exists in reality "are particularly societies which are born, develop and die independent of one another" (1982[1895]:64). Thus societies are to be treated as things, as observable facts. Further, societies are to be observed empirically by their observable features. In this respect Durkheim compared them to species. His societies are 'social species'.

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For both Durkheim and Boas societies were objective entities exerting a force on man and conditioning him. Man, in Boas, came to be seen as a mere culture bearer. In Durkheim too man played an identical role: he was a part that worked towards the integrity of the society as a whole. Any existential attribute that man exhibited was in terms of his conditioning environment.

This characterisation led to a polarised view of society. On one end there was the 'traditional' society and on the other end, the 'modern' society. The traditional societies are pre-modern, pre-urban, pre-secular, pre-capitalist" (Wilson, 1984:vii) and where pre-industrial forms of collective life prevail. Traditional societies are seen as slow to change, if not stagnant, and if there be any change, it is usually because it is induced from outside. Stagnation is the result of overriding traditional influences. Traditionalism exhibits itself in modes of thought and practices guided by conditioned thinking rather than by rational thinking. Traditional people it

is believed, follow that is given to them from their past.<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of the claim that tradition is an impediment to change is the assumption that progress and rationality have superseded tradition in some societies. This is what legitimate dual models of the 'modern' and 'traditional' - one ever changing and the other stagnant. A little reflection will reveal that the prime reason for this duality in scholarship is because of the taken for granted view that human beings in certain cultures are passive bearers and that the culture replicates itself through them. Modern society, according to this dual notion of human kind is characterized by 'movement' because the rational man of modern society acts consciously and intentionally, continuously changing his circumstances.

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5. Milton Singer expressed this best, when he writes: "in primary civilization like India, cultural continuity with the past is so great that even the acceptance of 'modernizing' and 'progress' ideologies does not result in linear forms of social and cultural change." (Singer, 1972 : 68)

To attribute such categorization, even by a way of cultural determinism, is essentially an idealist vision which has its own problems, many of which are well known by now. This dual projection in construction of histories is against the very grain of anthropology which is a unified science of man. Man is not passive in some societies and active in others. In all societies he is constrained by the conditions, which are of his own making. Thus to appeal to tradition, heritage, etc. "is to merely affirm the necessity of what is rather than explore the potentials of becoming" (Ingold, 1986: 216). And as Boon points out "sensational labels ... whether derogatory or rosy are caricatures... when caricatures are believed we call them ideologies" (Boon, 1982:22).

It is obvious that such constructions are the result of anthropological assumptions about culture. Indeed, the various important contributions on the subject of culture over the past several decades have been prompted by the urge to position both change and the individual more vividly. We have come a long way but to appreciate the distance we have travelled we must know where we started.

## CHAPTER - II

### THE INDIVIDUAL AND CHANGE : MALINOWSKI'S CONTRIBUTION

The mood that prevailed in British social anthropology in the early decades of this century is one of overriding concern for 'facts' or data. Generalizations were carried on but these were overlaid by a lot of empirical details. Adam Kuper expresses this resurgence of British empiricism when he writes:

"There was a feeling that the facts which were increasingly becoming available made facile evolutionist and diffusionist schemes look silly. Further these facts might soon disappear with the primitives...obviously there was a change of emphasis, away from theoretical pre-occupation and towards field research". (Kuper, 1973:38)

Malinowski played a decisive part in the formation of the British School of Social Anthropology. He viewed anthropology as a field oriented science in which theory and the search for general laws must be based on intensive empirical research involving systematic observation and detailed analysis of actual behaviour in living ongoing societies.

Malinowski was much more than the pioneer in the method of field research. He is also considered to be the originator of functionalist approach to the study of culture. These were in many senses incidental to the main task he set himself. Malinowski's primary interest was in the study of culture as an universal phenomenon and he recommended a systematic study of specific cultures in all their particularities. His insistence on field work, on recording of every detail of the society under study, gave to "Malinowski's monographs their vitality and made them such a startling refreshing contrast to the work of other anthropologists" (Kuper 1973:40). The contrast emerges clearly in his treatment of the individual. And here it should be said that he was not concerned with unique private experience, or of individual motives, but individuals as members of society. His Trobriand man emerges, to quote Kuper again, "a living , acting and calculating individual"(ibid). In other words, his "was a dynamic interpretation of human behaviour in the widest range of cultural circumstances" (Firth, 1957:2). We will have an occasion to discuss these points in detail later but for now we look into Malinowski's intellectual background in order to understand better their influence on his scholarship.

### Intellectual Background

Malinowski was born in Carcos in Poland which was politically a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire. "Malinowski grew up at a time and in a setting in which Central European intellectuals were deeply aware not only of their special cultural heritage (which led many to an intensive political nationalism) but also of the multilingual and multicultural milieu" (Milraux, 1968: 541-47). He had a gift for languages and developed a keen interest in language as a mode of behaviour with "fully contextualized utterances" (Malinowski, 1935, Vol. 1 in *ibid*). This contributed to his assumption about cultural uniqueness which was crucial to his work on the Trobriands.

Malinowski's initial training was in Physics and Mathematics. Later, for a short period he studied at Leipzig and worked under Wilhelm Wundt and Karl Bucher and came in contact with experimental psychology and historical economics.



Malinowski entered the British academic field in 1910 at the London School of Economics. Leach writes :

"around this period the late 19th Century cultus of mechanistic materialism linked with naive doctrine of inevitability of progressive evolution still held the field, but was under serious attack. In the realm of pure science, Einstein's formulation of the theory of relativity had shaken the simple world of Newtonian mechanics to its foundations. In psychology, Freud was busily engaged in cutting away the foundations of ordinary man's ideas of rational individual" (1957:121)

While in social studies, according to Leach, "the evolutionist comparative method had achieved a kind of massive futility, and a great deal of stimulus was coming from the writings of Durkheim and his school" (Ibid).

Malinowski was sensitive to all these trends but one of the most influential figures for him was Wundt, the founder of the science of experimental psychology. To quote Leach again, "his anthropological theory threw special emphasis on the study of language and upon the unity of personality of the tribe as a whole. Malinowski approved of Wundt's empiricism but was repelled by the 'group mind' interpretation

of his historicist approach. He searched for a body of theory which could somehow combine the materialist basis of the 19th century evolutionism with the attribute of free will to the individual" (Ibid). For his explanation he looked towards the pragmatism of William James. At around the time that Malinowski came to England, James's philosophy was one of the prevailing currents of thought. One finds the word 'pragmatic' in Malinowski's writings quite often. He wrote in the context of symbol and meaning that "the functional approach allows us to determine the pragmatic context of a symbol and to prove that in actual reality a verbal or other symbolic acts become real only through the effect it produces" (1944:25). Functionalism under Malinowski presented us with the useful and practical. His criticism of Frazer makes this clear :

"He (Frazer) concentrated his attention primarily on the rite and formula and not in relation to the pragmatic utilitarian performance in which it is embedded and to which it is intrinsically related. In real science...the facts consist in the relatedness...society hence has to be observed in their working state" (ibid, 26-27).

With his hypothesis of interdependence of institutions (which had become current in Britain owing to the influence of French scholars) he set out on a direct observance of facts. Field work hence became integral to his study. To contextualize facts he moved from fact to theory and from theory to fact. Field work, however, was not invented by Malinowski. Undoubtedly his presentation of data surpassed others in detail and richness. Rivers did work on Todas (1906). Seligman, made a survey of the Melanasia and New Guinea in 1904. Haddon organised an expedition to Torres Straits. And Boas carried out research among Eskimos, and later investigated the Indians of the north-west coast of America.

### Field Work

The Trobriand studies with its series of monographs written between 1916-35, established Malinowski as a master ethnographer. His monographs and articles are concerned with the analysis of various aspects of Trobriand economy, social control, marriage and

the family, ritual belief and mythology. The primary task for him was to analyse a range of institutions and demonstrate their organisation into a cultural whole. This involved eliciting a mass of detail which included looking for what Malinowski called the "invisible facts" or the principles of organisation and of their interconnectedness.

In the course of his research Malinowski came to the view that there were three broad kinds of data. First, (i) one could outline institutions through "the method of static documentation by concrete evidence". (1922:17) These of course revealed only one level of reality. The anthropologist must also record (ii) the actualities of social life - "the imponderabilia of everyday life". The third kind of data are (iii) a "collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives.. folk lore and magical formulae. (These have) to be given as a corpus inscriptionum, as a document of native mentality" (Ibid; 24, 25).

These prescriptions, according to Malinowski, reflect a systematic divergence between what people

say about what they do and what they actually do, and what they think they do. It is this perception which is the hallmark of Malinowski's work, and this is borne out of his field work experience. The realisation of different layers of reality formed his basic assumption in his understanding of culture.

For Malinowski, aspects of culture cannot be studied in isolation, they must be understood in the context. Reality is not what it appears to be. People say one thing and do another thing and the corollary to this is the fact that man everywhere is the same. In the preface to Crime and Custom in Savage Society (1926), Malinowski wrote "the heathen can be as self seeking and self interested as any Christian ". This view of the universal man is fundamental to Malinowski's study of culture. His central concern, as Parsons writes, is "to make ...types of behaviour humanly understandable to modern European through a theory of function of some sorts" (Parsons, 1957:54).

### The Notion of Function

According to Malinowski even if items are borrowed, (as the diffusionist emphasise) they should be seen in the cultural context. He criticised the evolutionist and others who talked of 'dead weights' or 'cultural fossils' in human culture. He writes :

"The principle that cultures harbour to a considerable extent ....objects which do not really belong in their context. In evolutionary theories such dead weights appear under the guise of 'survivals'. The diffusionist speak of them as 'borrowed traits' or trait complexes. The real harm done by concepts like survival in anthropology was an effective short circuiting of observation in field work. There is no doubt that the survival endures because it has acquired a new meaning, a new function".

