Types of Culture: Material and Non-Material Culture

Culture refers to the shared way of life of a society or social group. It includes people's beliefs, values, customs, traditions, language, knowledge, skills, behaviour, and the objects they create and use. Culture is learned and transmitted from one generation to another and also changes over time. In social and cultural geography, culture is commonly divided into two broad types: **material culture and non-material culture**.

1. Material Culture

Material culture refers to the **physical and tangible objects created, used, and valued by a society**. These are things that can be seen and touched and which reflect the lifestyle, technology, economic activities, and traditions of a particular community. Material culture includes houses, clothing, tools, agricultural implements, roads, vehicles, machines, monuments, religious buildings, handicrafts, furniture, musical instruments, and other physical objects. For example, traditional bamboo houses, handloom products, agricultural tools, traditional ornaments, and places of worship are examples of material culture. Material culture varies from one region to another because it is influenced by the availability of natural resources, environmental conditions, technology, occupation, and cultural traditions. Therefore, the study of material culture helps geographers understand how people modify and organize their physical environment.

2. Non-Material Culture

Non-material culture refers to the **non-physical aspects of culture that influence people's ideas, behaviour, and social relationships**. Unlike material culture, it cannot be physically touched or seen as an object. It includes language, beliefs, values, customs, traditions, religion, knowledge, norms, morals, folklore, rituals, music, and social practices. For example, respect for elders, marriage customs, religious beliefs, traditional festivals, folk songs, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge are forms of non-material culture. These cultural elements provide people with a sense of identity and guide their behaviour within society. Non-material culture is transmitted mainly through family, education, social interaction, religious institutions, and community traditions.

Material and non-material cultures are **closely interconnected**. Material objects often carry non-material meanings. For example, a traditional dress is a part of material culture, while the beliefs, identity, customs, and symbolic meanings associated with wearing that dress are part

of non-material culture. Similarly, a religious building is material culture, whereas the religious beliefs and rituals associated with it belong to non-material culture. Together, material and non-material culture shape the **cultural landscape** and help create the distinctive identity of different places and communities.

Material Culture	**Non-Material Culture**
Physical and tangible	Non-physical and intangible
Can be seen and touched	Exists through ideas and practices
Houses, tools, clothes, monuments	Beliefs, values, language, customs
Reflects technology and physical lifestyle	Guides behaviour and social relationships
Changes with technological development	Changes through social and cultural processes