(Malinowski, 1944 : 27-29)

Malinowski further wrote that the method of evolutionary anthropology was based primarily on the concept of survival which lead to "premature speculation on possible origins and stages" (ibid). A way out of this is to know a culture in its actual working state.

Malinowski replaced earlier evolutionary views with his central assumption that "culture cannot be regarded as a fortuitous agglomerate of such traits... only compatible elements compound into a homogeneous whole" (Malinowski, 1931 : 624). To attribute purposiveness to the existence of a particular thing is teleology, besides it is confounding cause and effect. Realising this, Malinowski wrote in his Scientific Theory of Culture "...functional analysis is easily exposed to the accusation of tautology... for, obviously, if we define function as the satisfaction of a need, it is easy to suspect that the need to be satisfied has been introduced in order to satisfy a function" (1944:121). Malinowski hoped to escape the pitfalls of circular arguments by relating function to a final and basic need which is the maintenance of individuals and groups for survival. Thus function for Malinowski was, in a utilitarian sense, a practical effect on the people in a particular culture. This demanded a study of cultures in their concreteness and "a culture at that which through age long historical development has reached a state of well balanced equilibrium" (Malinowski, 1938, p.XXXVI). Commenting

on this statement of Malinowski, Leach writes "it was Malinowski's proud boast that he had taught anthropologist the futility of the pursuit of conjectural history, yet, all the time, the primary assumption of the functionalist creed - the dogma that there is an intrinsic integration between the institutional mechanisms of any one cultural whole - called for a major historical conjecture, namely that equilibrium had been achieved through age long historical development" (Leach, 1957 : 126).

Both Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski studied societies in their working state at a particular point of time. The notion of function is different however in each of their writings. Radcliffe-Brown was greatly influenced by Durkheim and it is said that Radcliffe-Brown introduced the theoretical discipline of French sociology into Britain. Durkheim, as we have stated earlier, was mainly concerned with needs of society, unlike Malinowski who talked of needs of man. That is, what does society need in order to survive? In Division of Labour (1983[1833]),



for example, Durkheim discovered that division of labour provides a new basis for solidarity in rapidly differentiating societies. Consequently when societies do not exhibit solidarity, pathological states like anomie occur.

Though Durkheim warned that cause and effect should not be mingled, he did not seem to follow this prescription himself. Thus in Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1976[1915]) when talking of religion as the hidden worship of society enforced by a set of ideas and rituals which commit men to submit to society, he asks the question as to what causes the aroused 'collective' to feel the 'presence of mana' and to create totems? His answer was 'solidarity' of course. In other words, it is the end that causes the event. Without adequate explanation on what causes the individual to submit, his argument becomes inadequate. Malinowski thus criticising Durkheim wrote :

"the metaphysical concept of a group mind, collective sensorium, or consciousness are due to an apparent antinomy of sociological reality: the psychological nature of human culture on the one hand and on the other the fact that culture transcends the individual....

The fallacious solution to this antinomy is the theory that human minds combine or integrate and form a supra-individual and yet essentially spiritual being. The psychological nature according to Malinowski is, due to the fact that its ultimate medium is always the individual mind...the collective element is due to the sameness of reaction within the small group" (1931:62)

To understand human behaviour Malinowski argued, it is essential to know his biological nature. We will talk of his theory of needs later, but to come back to the idea of 'function' let us see how Radcliffe-Brown conceived it. Radcliffe-Brown, influenced as he was by Durkheim, stressed on the integrative aspect of function and not the pragmatic useful side of it. He wrote function as "the effects of an institution, custom or belief in so far as they concern the society and solidarity or cohesion" (1933:234). Borrowing the concept of structure from Spencer, Radcliffe-Brown was primarily interested in the way the society governs itself. Structure in his writing is an actual "set of relations at a given moment in time" (1952: 24) which are explicitly laid down by the normative order. It is possible to abstract from this given

structure to a considerable extent, making possible comparison. Radcliffe-Brown was better equipped than Malinowski with his battery of concepts. One explanation lies in Radcliffe-Brown's preoccupation with structures and the nature of effects he thought most significant. He was not concerned with immediate effects with which Malinowski was concerned but with "more remote effects upon the social cohesion and continuity" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1933:p.x).

One consequence of this was, while in Malinowski the immediate effects for function, brought the individuals into focus, in Radcliffe-Brown the individual is almost absent. He is the invisible fact. The person in Radcliffe-Brown is governed by the rules of his society, whatever is irregular or idiosyncratic is omitted from the specification of structure and hence cannot be put down to an individual. Malinowski on the other hand noted all the aberrations from given norms. But this richness of data, allied with his insistence on contextuality made generalisation difficult. But towards the later years of his life he attempted certain theoretical generalities.

Institutions as units of culture could be isolated from culture for comparative purpose because "they have a degree of permanence, universality and independence" (Malinowski 1931:626). But as Leach writes: "Malinowski's version tends to confuse the individual with his institutionalized role. As a result his institution emerges as a collection of individuals (personnel) who possess a common vested interest, a conception closely analogous to Weber's corporate group" (1957:136). Nevertheless, Malinowski's institution, as he left it, though not precise provided a kind of bridge towards more precise constructions.

Function for Malinowski is invariably related to the needs of human kind. Thus 'culture' is essentially an instrument for the survival of humankind. In his words, "(culture) is a vast apparatus... by which man is able to cope with the concrete, specific problems that face him" (1944:68). In relating the individual human and the phenomena of culture, Malinowski worked out a theory of motivation or needs.

### The Theory of Need

The theory of system of needs is set forth in Malinowski's posthumous publication A Scientific Theory of Culture. There he wrote: "(A)ny theory of culture has to start from the organic needs of man, and if it succeeds in relating the more complex, indirect, but fully imperative needs of type which we call spiritual or economic and social, it will supply us with a set of general laws such as we need in sound scientific theory" (1944:73). Malinowski defined need as "the system of conditions in the human organisms in the cultural setting and in relation to the natural environment, which is sufficient and necessary for the survival of group and organism" (1944:90). According to Malinowski, practically everything is geared to meet the survival needs of humans directly or indirectly. He writes therefore "the foundations of organization must be so arranged as to allow the basic needs to be satisfied"(ibid). Thus for Malinowski culture is essentially a man made creation to meet the exigencies of life. Depending on situations and contexts, culture meets the basic demands of humans.

In his hierarchy of needs the basic needs are most fundamental, and then there are the other needs. The basic needs and their cultural responses are as follows:-

	<u>Basic Needs</u>	and their	<u>Cultural Responses</u>
1.	Metabolism		Commissariat
2.	Reproduction		Kinship
3.	Bodily Comfort		Shelter
4.	Safety		Protection
5.	Movement		Activities
6.	Growth		Training
7.	Health		Hygiene

Culture then, has a survival value. Its adaptive character is in part due to the fact that through the basic needs shared with other animals, provide the primary determinism. The conditions of man's life as a social animal, imposes a secondary determinism.<sup>1</sup> According to Malinowski non-basic needs are essentially means to an end so they may be called derived or imperative needs. These relate to the requirements of maintenance of human behaviour, socialization and exercise of

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1. Malinowski writes "Man does not live by bread only but primarily by bread" (1944:72)

authority. The 'response' to them comprises of 'economics', social control, education and political organization. To the sphere of integrative imperatives belong the phenomena of tradition, normative standards of value, religion as well as language. According to Malinowski these symbolic elements are essential, "they are the basis of learned behaviour for the individuals of a community" (1944: 135). Symbolic communication is what gives a set of elements in a society a coherency and consistency. It is only through communication that individual elements are incorporated into tradition which are further "communicated to other members of the society... and transmitted from one generation to the other"(Ibid). Like the cultural anthropologist of his time Malinowski too recognised the importance of symbolic communication towards coherency and consistency. The American cultural anthropologist were in a sense ambiguous about the process of learning, especially Boas, who took the cultural heritage as given. Malinowski admits that "the process implies definitely the existence of permanent relation between its members. Thus any discussion of symbolism without its sociological context is futile" (Ibid: 136). The 'permanent relations'

that Malinowski mentioned is seen mainly as an organizational response to meet the needs of the individual.

Malinowski's classification of the functional imperative could have well constituted a basic starting point for a general theoretical analysis. But Malinowski is always returning to his overriding concern namely, how can one relate these derived needs to a theory of motivation of the behaviour of individual. Thus in the last part of the scientific theory, when he talked of learned behaviour (having its origin in the secondary environs) or acquired drive, he argued that this secondary need is also essentially a satisfaction of a particular basic need in the original sense. He wrote: "For man is so moulded that if he were deprived of his... organization he would as effectively starve as if the substance of food stuff was withdrawn from him" (1944:127). Malinowski's failure to establish an adequate theoretical link between observed cultural behaviour and the psychological source of motivation lies in his conception of individual as a bundle of biologically inherited basic needs from which develop secondary learned behaviour.



Thus in Malinowski's writings culture emerges primarily as an adaptive mechanism for the survival of mankind. In his article on culture in Encyclopedia of Social Science (1931:Vol iv: 621-46) he wrote "(C)ulture consists of the body of commodities and instruments as well as of customs and bodily or mental habits which work directly or indirectly for the satisfaction of human needs. All the elements of culture...must be at once functioning, active, efficient" (Ibid:625).

Another aspect in Malinowski's understanding of culture is the notion of 'social heritage' or the set of forces impinging on the individual born into each society. In his view, "certain devices, forms of organizations, customs or ideas enlarge the range of human potentials on the one hand and impose restrictions on the other" (1944: 116-119). The culture and personality school took full advantage of the conception of social heritage as a determining factor in shaping personality, and tended to push it to an extent where the personality was only a kind of mirror image of the culture. Malinowski on the other hand reduced the learned elements to

instrumental status and left the biologically given structure of instincts untouched as the prime mover. Thus we find that though Malinowski recognised a measure of conflict between the needs of the individual and of society, and of those between different factions or groups within the community, yet he tended to search for mutual adjustment so that a sort of balance may be arrived at in society.

Rules and regulations for Malinowski provide a plan for realization of a task. ~~Man~~ was self seeking and man co-operated out of his own interest. Malinowski wrote that "whenever the native can evade his obligations without the loss of prestige or without the prospective loss of gain, he does exactly as a civilized business man would do" (1926:30). Malinowski's perspective depended like all theories, on his idea of man. This idea of man, many believe, is the archetype Trobriand Man. In Malinowski's view, man is down to earth. He has no time for intellectualizing and imagining. He is reasonable and practical and quite able to discern his true long term interests. This view of man is what made Malinowski recognize the multi-faceted reality. But

this recognition had its problems, as Audrey Richards points out,

"Once individual variation in human behaviour was admitted, and it had to be admitted, then anthropologist found that they had fallen into the well worn groove of the case history method and were bound to the use of quantitative data. The field worker seemed to be a person who tried to find out more and more about more and more" (1957:28).

The data grew and grew.<sup>2</sup>

Malinowski's obsession with empirical details to be seen only in their functional context is the basic assumption. In the light of the above, let us examine his fundamental ideas on culture and change.

### Culture and Change

As we already pointed out the concept of culture for Malinowski like for the earlier scholars, was an inclusive one, which included tools, techniques customs, morals, habits, etc. But for Malinowski

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2. Leach labels him an obsessional empiricist who was "deeply suspicious of every type of second hand information". Besides the "total field of data under observation of the field worker must somehow fit together and make sense". Thus "he was deeply suspicious of abstractions that could not be referred directly to observable facts" (1957:122).

culture is first and foremost an instrument for the survival of mankind - it is a means to an end. It is an adaptive mechanism both at the level of individual organisms and at the societal level. The secondary or integrative responses by taking care of the survival needs, bring consistency and coherency through symbolic communication or by moral/political authority. This keeps society in working order and in equilibrium. It indirectly contributes to the survival of human organisms. Thus, rules and regulations are seen by Malinowski in a strictly utilitarian perspective. He sees in culture first and foremost the instrumental aspect.

There is, however, no denying that there could be a functional aspect to everything that exists in society. But that is not the only aspect. Malinowski also anticipated aberration and discrepancies in human behaviour. Man is not a passive role player in his understanding. Man manipulates, in as far as he can to fulfil his needs without endangering his position in society. That is the reason why according to Malinowski there was reciprocity and co-operation.

Now, if man is to survive he must learn the contents of his culture and he must conform to its norms and rules. The cultural element of the environment is man-made and is perpetuated and sustained by human action. It is not something which is simply there, independent of human life, to which man must adapt because he is unable to change or control it. Yet at the same time the culture also has enough openings for tactful evasions, and enough room to enlarge one's potentialities. Malinowski once put it very pithily when he wrote that "culture is an investment in freedom".

Malinowski was quite right that man is subject to a certain order which is independent of the exigencies imposed by the physiological needs of the organisms, but he grossly underestimated the theoretical import of these facts. At certain points a general analysis of an enduring structure did emerge in Malinowski's work, notably in his classification of institutions. But he never disentangled the concept of culture nor trim it of all inclusiveness which would have been a necessary prerequisite for further theoretical

development. Nor was he able to position the openness of culture or the "calculating man" within his scheme of classification. Radcliffe-Brown did not either. The fact that he saw structure as hardened reality totally out of the purview of the individual, made no room for the kind of dilemma that Malinowski faced.

The theoretical discussions of the early part of this century tacitly assumed that the societies concerned were static, though they always envisaged as representing the end point of a process. In this state of equilibrium a process of change is always on account of exogenous forces. At the time when Malinowski worked on the Trobriands, or later on Africa, dramatic changes had been brought about by the colonial presence. "The study of culture change (as it was called those days) was closely linked with the practical application of anthropological knowledge and in Malinowski's thinking and writing they were never separated" (Mair, 1957:231). His visit to Africa in 1934 convinced him that anthropologist had an important contribution to make towards policy

making, and led him to criticise the policies of colonial rulers. This interest led him partly to the formulation of theories of social change.

For Malinowski who saw societies as well balanced integrated systems change was mainly a consequence of 'culture contact' (1945)). This again reveals his inability to push his insight on the calculating individual and on the belief that culture has large doses of freedom, to a theoretical fruition. He, however, recognised that new methods were necessary for the study of those communities undergoing intensive change. Towards this end, he elaborated, what, for the sake of brevity may be termed his 'three column approach'. This approach highlights three phases of culture contact and change. In the first phase one must examine the impinging culture with institutions, intentions and interest: then, attention must be paid to the reservoir of indigenous customs and finally, it must study the process of contact and change where members of the two cultures cooperate, conflict or compromise. Basic to his understanding of this approach

is his idea of "institutions as isolates" of culture. Hence, contact becomes primarily the impact between institutions, in the process of which they are modified, assume new forms or new functions. Once again we find that Malinowski has left out his individual - the "rational", "calculating individual" - out of his scheme. Malinowski referred frequently to the cultural determinism of the two societies in contact and affirmed that "institutions which are the result of contact and change... obey a specific determinism of their own" (1945:12). He did not, however, develop this concept though he probably had value systems in mind.

It is obvious that once you have reality seen as an ordered arrangement we seem to be dealing with a discreet entity rather than with a process. Continuity is replaced by the dichotomization of structural persistence and structural change. To account for change it is not enough to talk of sudden changes from outside. For change is a constant feature of all societies. Any understanding of change must take in the time factor. As Leach has written "every real society is a process in time, whereas the cultural



situation... is a product and accident of history" (1964;5, 6).

The interpretative school in its attempts to correct the empiricist tendencies in functionalism brought into focus the realm of meanings and symbols. Geertz, who is a representative scholar of interpretative social anthropology, concentrates on the idea of culture as a meaning, rather than as function. The chapter that follows will discuss the contributions of the interpretative school in the light of the preceding pages. Let us see how the interpretative school understands culture and cultural change.

## CHAPTER - III

### FORMS OF LIFE : GEERTZ'S UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE

By the end of world war II almost all colonized countries freed themselves to become nation states. These independent nations were to be economic units competing in a world-wide market system. Increasingly social scientists turned their attention to understand the supposed lag in economic development. Culture as way of life of people, came in handy in many of the explanations.

Among the theories offered, the concern with particularity of culture and the variety of lived experience proved most compelling. With more refined theories of human symbolism, culture increasingly came to be understood as an interpretation of historical circumstances by a particular people in their time and place. By around mid 20th century, a great number of social scientists were rejecting positivism and were discovering German historicism and interpretative sociology. In general the early 'scientific spirit'

gave way to interpretative understanding. This approach in the study of human society "situated itself against positivist, structuralist and neo-marxist positions" in general against all those theories whose supposed "effort is to integrate the science of man within a natural scientific paradigm" (Robinow and Sullivan, 1979: 3). Hence, this school has taken it upon itself, following Kantian distinction of 'phenomenon' and 'noumenon' to pursue a method befitting human societies, whether the focus would be on 'concrete varieties of cultural meaning'(ibid:4).

Within the interpretative framework Clifford Geertz stands in the forefront especially in relation to cultural theories. His treatment of culture as a 'system of shared symbols and meanings' had many avid followers. Geertz is an important scholar for he is one of the few anthropologist to have extensive influence beyond his own discipline and also because he has argued vociferously for an interpretative approach. Peacock rightly says, when assessing Geertz's work that "regardless of one's view of Geertz's scholarly

work, one must accept that he occupies a critical place in the discipline. He is of strategic importance in the rebirth of American cultural anthropology which by the death of Kluckhohn and Kroeber had already entered dark age".(Peacock, 1981:122)

This chapter will explore the programme that Geertz proposes, viz., a theory which does not emulate natural sciences where the study of meaning is emphasised rather than the study of causal laws, to arrive at an interpretative exclamation of culture. Geertz is probably best known for his monographs: The Religion of Java (1960), Peddlers and Prince (1963), Agricultural Involution (1963), Islam Observed (1968). Though his theory is implicit in these works, his essays consolidate his theoretical standing more clearly.

All of his work is not necessarily systematic. These shifts in emphasis have been pointed out by Diane J. Austin Broos who writes that Geertz's initial project was Weberian, where there was a "stress on the issue of agency and the view that a causal and

comparative account of society can incorporate meaningful phenomena". According to her "he later became less committed to a general account of human agency and was more concerned with cultural configuration that mould particular agents"(Austin-Broos, 1986:142). Despite these shifts in his intellectual journey<sup>1</sup> the essays by Geertz which delineates his theoretical and conceptual preferences is in Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture(1977). Naturally, this is also a good place for us to start.

#### Thick Description : An Interpretative Theory

Geertz's basic premise for a different anthropology or a different theory arises out of a reconsideration of the concept of culture. In his article - "Thick Description" and elsewhere Geertz asserts that culture is symbolic and meaningful. He writes therefore: "(T)he concept of culture, I expouse is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber, that man is an "animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun , I take culture to be these webs, and the analysis of it be therefore, not an experimental

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1. Broos writes his ideas traversed "From sociology through philosophy and hermeneutics to a new historicism"(Austin-Broos, 1986:143)

science in search of laws but an interpretative one in search of meanings" (1973:5). It is this concept of culture, Geertz believes, that involves "an elaborate venture in thick description to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle." (1973 : 7). Here Geertz takes Ryle's example of 'winking' to elaborate on the many aspects of reality or what Geertz calls as the "stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures...in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, paradoxes, rehearsals of paradoxes are produced, perceived and interpreted" (ibid). Geertz explains that what the ethnographer is faced with is:

"a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon, knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'constructing a reading of') manuscript...full of incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries but written not in a conventionalized graph of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour" (Ibid:10).

In short, Geertz's programme is to unravel "socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people act". Asserting that these meanings are contextual, he argues that we must attempt to grasp it from the "native's point of view". Our

formulation of other people's symbolic system must be actor oriented. This does not mean, writes Geertz, that, culture is located in the hearts and minds of men, as Goodenough asserts. One need not resort to ethno-science or conventional analysis or cognitive anthropology, a school of thought which according to Geertz holds a view "that culture is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups guide their behaviour...in such a way that extreme subjectivism is married to extreme formalism" (ibid:12). Against this strict operationalization of concepts which according to Geertz is a methodological dogma, Geertz's assertion is that culture is "an interpretation of a particular people in a particular way owing to their historical specificity, which is manifested in their life styles and behaviour "(1937:10). Thus culture should be sought in the manifested actions of people. Geertz acknowledges that our interpretation of what "our informants are up to, or think, what they are up to...are themselves interpretations and second and third order once to boot" (1973:15). Geertz realizes the dangers in the lack of systematic

modes of assessment, but then again, feels that the whole point, of interpretative exercise is to "aid us in giving our subject's life so that we can in some extended sense converse with them" (1973:24). Interpretation does not involve, according to Geertz, 'codifying' abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalise across cases but to generalise within them. The aim is the analysis of social discourse.

Now, to trace this 'course of social curve' one need not go into the whole array of social realities specially when one is confronted with the unfamiliar. According to Geertz, one could draw generalisation by attending to small events. Because "small facts speak to large issue... social actions are comments on more than themselves". (1973 : 12) But he warns that generalisation cannot be extended across cases, but be kept within them, we can only have inferences and not governing laws. He confesses thus interpretative theory "is not predictive", in the strict sense of the term . The above brief summation of Geertz's exposition of what he means by interpretative analysis hardly does justice to his elaborate and involved



explanation, but in its broad outline it points to the endeavours of cultural anthropology. What should be assessed at this point are its strengths and its weaknesses.

Geertz acknowledges that in the strict meaning of the term interpretative theory is neither predictive, nor is it verifiable. Geertz readily agrees that it lacks precise criteria for evaluating cultural interpretations. According to him, a "good interpretation of anything - a poem, a person, a history or ritual... takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation" (1973:18). One is left to wonder what is good interpretation and how one is to make out the bad interpretation from good. On this matter Geertz provides us with no guidelines. In fact he concedes that interpretative theory has no means for evaluating alternative accounts of the same phenomena: "This raises serious problems of verification", but he writes, that "this is the virtue of it" or as Geertz puts it elsewhere "either you grasp it or you do not" (1977:24). Such discussions on the characteristics of interpretative method are not only difficult

to grasp but they add little to theoretical development.

Paul Hershman rightly argues in his criticism of Geertz that "generalisations and comparisons are vital components of sciences" (1984:268). But for Geertz generalisations are to be "within cases and not across cases" (1973:26). The reason behind this argument is his idea of contextuality of relativity, which we will discuss in detail later. Taking from Wittgenstein that each 'form of life' is supported by implicit set of rules he, argues, that "any attempt to cast what it (culture) says in terms of other than its own is regarded as travesty" (Geertz, 1973:24).

Geertz's idea of generalisation, as is obvious, will yield little in terms of cumulative knowledge. Geertz, in fact, admits frankly that "our knowledge of culture...cultures...a culture grows in spurts rather than following a rising curve of cumulative findings" (1973:25). The main purpose of interpretative theory as Geertz sees it, is towards refinement of debate rather than the perfection of consensus.

But with Geertz's loose equation of description with analysis, analysis with explanation and theory with all these, refinement of debate is bound to be a difficult task.

Arguing that complete objectivity is impossible Geertz leaves a large area for intuitive handling. This is largely because he seems to reject operationalization of anthropological research. He seems somehow unable to understand that methodology is built upon a conceptual framework that depends in turn on a theoretical language. In Geertz's writing one is confronted with a metaphorical vocabulary which only adds to the obfuscation.

By upholding conceptual operationalizations and generalizations we are not upholding scientific method as the only way of knowing. We realise that complete objectivity is a myth. And that science can reduce and dehumanise humans by reducing them to objects of study. We are not arguing for predictive models or iron laws. But we cannot rule out the fact that underlying all the apparent diversities

in culture, there are processes working beneath which are true for all cultures. There is scope for understanding these processes in conceptual terms, and these are concepts which are applicable across cases. But Geertz fails to realise this because for him a particular symbolic system more or less determines the processes in that particular context. He gives his famous example of the Balinese trance (1979) as being something very unique to Balinese culture. The reason for this understanding lies in the way he conceptualises culture and the man within. Let us turn our attention to his formulation<sup>of</sup> the concept of culture.

#### Culture as shared symbols and meanings

In keeping with the American cultural anthropologist tradition Geertz recognises culture as a tradition, as established patterns of meanings. He believes that "culture is embodied in symbols...by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (1973:89).

Culture, according to him though "unphysical is not an occult entity" (1973:10). It does not exist in someone's head. Culture is public because meaning is. Geertz criticises the mentalistic notion of culture. These scholars according to him place culture in the minds of people, as something innate, as an inner capacity (something in the likes of Chomsky's competence). Consequently they come up with taxonomies, paradigms... and other ingenuities... which are merely clever simulations... logically equivalent but substantively different" (1973:11). These are either extremely subjective or too formal. Geertz inevitably confronts Levi -Strauss for presenting of view of culture as mental competence. In his article "The Cerebral Savage: On the Work of Claude Levi-Strauss" (1973) Geertz attacks Levi-Strauss for taking for granted the elements of the conceptual world whereby thinking consisted of fiddling with the elements and putting them into permutation and combinations. Geertz questions Levi-Strauss as, "how these beings (elements) came to be in the first place?" According to Geertz, Levi-Strauss generalises this permutational view of thinking to savage thought in general. Geertz wonders why

the linguists never ask questions as to why French call certain animal 'chein' and English call it dog, and he believes that the answer for this is rooted in the particular. On the whole Geertz objects to Levi-Straussian analysis which according to him "annuls history, reduces sentiments to a shadow of the intellect and replaces particular mind of particular savage in particular jungles with the savage minds immanent in us all (1977:352-354).

For Geertz "culture is not in the minds of men, neither is it a self contained 'super organic reality' with forces and purposes of its own; that is to reify it. It cannot be found in the brute pattern of behaviour events we observe in some identifiable community or other: that is to reduce it" (1977:10), but it consists, for him, in socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do things.

Geertz develops his notion of culture as 'public' relying heavily on the works of Gilbert Ryle and Wittgenstein. But before we go on to discuss what Geertz means by culture as 'public', we shall deviate slightly and look into the substantive aspects

of his notion of culture. Talal Asad on his "Reflection on Geertz"...(1982:237-59), rightly points out that Geertz understanding of 'symbol' is divergent in the sense that symbol is thought of as an aspect of reality and sometimes as its 'representation'(ibid: 239). This problem arises, according to Asad, because "cognitive questions are mixed up with communicative ones; and this makes it difficult to enquire into ways in which the two are connected. A symbol could not only 'represent' something (existing in reality) but mean a set of relationships, objects...brought together as complexes or concepts having an intellectual significance"(ibid:238). But one must point to the conditions under which such concepts came to be formed. Asad points out to the dangers of Geertz's exposition where symbols are presented as 'sui generis.' Where the origins of symbols lie are not pointed but their functions are given attention.

Our idea in bringing this up is only to point out that the generation of symbols depend on social relations. Hence one cannot really talk of symbols being outside and above social conditions<sup>3</sup>. As Asad

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3 In "Religion as a Cultural System", Geertz defines culture as: "meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life" (1977:89).

writes the very expression that Geertz uses 'knowledge about' and 'attitude towards' life suggests distanced spectator role as compared to 'knowledge from' and 'attitudes in' living. The problem with this viewing is that it forgets to note how knowledge is after all constituted out of social conditions and is not separated from it. Further, as Asad points it "closes off the possibility of examining how knowledge and attitude are related to material conditions" (1982:29).

Geertz's main concern is with culture as a system of shared meanings. But as Keesing points out (1987:161-164) by drawing on the Kuaio example that many of the meanings "need not be shared and public and they need not even be understood..., be followed or even stay within its boundaries." Geertz's understanding of culture as "shared meanings gives us an illusory picture of a coherent whole." (ibid:163) In fact, Geertz seems to go by the same principle as pattern theorist who argue that there is connotation of elements that characterise a culture in all its uniqueness. But Geertz departs from the American cultural anthropologists when he remarks : "The question as



to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together, loses sense, the thing to ask about a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid is not what their ontological status is. It is the same as that of rocks on one hand and dreams on the other, they are things of the world"(1973:10).

In his article 'The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind' (1973), Geertz develops the notion that culture is a public affair. Ryle before him had argued that when we are referring to mind, we are actually referring to observable behavior and not "to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects" (c.f. Austin-Broos. 1986:146). By making culture public, Geertz hoped to avoid reduction to either material or to the non material. Like Ryle's mind, culture was a complex of social behaviour and interaction. Culture is hence found in the social process as by the manipulation of common and communicable symbol systems within different groups. Taking his cue from Wittgenstein the philosopher, Geertz developed the notion that mental and cultural

phenomena are essentially both public and observable. "(C)ulture is symbolically systematic action, and not simply a system of ideas which exist independently of action" (Austin-Broos, 1986:147).

In his article 'Person, Time and Conduct in Bali', (1973), Geertz sought to apply the notion of culture being observable in public behaviour. In Bali, Geertz argues that the conventional naming system, the ritual and every-day etiquette, together form a coherent whole. Geertz writes that to analyse these connections one does not have to invoke an order of order, a holistic entity but to look for significant symbols in the every-day world. Following Schutz who was interested in the natural world of 'Lebenswelt' and not on the transcendental, Geertz argued that significant symbols are to be found in this world. Schutz's main concern was with process whereby individuals construct an inter-subjective world of shared significance. By bringing in this aspect of inter-subjectivity, Geertz "hoped and believed" (as Austin-Broos rightly points) "that he resolved the ideal/material dichotomy" (1986:149).

### Cultural Relativism

Culture is not only made public by symbols but an understanding of culture depend on the special logic involved in symbolic systems. In one of his earliest essays 'Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man'(1973) Geertz argues for a particularistic, interpretative instance of a particular culture. Geertz points out that to draw cross-cultural comparisons is "to falsify the human situation or at least to misrender it seriously"(1973:36). Feeling that comparative questions do little justice to the phenomenon of Balinese trance, Geertz opts for idiographic approach in which 'human nature is interdependent with culture in a "highly particular form". He writes therefore, that "it is among such interpolations as these...that anthropology has attempted to find its way to more viable concept of man"(1977:44). According to Geertz "there is no Man with capital M but a mankind with a body of his customs. There is need to bring in synthetic notion, in which biological, psychological, sociological and cultural factors can be treated as variables within an unitary system of analysis" (ibid).

Not surprisingly, hence, Geertz demonstrates that the Balinese concept of self differs from one which Schutz presents—the concept of 'consociates' of personal intimates as universal category of interaction. Implicit in Geertz's argument is the view that the very identity of the knowing subject ought to be constructed differently in different culture. By adopting this stance he came in conflict with the epistemology of analytic philosophy and away from the phenomenology of Satre and Schutz, whose understanding involved a universal subject.

In his essay 'From the Native's Point of View' (1977), argues that when we refer to the native's point of view we are not looking into the emotion, or sentiments, or experiences. According to Geertz we come to understand the particular minds by understanding the system of communication within which they operate. Geertz writes : "To find out what some pack of natives conceive a person to be, the anthropologist moves back and forth between asking himself...what is the general form of their life?...and what exactly are the vehicles in which their form is embodied?" (1979:240).

And what is the general form of life? Geertz looks to Wittgenstein's language games theory for an answer. Wittgenstein's notion of communication as a matter of multiple language games which constitute forms of life inspired Geertz. Geertz connects the game theory to his culture. The notion that culture is a set of loosely connected games, each with its own symbolic system, demanded an understanding of the rules of the games and not general laws.

Interpretation does not simply involve empathy with the subject of the study but rather an understanding of their lives. It is "hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts, which actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole which motivated them. All this is what Dilthey called the hermeneutic circle"(1979:240). Geertz like Dilthey argued that particular texts - works of art or historical records should be interpreted with reference to cultural systems that produce them. Each cultural form should be analysed in its own terms, and so also the actors living in that culture. In this essay Geertz uses Ricoeur's concept of text to show how the Balinese cockfight can be treated as social text. According

to Ricoeur in his essay 'The Model of the Text':

"An action is a social phenomena not only because it is done by several agents in such a way that the role of each of them cannot be distinguished from the role of others, but also our deeds escape us and have effects which we did not intend...the kind of distance we find between the intention of the speakers and the verbal meanings of a text occurs also between us agent and its action" (quoted in Austin-Broos 1986:153).

Ricoeur further feels that we may find in events a meaning and significance not apparent to the actors themselves, just as in literary criticism the author's own intentions are very seldom decisive in the ultimate interpretations of text.

To get a closer understanding of this, let us examine Geertz's famous essay on the Balinese cockfight(1979). In Balinese cockfight, Geertz analyses an inscription of meaning : a particular institution whose significance went beyond the logical intention of the actors. According to Geertz the cockfight is neither a mere gambling nor Freudian play on

the 'cock' as a symbol of male sexuality. The cockfight is a "simulation of social matrix". Though in the cockfight one gets an insight into Balinese notion of prestige, status and also order, but none of these are discernible disclosing as such, but are simulated in the ringside of the cockfight in a "Deep play".

Geertz's interpretative approach thus advocates a fine and elaborate 'description' of culturally situated phenomena with less emphasis on theoretical or methodological rigour. This does not exactly call for celebration because it has its serious consequences. In particular, there was the danger of "sociological asceticism and sterile elegance" (1973:30), a danger Geertz anticipated but could not heed himself. Appositely, in Geertz's work "human experience becomes a text without a context, read for the amusement of one's peers with little regard for world of process and change" (Walter, 1980:556).

On the other hand, one can find in Geertz an imaginative, insightful descriptions of cultural realities. Geertz's belief in the possibility of understanding symbols cannot be easily dismissed.

Geertz did take the conventional concept of culture to task. By adding the symbolic dimension to the concept of culture he brought in a new dimension. If anything, it produced an image of concrete humans with feelings and emotions, which conventional science searching for causal explanation overlooks.

But now how far has this humanistic endeavour been successful? When one concentrates on emotions and feelings as being totally shaped by culture we undermine commonality that lies underneath. If the 'other' is glossed over as being different then one must go into the process of how these differences came about. After all structures of existence are structures which come about in social process over time. In Geertz's account one finds a stillness arising from his understanding that inscribes meanings of history which envelops the human agent within the fields of tradition.

Additionally, it is important to recall what Evans - Pritchard reminded us long ago while writing about Azande magic. While Azande beliefs are admittedly



different and Evans - Pritchard was not the one to gloss over such differences nevertheless, he pursued the argument that the process of reasoning are not all that different provided one is tuned in to the Azande premise of rationality (1937). After all "to make known the unfamiliar in familiar terms" was the credo of Evans - Pritchard. If one examines Geertz in this context we realize that unlike Evans Pritchard before him, Geertz thus thickly ethnicizes his subjects without consciously realizing that the very act of anthropological writing perforce compels the scholar to make the unfamiliar known in familiar terms.

A further consequence of Geertz's anthropological style which disembodies societies of their history is that these societies, in Geertz's hand have only a predictable and known future where the encapsulated meanings in the ever present social life only become denser with time. Quite predictably, Geertz can see no development but only "involution"(1963).

From the point of linking diverse societies through a theoretical approach that allows for comparative

differences, we have so far been somewhat disappointed. While Malinowski was sensitive to the need to de-exoticize the anthropological subjects, we found that he did not provide any theoretical leverage to realise this project. Geertz, in this sense, seems to be stepping backwards, as he does not seem to find this aspect of Malinowski worth considering at all. On the other hand, his "thick description" consciously and deliberately, separated societies on all axes and fronts.

Malinowski and Geertz are, however, similar in a certain very important sense. In both Malinowski's and Geertz's frameworks internal sources of change are not admitted. But here at least Malinowski makes some concessions, as we saw earlier, with respect to culture contact, but Geertz, consistent with his style can only make room for greater elaboration of detail as he did in his study of Agricultural Involution(1963).

## CHAPTER - IV

### CULTURE AND PRACTICE : AN EVALUATION OF BOURDIEU'S WORK

We now move on to Pierre Bourdieu's work, where we come to a conception of culture which attempts to fill in some of the lacunae in the earlier formulations. Bourdieu realizes that the functional strait-jacket of structuration of societies, objectivizes the social analysis. On the other hand he is also aware that phenomenological analysis are of little help. Phenomenology captures only the experiential reality of the subject. Bourdieu attempts to bridge this gap by seeing the agent in a situation of 'practice'. Thus Bourdieu, in a way addresses some of the problems that Geertz leaves behind. One central theme that his theory of culture attempts to do is bring the relations of power, as arising from the material conditions, into sharp focus, and in this process account for social dynamism is an intrinsic fashion.

In order to understand Bourdieu, we must take note of the Marxist tradition, for this has influenced him to a great extent. The concept of culture is

not indigenous to classical Marxist writing, in the sense that ideology is.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, culture as a term was used by 'materialists' to denote a body of knowledge which is a simple 'reflection' of material condition of the economic base.

Serious attempts have been made by Marxists to formulate new hypotheses on the question of culture. Lukacs and Gramsci to Althusser, Godelier, Bourdieu, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson have only contributed in this effort. In this chapter we cannot discuss all these contributions but we will restrict ourselves to a discussion on Pierre Bourdieu's approach as it directly takes up the issues that we have discussed so far in the social anthropological traditions.

Pierre Bourdieu like Malinowski and Geertz has worked extensively on cultures other than his own. Bourdieu worked among the Kabyle of Algeria. Bourdieu's exposition is mainly in the broad pers-

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1. In Marxist literature, the tendency has been to view ideology as pure illusion and inverted image of what is real. It is forgotten that ideology is not merely a reflection and not simply unreal for "it is partially constitutive of what, in our societies is real" (Thompson, 1984:5).

pective of Marxism within which he questions and attempts to understand power relations in society. But he goes beyond the traditional Marxist fold in his understanding of ideology. He develops a theory of "ideology", rather, symbolic power (since he uses the term ideology for more defined and coherent bodies of thought) based upon historical research and upon the use of classical techniques of empirical sociology such as statistical analysis of survey data.

After his ethnographic research among the Kabyle of Algeria, Bourdieu has spent much of his time researching on the French educational system, and the part it has played in the production and consumption of French culture, and for its capacity to promote structured cultural differences in French society. Underlying Bourdieu's varied empirical work is his concern with culture as a medium and a mode of domination.

Bourdieu insists that "ideologies are always doubly determined, that they owe their most specific characteristic not only to the interest of the classes and class fractions, but also to the specific interest of those who produce them and to the specific logic

of the field of production (usually, transfigured into the ideology of 'creation' and 'creator')" (Bourdieu, 1977 quoted in Granham and Williams, 1988:117). There is thus means of escaping the crude reduction in some Marxist scholarship, where ideological products are directly linked to class interests. But we also must guard ourselves, Bourdieu warns, from "falling into the idealist illusion of treating ideological production as self-sufficient and self-generating totalities" (ibid:117). In other words, what Bourdieu proposes to do is not only identify apparatuses or modes of domination, but also look into the processes of its reproduction and legitimization in the way the agents strategically use given resources. It is this general problem in its specific condition that Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' is addressed to.

#### Bourdieu's 'Theory of Practice'

Bourdieu's writing is particularly dense and his ethnographic detail wide ranging. Most of his theory is implicit in his writing. However, his book

outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) more or less encapsulates his approach. It is a work to which he constantly refers. We will, therefore, focus our attention on this work, and draw from this to understand his approach and some of his concepts.

Bourdieu's main concern is with 'socialness'. He believes that sociology by definition is the science of social conditions in the classical tradition of Durkheim. But Bourdieu is concerned with social conditions which determine intellectual practices - a set of structured dispositions which he calls as 'structured structures' mediating between people and structure. For Bourdieu people are elements in the social process and thus to "concentrate on the ideology of individualism which dominates our society; is to fetishize our personalities at the expense of sociological knowledge to succumb to subjectivism" (quoted from Miller and Branson, 1986:215).

In Bourdieu's theoretical work we find a specific critique of 'subjectivist and objectivist' positions on adequate knowledge - which he calls a science of practice. Within subjectivism Bourdieu includes

phenomenological knowledge as well as tendencies as psychology, ethnomethodology, and the existentialist focus upon the individual. The subjectivist position according to Bourdieu has the characteristic tendency whereby the observer anthropologist refers to himself as a participant as well. As against this is the objective anthropologist who in taking up a point of view of an actor, withdraws from it in order to observe from above and from distance, he constitutes practical activity as an object of observation and analysis, a representation" (1977:2). According to Bourdieu this objectivist tendency includes all types of structuralism and functionalism. But he is specially critical of Levi-Strauss and Althusser, who go beyond the native experience, to look for regularities of social action. But in doing so they reify and fetishize the structure, making the agent a mere performer of pre-ordained rule or as bearer of structure. While subjectivists cannot recognize the social determinants of human action, the objectivist have a tendency to wholly succumb to the structures. By doing this, both the subjectivist and objectivist fail to recognise the socially and historically specific conditions determining all human practice.



To make possible a science of practice one must strike a balance between "objective structures to which objectivist mode of knowledge give access and the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualised and tend to reproduce" (1977:3). In other words "to restore to practice its practical truth we must ...introduce time in to the theoretical representation of a practice, which, being temporally structured is intrinsically defined by its tempo" (1977:8). We shall be able to shed more light on this subject by discussing Bourdieu's contribution on gift exchange.

The phenomenological and objectivist analysis according to Bourdieu :

" bring to light two antagonistic principles of gift exchange, the gift as experienced or at least meant to be experienced, and the gift as seen from outside. To stop short at the 'objective' truth of the gift, i.e., the model, is to set aside the question of the relationship between the so-called objective truth, i.e. - that of the observer, and the truth that can scarcely be called subjective, since it represents the official definition of the subjective experience of the exchange, it is to ignore the fact that the agent's practice is irreversible as sequence of action that the observer constitute as reversible".(1977:5)

What the objectivist fails to do, according to Bourdieu, is to conceive that the acts of so-called reciprocity may misfire and also that the act of gift exchange 'receives its meanings from the response it triggers off'. Besides which there is 'delay and deference' which the 'monothetic model obliterate' what should be brought into focus is what makes the gift exchange obligatory? According to Bourdieu it is not the rule which the actors follow, but underlying the gift exchange is an "individual and collective 'misrecognition' ('meconnaissance) of the reality of the objective mechanism of the exchange" (1977:5-6). What makes the gift exchange carry on despite lapse of time, (for a gift exchange is not swapping or lending, going from one hand to the other) is "the collectively maintained and approved self deception without which symbolic exchange, could not operate" (ibid).

Thus, Bourdieu writes "to abolish intention is to abolish strategy"(ibid). The agents' social interaction are strategical and time and space are integral to the strategy available to them. Thus it is not the mechanical necessity which forces a gift exchange to renew itself endlessly. "The Kabyle

operate through, not by the 'rule' of honour but a 'sense' of honour intricately elaborated in the strategies which constitute the tempo of their gift exchanges. The honourable man is not simply one who has engaged in exchange and accepted challenge. He is the one who has cultivated a complex 'disposition' with regard to honour that will allow him to make the effective choice of action in the appropriate circumstances. (Miller and Branson, 1986:216). The sense of honour is a disposition 'inculcated' in the earliest years of life and is "constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group, that is to say, from the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions to whom each is linked by his disposition and interest". (1977:10). Thus to analyse what happens between actors, Bourdieu insists that we "consider the practical mastery of the symbolism of social interaction - presupposed by the most every day games of sociability and accompanied by a mass of 'percepts, formulae, and codified cues" (1977:10).

Bourdieu's main concern here, as is obvious, is with human action, but action which takes place 'irreversibly' in time. Thus all human actors are

involved in strategies in situation of which the outcome is uncertain because these strategies are opposed by other strategies of other actors. Therefore, it is necessary, Bourdieu argues, that we specify the mechanism, which are unknown in principle to the actor (for if they know they would alter their strategy to take account of this knowledge), which generate strategies specific to its conditions.

### Habitus

The regulating mechanisms that Bourdieu proposes is the 'habitus'. The 'habitus' is in Bourdieu's words :

"System of durable, transposable, dispositions structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aim at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and being all this collectively orchestrated without being the product of orchestrating action of conduction" (1977:72).

Let us try and make some of these features lucid. The habitus is a system of lasting transposable dispositions which mediate between structures and practices. The dispositions are the products of the

structure constitutive of a particular condition of existence. The dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation which depend upon the objective conditions. The dispositions are inculcated in a durable way: the person is literally moulded into a certain form, so that the habitus is reflected in the whole way one carries oneself, in the world. The dispositions are 'transportable' in the sense that they are capable of generating practices in fields other than in which they originally acquired.<sup>2</sup> "One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning of practice and the word". (1977:80). As trnasposable dispositions, not only do "they provide a link between past and present", (ibid), but also they are objectified to the extent that they are 'taken for granted'. "In other words the harmonization of agent's experience and continuous reinforcement that each of them receive.

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2. Bourdieu writes : "In fact it is their present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions. In short, the habitus, the product of history produces individual and collective practices and hence history, in accordance with schemes engendered by history".(1977:82).

"The homogeneity of habitus... causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible. This practical comprehension obviates the , 'intention' and 'intentional transfer into the other'" (ibid). Bourdieu argues that this does not mean that because the habitus is a strategy generating principle, actors are mere inculcators of structures of disposition. According to him, there are numerous strategies at their disposal, However, he stresses that an agent's actions take place within a structured space and time. These structures generate a pattern of behaviour which in turn becomes a structure in itself, "it feeds off itself like a train bringing along its own rail". (ibid:79).

As Miller and Branson point out Bourdieu "describes the necessary interrelationship between the agent's condition of existence, the physical environment, and the agent's habitus" (1986:218). But in looking for the source of habitus, Bourdieu had to look beyond vulgar materialism , "for if the objective conditions of existence produce habitus, they are also produced

by habitus, through the dialectics of practice, a practice oriented in terms of 'dispositions' exercised through the peculiar logic of practice, a logic constructed against the logic of science and referred to by Bourdieu, with mischievous ambiguity; as practical logic" (ibid).

Thus, the habitus is not just a random series of dispositions but operates according to a relatively coherent logic, that is the logic of practice :

Bourdieu argues that :

"Practice always implies a cognitive operation, a practical operation of construction which sets to work, by reference to practical function, system of classifications (taxonomies) which organise perceptions and structure practices...these schemes of perception, appreciation, and action, which are acquired through practice and applied in their practical state without acceding to explicit representation, function as practical operators through which the objective structures of which they produce tend to reproduce themselves in practice. Practical taxonomies, instruments of cognition and communication which are the precondition for the establishment of meaning and the consenses on the meaning, exert their structuring efficacy only to the extent that they themselves are structured" (1977:97).

Bourdieu like Durkheim sees symbolic systems as arbitrary and undetermined taxonomies structuring structures in the sense that they do not reflect reality. Such systems are based in the Saussurian model of 'distinction'

and 'difference'. However, Bourdieu is critical of the Durkheimian and the Saussurian tradition by stressing that the systems, although arbitrary in themselves, are not arbitrary in their function. Since logic of practice must be operated unconsciously, it must be inculcated by an ambiguous and impoverished logic, in the sense of working with simple categorical distinction, which are also flexible so that they can be applied as the structuring principles of practice over a wide range of situations. Thus the logic of practice through simple dichotomous distinctions as high/low, inside/outside, near/far, male/female, good/bad, black/white, fine/vulgar etc. - principles of categorization that develop in the immediate environment, can be applied over time and range of situations as regulating principles (1977:96-158).

Since the habitus is a unifying phenomena, it produces an ethos that relates all practices produced by habitus to a unifying set of principle. The ethos writes Bourdieu is the result of 'experience of probability', "necessity made into virtue" (1977:77). Bourdieu argues that "unlike scientific estimations, which are corrected after each experiment...practical estimates



give disproportionate weight to early expectations." (ibid). Early experience produce the structure of the habitus which in turn becomes the basis of perception and appreciational of all subsequent experience. The habitus thereby frames the others of subsequent practice. "The habitus practice which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principles" (ibid:1977). Further, "The practices themselves emerge neither directly from the historical conditions which produce the habitus. Rather the habitus mediates between these two, structuring the present in terms of logic desired from past experience itself structured by habitus" (Miller and Branson, 1986:218). Thus for Bourdieu the 'logic of practice' functions like an unconscious principle guiding and generating habitus. He does write so in fact. To quote Bourdieu

"The 'unconscious' is never anything other than the forgetting of history...in each of us, in varying proportion, there is part of yesterday's man, it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we are formed and from which we result, yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us"(1977:9).

Thus "what appears as objective meaning is pure synchrony, whether it be myth, rite, language etc." (1977:79). Once we grasp the logic that guides them and realize the ambiguity of the nature of practice, Bourdieu writes, we transcend models of society. Models which focus on rule, pattern and constraint in the description of an action. "Ideologies are no longer either sets of rules and regulations oriented towards order or reflection of the material conditions of existence. Kinship is no longer a neat ambiguous field of rules and terminologies understood through arbitrarily devised concepts. Culture is anything but a field of symbols with clear unambiguous referents" (Miller and Branson, 1986:219). Ambiguity thus, is characteristic of practical logic, through which people express themselves. A single 'reference' may have multiple-references. Bourdieu gives the example of ritual with its multiple meanings.

The agent in Bourdieu's schemes is understood as producer of objective meaning without conscious effort. He writes "(E)ach agent, wittingly or unwittingly ...is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning because his actions and works are products of a 'modus operandi' of which he is not the producer

and has no conscious mastery, they contain an objective intention, which always outruns his conscious intention<sup>11</sup>(1977). The agent is strategist improvising in an ambiguous environment. "It is because subjects do not...know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know" (1977:79) . Thus the habitus as disposition objectively produced are shared by agents with common material conditions. "There is harmonization of agents experience with the production of commonsense world...endowed with objectivity"(1977 :80).

Thus the habitus by its unifying principle derived from the practical logic with its ambiguous logic presents the world in 'misrecognised form'. Bourdieu thus summarises the contribution of the concept of the 'habitus' to the links between individual and collective practices and transformation of society.

"In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and history, in accordance with schemes, engendered by history. The system of dispositions is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discern in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis. And it is at the same time principle of the transformations and regulated revolutions which neither the extrinsic and instantaneous determinism of mechanistic socio-logism nor the purely internal but equally punctual determination of voluntarist...subjectivism are capable of accounting for." (ibid;

As Miller and Branson point out, "Bourdieu thus moves beyond the artificial imposition of logic and the lives of the people he studies beyond the scientific straitjackets of timeless structure and beyond the artificial opposition between the structure and the individual to the dialectical relationship between the structure and dispositions making up the habitus: The habitus accompanies the agents through their lives structuring and being structured from restructuring to restructured . . . Bourdieu uses his notion of habitus to present a theory of practice which temporalizes and materializes Durkheim's conscience collective" (1986:22). Bourdieu endeavours to temporalise the collectively orchestrated system of disposition whose main purpose is to present a disrecognised reality. The instrument of this, Bourdieu writes, are subordinated practical functions and the coherences which characterizes them are that of 'practical logic'.

#### Symbolic Capital : Modes of Domination

Bourdieu insists that practical symbolic system which is built on the logic of practice is arbitrary for they have to disguise class relations. They represent

class relations because they are based on 'distinctions'. Thus symbolic systems serve to reinforce class relations as internalized in the habitus.

Bourdieu's point is that, it is not only through a theory of practice that one can understand the way symbolic system serves the process of domination. Bourdieu criticises vulgar marxism for reducing culture to the status of determined, dominated superstructure, a mere symbolic expression of the economic. Bourdieu hence moves on to the part played by the symbolic system: from strategy to a wider context of analysis of modes of domination, through wherein he explicates his concept of "symbolic capital".

Bourdieu's discussion points out the mechanisms which repress the true nature of the economy, "a system governed by the laws of interested calculation competition or exploitation. The most economic of tasks find themselves constituted symbolically...as lacking concrete or material effect"(1977:172, 176). Here he joins a long tradition of French anthropologists Like Mauss and Dumont, Bourdieu finds that the 'economic man' does not exist in non-capitalist societies. Bourdieu writes :

"The common root of this ethnocentrism is unconscious acceptance of restricted definition of economic interest. The theory of strictly economic practice is simply a particular case of general theory of practice. The only way to escape the ethnocentric naiveties of economism, ...is to extend economic calculations to all goods, material and symbolic without distinction" (1977:178).

For Bourdieu all societies are characterized by struggle between groups of classes to maximise their interests. The social formation is seen as a hierarchically organised series of fields within which human agents try to maximise their control over the economic, intellectual and cultural field. These resources of power may be of three broad types: 1) economic capital which is implicitly taken in a Marxian sense, 2) cultural capital - production and appropriation of cultural capital, for example language skills, familiarity with works of art (1977:187) objectified in books, paintings etc. (Bourdieu, 1984) and certified with diploma titles and other credentials (1977:187), and 3) social capital which is a totality of resources that may be called upon. Symbolic capital consists of prestige and social credit or renown attached to a family. As Bourdieu puts it "symbolic capital is a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical 'economic' capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch,

and only inasmuch, as, it conceals the fact that it originates in 'material' form of capital" (1977:183). Bourdieu adds : "The symbolic capital is convertible to material capital...because they draw from it not only their authority but an economic guarantee" (1977:180). Thus they are mutually convertible: "a conversion of material capital into symbolic capital itself reconvertible into material capital" (1977:180). This is contingent upon the system of instruments of reproduction, laws of inheritance, marriage and labour market and the school. In this model, social structure is conceived as the objective distribution of the different species of capital between groups of classes. The dynamics are spelt by each of these classes struggling to safeguard their interests. However, there is a tendency for the symbolic field to legitimize a given state of material class relations by means of the specific mechanisms of misrecognition by which symbolic systems represent in a transformed 'euphemized', disinterested form the hierarchical relationship in the material class relations.

Bourdieu's arguments are based upon his anthropological field work with Kabyle in Algeria, that is in pre-

industrial, so-called primitive states. There are societies, in Bourdieu's words "which have no 'self-regulating market' (in Karl Polanyi's sense), no educational system, no judicial apparatus, and no state, where relations of domination can be set up and maintained only the cost of strategies which must be endlessly renewed" (1977:183). Domination is no longer exerted in a direct way, 'power is exercised by long term domination through symbolic violence. The most "successful ideological effects are those which have no need of words, and ask no more than complicitous silence" (ibid:184). Relation of domination through the mechanism of symbolic violence 'censors' and euphemizes socially recognizable violence. Thus in non-capitalist societies there exist relations of domination which have the "opacity and permanence of things and escape the grasp of individual consciousness and power. Objectification guarantees the permanence and cumulativeness of material and symbolic acquisitions which can then subsist without the agents having to recreate them continuously and in their entirety by deliberate action because there exists relatively autonomous fields of objectification" (1977:184).

Such societies exist in a state of 'doxa' where the symbolic system is both common to all and taken for granted because it exists at an implicit



level as a logic of practice rather than as an explicit discourse (1977:171). Here Bourdieu seems to be working on various transitional stages. Bourdieu argues, economic development leads to the growth of an autonomous economic sphere related to the development of exchange relations and in the same movement breaks the ~~tradition~~ of Doxa and creates a relatively autonomous symbolic sphere which make the symbolic system more explicit, creates class struggle in the symbolic sphere between orthodoxy and its necessary corollary Heterodoxy" (Granham & Williams, 1986: 122). That is, criticism produces heterodoxy, this impels the dominant agents to produce a defensive discourse of orthodoxy. Because of this mutual interest, the symbolic systems tend to reproduce the given state of relations. Bourdieu's main concern is with these modalities and mechanisms of reproduction.

Bourdieu's concern, to end this exposition, 'with culture as milieu which far from being only symbolic is also an active element, having an enduring and autonomous character to mediate dialectically between the agent and the society shaping it and being shaped by it'.

### Change and Individual

Pierre Bourdieu's work is productive and imaginative, what distinguishes Bourdieu's work is 'his willingness to grapple with the problem of cultural Practice... rather than relegate it to the too difficult or too metaphysical basket.' (Granham & Williams : 1986:119).

In sharp criticism, Bourdieu has highlighted the dangers of linguistic objectivism which ignores the social conditions of language, and also of interactionism of phenomenological studies which focus on the experiential aspect. Bourdieu chose to steer clear of this danger by elaborating a theoretical framework which is a dialectical synthesis of the above. His concepts of symbolic violence and symbolic capital draw our attention to the relationship between communication and domination. The concept opens new areas of investigation in the arena of culture. But his shortcomings in his criticism of phenomenology and structuralism is that he has not been able to provide an adequate alternative understanding of meaning or signification. Furthermore, he has been little too hasty in stripping the structural features of communication.

Bourdieu's epistemological ambitions are materialist but he seems to fall short of his aim. A lot is said and assumed about the economy but not much analysis is presented on the subject. Emphasis has been more on symbolic violence, symbolic capital, and cultural arbitrariness. This emphasis often leads to undermining of material conditions and their determinants. The difficulty arises because he gives the symbolic power a 'force' beyond the constraints of material condition, in the process he leaves the material structures behind to concentrate on the symbolic structures. It is true that symbolic aspect cannot be severed from the materiality, but one must analyse the relations of power which are secured materially, before concentrating on how these are disguised. Thus he counters the view that 'superstructure' is simply determined by the 'base' by giving the symbolic field a relative autonomy. The problem arises when ideology is viewed as simple mechanism of obfuscation. It should be remembered that ideology operates in a cultural medium, which is constitutive of social lives.

Another defect is his failure to provide an adequate explanation of ruptures in history. He offers, no doubt, a powerful and imaginative theory of social

production but this becomes a suppression in one sense, of history, especially in his analysis of traditional societies. The agent in these societies is projected, as someone with no powers of consciousness, unable to act save in defined structural limits of his habitat, because the domination is complete, without the possibility of contradiction (the state of doxa). He paints too abstract a picture of domination and fails to see the subtleties of subversion. As J.P. Thompson points out complicity need not be "a sign of assimilation to the social order, it can also be a way of circumventing or even disrupting that order by employing the means which are proper to it" (Thompson, 1984:64).

Though Bourdieu provides us with an understanding of changing practices he nevertheless sees "change" as Miller and Branson say "within a mode...a wide ranging change limited nevertheless by the broad structures that encompass that mode or style" (1986:223-224).

One is reminded of Leach's analysis in Political Systems of Highland Burma (1954). In this work, Leach shows that there is enough room to bring about change within an expressive cultural format. In the Kachin

political system, the cultural/political models oscillate from 'gumlav' (egalitarian) to 'shan' (aristocratic), but these changes are within the general system of rules and prescriptions. In his system there are changes but changes which revert back to the 'systemic' order. The change that Bourdieu conceives of is similar to this. In his model the agents have options and choices which he calls 'strategies' but they are limited by structures of logic. This is especially so in a state of a mode where the 'logic of practice' is all pervading. The state of doxa, in particular, is characteristic of traditional societies.

Underlying Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, Thompson writes is his assumption that there "is a certain kind of consensus with regard to the values or norms which are dominant in the society concerned... through which and by means of which domination is sustained" (1984:64). Here Bourdieu's formulation resembles very much like Durkheim's model. Bourdieu's symbolic system is like Durkheim's 'collective conscience' but resurrected in time and space (see Miller and Branson), 1984, Di-Maggio, 1979). A consequence of this, Bourdieu falls in the same trap as say Althusser and his followers that Bourdieu is so very critical of. Bourdieu's man in society suffers the same fate as Althusser's subjects.

Warquant asks the right question in this regard "in what ...is the social actor more than a mere 'trager' of a 'habitus' that regulates even improvisations? How does agent intervene in determinate sequences and make the perpetuation of structures problematic (Warquant, 1987:79).

The lack of a proper definition of an agent's conscious action, we believe, is Bourdieu's major drawback. In this sense, he is no different from some of the early anthropologists like Durkheim or Boas who see man either as a structured being or a 'culture bearer'.

## CONCLUSION

Our presentation so far has been limited for we restricted ourselves to individual scholars. However, the endeavour has been to bring out some of the principle arguments of these major authors with respect to their contributions on culture. Any attempt, therefore, to clarify issues at this point is necessarily very preliminary - a sort of a prelude to further elaboration in the future.

As we already pointed out in our introductory chapter, the tendency to give an overriding deterministic position to structure has been most persistent in anthropological theory. It does not really matter whether this structure is conceived as Durkheim's coercive 'social fact' or in terms of an overbearing cultural load as that of Boas. In both cases the individual is constrained in entirety. This has repercussions at two levels: (1) The first is with respect to the position of the individual and the limits and constraints upon the individual as social animal. (2) The second and related point is the dimension of cultural change.

If the individual can only express individuality through pre-determined and given structures of culture then change is impossible.

To begin with the last author first, in Bourdieu, inspite of his sensitivity to the individual and change, there is an essentialism of the Durkheimian kind in his works. He elevates 'habitus' as a system of dispositions common to all members of the same group or class and whose collective history is a certain specification. Geertz is no different either in his conception : structures of representations consisting of symbolic meanings have a particularity of their own which define a mode of living. All these scholars, referred to in our earlier chapters, in their earnestness to look for explanations outside human agency, explanations they considered 'social', brought in the idea of structure too sharply. According to them the conditions which shaped the individual are enduring and determining. Thus in Durkheim the individual appears only as one who has interiorized social constrain. If the element of individual is awarded any place in these theories, they are treated as dependent and as emanating from the social structure. This is the reason why in Durkheim



the 'conscience collective' as a fused mind is more than the individual mind. Bourdieu's conception of 'habitus' or Geertz's rule governed meanings systems are similar to Durkheim's conception. This subversion of the individual by a constrain exerting structure naturally entailed the elevation of themes such as socialization and social reproduction.

This elevation of culture to a level of persistent structure posed serious problems for understanding change in society. Basically, it undermined the role that human beings play in creating and transforming conditions around them. This basic mistake stems from the failure to recognise the fundamental nature of man. By 'nature of man' we do not mean the biological constituents inherent in each individual. We are referring instead to the conscious active and creative nature of humans in their social settings (see Geras, 1983 and Honneth and Joas, 1988). Human beings are essentially engaged in creative activity which are contextual in character. To see culture as only constraining is to grant it a kind of autonomy that succeeds in reifying and idealizing it.

In this concluding section, we will survey briefly, as a way of recapitulating, some of the main points in Malinowski's, Geertz's and Bourdieu's perspectives. We believe that a central theme runs through their theories. Despite their differences, there is a considerable overlap in their work. We have examined the works of these scholars with primary emphasis on how they handle the 'individual' and 'socio-cultural change'. This should give us an idea of the direction that the anthropological studies of culture have taken. As pointed out above, the conceptualisation of culture has still to overcome many analytical problems. Our effort is to spell out these analytical limitations so that at some point they may be overcome.

Culture as 'instrumental', 'representational' and 'ideological'

In Malinowski's account, as we have already seen, culture is instrumental for the survival of biological individuals. Malinowski depicts the individual as a bundle of needs, and these needs have the status of 'prime movers' in his works. This idea of his

veers towards methodological individualism,<sup>1</sup> where social behaviour is seen as an outcome of a maximization problem. The application of 'reason' in Malinowski is the sole identifying characteristic of man (See Harris, 1968, Leach 1957). All his needs are strictly in the utilitarian sense. Roy Bhaskar pointing out to the limitations of such arguments writes : "(T)o say that men are rational does not explain what they do, but only at best how they do it. But rationality, setting out to explain everything, very easily ends up explaining nothing" (Bhaskar, 1979:37). This problem arises in Malinowski because he fails to recognise that social activities are more than survival needs. He recognizes that the individual is essentially a creative being, evolving mechanisms of adaptation. But this activity for Malinowski is group oriented- in an associative sense. In his conception of society, men seem to come together so that they bring advantage to each and every one of them contracting individuals?<sup>2</sup> Thus, this agglomeration of biological individuals

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1. Methodological individualism is an explanation where social phenomenon is generally explained in terms of individuals. For Popper, for example, "all social phenomena and especially the functioning of social institutions should be understood as resulting from the decisions of human individuals" (Popper, 1962 quoted in Bhaskar, 1979:34).
  2. Here he joins the liberal political theorists who think that society exists for the benefit of its members.

does not leave any space for ruptures in Malinowski's society. True to form, Malinowski cannot see internal source of change. This is evident in Malinowski's analysis despite his conceptualisation of an 'active rational man'. His idea of rationality in this sense is limited.

As we move on to Geertz, who in a sense takes a step or two backwards, we find that the 'active rational man' is totally missing. His individual is enmeshed in "webs of significance" (1973:5). Geertz believes that culture is a 'system of symbols' (1973) but does not stop at this. According to him, the system of symbols and meanings are rule governed (we have discussed this aspect in chapter 3) which makes the symbolic system semantically closed, where no new meanings can be generated. This is why Geertz tends to see social change as little more than obsessive involution with no dynamic movement.

Bourdieu tried to avoid the pitfalls of the above perspectives. Like Geertz, he situated the agent in the realm of meanings of 'intentions'. But he moves beyond Geertz by placing these meanings in material conditions. He argues that as actors have

interests, the symbolic fields are appropriated to generate an ideology. This is because the actor is inculcated with dispositions which motivate him, to follow a 'logic of practice'(1977). Now the logic which guides a particular practice is intrinsically structured in such a way that it stands the test of time to become transcendental. One sees the likes of Kantian 'a priori' notion in this argument.

Thus, as much as others, Bourdieu fails to give an adequate explanation of change and freedom to the individual to inculcate new dispositions. Whatever change that takes place is limited to the options available to the agents, but within the limits of practice.

To understand change then, we have to posit the 'creative active human being' as the fundamental starting point of any explanation.

### The Human Essence

Marx developed the essence of humanness by overcoming the material-ideal dichotomy by a dialectical understanding. The human species through a relation

with nature realizes itself. "Marx understands the human being's sensuous -cognitive capabilities as achievements that are integral to the process of the very activity that transforms nature. The two components... corporeal receptivity and creative activity are combined by Marx in the concept of 'objectual activity', this notion ...becomes the key category of his theory" (Honneth and Joas, 1988:20).

This 'objectual activity' is developed by Marx through the concept of labour. "Human labour is understood to be just as much a process of productive, expenditure of human beings, as a process of manifestations of the forces of his essential being : labour is simultaneously a factor of both production and expression" (ibid:21).

Man is engaged in activity not in isolation, as we pointed out, but is involved in social relations. Thus when we talk of man, we talk of social man, one who is constituted out of social relations. Therefore, social life is not something that the person does but what the person undergoes. Men do not make societies but living socially makes societies. Thus Marx writes

that "in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will" (Preface, 1970(1895)). When Marx argued that the relations into which persons enter are independent of their will, he does not mean to deny consciousness to actors but to affirm the socially constituted nature of actors.

Man in this relational sense produces conditions of his existence. This creation is not just vis-a-vis nature in the naive materialist sense. Creation is not simply production of material things as commonly understood. It is creation arising out of other experiential realities, just as he produces his conceptual world too i.e. he expresses in various ways the ontological realities of time and space.

The conditions that man create are 'enabling' as well as 'constraining'. The mistake by our main line scholars so far has been to give the structural constraints a deterministic position. We contend that structures impose limits on our actions, they do not however, determine our actions. As Bhaskar writes: "The rules of grammar, like natural structures, impose limits on the speech acts we can perform, but

they do not determine our performances. This conception (thus preserves the status of human agency" (1979:45). This conception gives room for diversity in real life which we believe is fundamental to the generation of change. The so-called cultural structures such as 'traditions', symbolic systems' or 'dispositions' are constraining but they do have self-sustaining overreaching reality. We can only think of them as enduring conditions. "They provide context and not a straitjacket for social life" (Ingold, 1986:216). Thus, anthropology must take into consideration of the structure not as ever pre-given but as a process: "Structures of existence are structure of reproduction i.e. structures of social process in time" (Friedman, 1987:165).

We consider man's social condition as a starting point for a relevant analysis. Set against the backdrop of enduring conditions, man acts continually and dialectically with the conditions around him. Man constitutes himself. This he does not only through others like him but also with regard to Nature, Time and Space. This 'constitutive complex' borne out of the 'constitutive capacity' of man, defines him. It is the 'ground' upon which men become agents, not subjects, of history,



spinning out various combinations and permutations of social conditions into a flow of social life. Culture is an actively constituted expression of these conditions, a medium and mode of expression of the flow of social life, taking varied forms. Such a conception of culture cannot be treated as an autonomous structure. Nor can man be understood as a mere culture bearer. This recognition, still, merely places us on the threshold of an alternative formulation which can help us understand both the creative individual and socio-cultural dynamism, a formulation closer to the spirit of anthropology.

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