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Paper No.: 10 Theories and methods in social and cultural Anthropology
Module: 02 Foundation of anthropological thoughts

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Summary

Learning Objectives

- To introduce students the history of anthropological thought by tracing its historical development
• To classify the course of historical development, academic, and Anthropological importance in terms of its development

• To focus on the founding thinkers and anthropologists, theories and ethnographic researches that have constructed histories of anthropology (British, American and others) in the historical process

• To explore the formation and emergence of anthropology as a discipline in the late 19th century to the late 20th century.

• To discuss on development of major sub-disciplines of anthropology which are socio-cultural, linguistic, biological, and archaeological anthropology

• An attempt to look at how developments in anthropology might be related to other historical and academic developments
1. Introduction

Anthropological thought deals with theories developed and contribution made by different anthropologists. Literature available suggests that the man, his culture and society, have been subject of study; the subject was taught under different social sciences, because in the beginning, it was difficult to decide the subject matter of anthropology. But now anthropology has emerged as a full-fledged discipline of teaching and research.

2. Etymology

An anthropological perspective on defining anthropology as a holistic approach, which is both diachronic and synchronic; it includes a consideration of all aspects of people's social, economic and cultural life including the social habits of the human population. It not only includes the ways in which people in any society live but also how it is affected on the level by everything that is going on in the regional, national and international arena. There are so many things new about the study of man by man through the scientific approach on the origins, the behaviour and the physical, social, cultural development of humans. Anthropologists using cultural perspective to understand patterns view human populations as biological as well as cultural entities. In short, anthropologists of one kind or another are liable to investigate almost everything about human beings: our evolution, our genes, our emotions, our behaviours, how people organize their living, our language, our religion, our behaviours and so forth. A good way to emphasize anthropology’s broad scope is to say anthropologists are interested in all human beings – whether living or dead, Asian or African or European—and that anthropologists are interested in many different aspects of humans, including their technologies, family lives, political systems, religions and languages.

3. History of Anthropological Thought

Many scholars consider modern anthropology as an outgrowth of the Age of Enlightenment, a period when Europeans attempted to study human behaviour systematically, the known varieties of which had been increasing since the fifteenth century as a result of the first European colonization wave. The traditions of jurisprudence, history, philology, and sociology then evolved into something more closely resembling the modern views of these disciplines and informed the development of the social sciences, of which anthropology was a part. According to the rise and development of different social institution as well as social facts, arts, religion, morals and various other facets of human behaviour, which are
taught under the purview of culture, the interpretations of which form the subject matter of anthropological thought, may be divided into four phases.

Four phases of development of the world anthropology are classified:

3.1 Formulatory Periods – before 1835

During this period the social facts and themes were variously discussed by the Greek social thinkers and philosophers, among them special mention may be made of Herodotus (484-425 B.C.), Democritus (460-370 B.C.), Protagoras (480-410 B.C.), Socrates (470-399 B.C.), Plato (427-347 B.C.), Aristotle (348-322 B.C.), Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), Lucretius (99-55 B.C.) etc.

3.2 Convergent Period -- from 1835 to 1859

During this period divergent views about the origin of biological and social aspects of human beings, by scholars of different countries, were expressed which ultimately shaped the theories of culture. Among these scholars special mention may be made of Marx (1818-1883), Charles Lyell (1797-1895), William Smith (1769-1839) etc.

3.3 Constructive Period – from 1859 to 1900

After the end of convergent period, which virtually disappeared with the publications of Darwin’s “Origin of Species” the constructive phase of the world anthropology started, which, according to Penniman, continued will 1900 A.D. During this period, anthropology, not only as an independent discipline of teaching and research, was started in many British Universities like Oxford (in 1884), Cambridge (in 1900), etc., but scientific researches and publications thereon were accelerated by E.B. Tylor, James Frazer, Henry Maine, J.F. Mc Lennan, Adolf Bastian, L.H. Morgan and others, which ultimately strengthened the subject for wider recognition all over the world. During this period various types of anthropological researches led to the formation of different branches of anthropology like ethnology, prehistory, social anthropology, physical anthropology etc.

3.4 Critical Period – from 1901 to 1935

Penniman used the word “Critical” for a period ranging from 1900 onwards till the publications of his book “Hundred Years of Anthropology” in 1935. His term “Critical” for explaining the trend of
researchers after 1900 has been subject of severe criticism and many of these critics argued that constructive works in anthropology continued even first half of the twentieth century. However, some significant developments took place during this period which were of critical name and, therefore, considering their significance, Penniman designated these phases of development as critical period.

4. The Roots of Anthropological Thought

How long have anthropologists existed? Opinions are divided on this issue. The answer depends on what you mean by an anthropologist. If we restrict ourselves to anthropology as a scientific discipline, some would trace its roots back to the European Enlightenment during the eighteenth century; others would claim that anthropology did not arise as a science until the 1850s, others again would argue that anthropological research in its present-day sense only commenced after the First World War. Nor can avoid such ambiguities. It is beyond doubt, however, that anthropology, considered as the science of humanity, originated in the region we commonly refer to as ‘the West’, notably in four ‘Western’ countries: France, Britain, the USA and Germany.

Schools of Thought

4.1 Animism

Described by Edward Burnett Tyler as the belief that natural phenomena such as climatic phenomena or rocks and stones could possess some kind of “spirit” or life force so that the apparently lifeless material world was actually animated by a host of unseen and supernatural forces

4.2 Diffusionism

Diffusionism is the term used by anthropologists and sociologists to account for the spread, through time, of aspects of culture artistic traditions, language, music, myths, religious beliefs, social organization, and technological ideas from one society or group to another.

4.3 Evolutionism

Evolutionism is a movement in anthropology and sociology which was much in vogue in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It refers to theories of change in which development is seen to go through stages
of increasing complexity and diversification. It is closely related to the idea of progress and technology, which is most prevalent in capitalist society.

4.4 Functionalism

Broadly speaking, ‘functionalism’ refers to a range of theories in the human sciences, all of which provide explanations of phenomena in terms of the function, or purpose, they purportedly serve.

4.5 Post modernism

In general, the postmodern view is cool, ironic, and accepting of the fragmentation of contemporary existence. It tends to concentrate on surfaces rather than depths, to blur the distinctions between high and low culture, and as a whole to challenge a wide variety of traditional cultural values.

4.6 Primitivism

Primitivism, in anthropology, refers to a body of thought that there exist remote and exotic ‘primitive’ peoples whose lifestyles and technologies are considered to show marked contrast to those of modern societies.

4.7 Relativism

"Cultural relativism," to most western anthropologists, is a combination of two notions: first, that behavioural difference between various populations of people are the result of cultural (sometimes societal) variation rather than anything else; and, second, that such differences are deserving of respect and understanding in their own terms.

4.8 Structuralism

Structuralism is the approach which seeks to isolate, and decode, deep structures of meaning, organised through systems of signs inherent in human behaviour (language, ritual, dress and so on). According to structuralisms, the mind functions on binary opposite; humans see things in terms of two forces that are opposite to each other i.e. night and day. Binary opposites differ from society to society and are
defined in a particular culture in a way that is logical to its members for example shoes are “good” when you wear them outside but “bad” if you put them on the table; the role of an anthropologist is to understand these rules to interpret the culture.

4.9 Syncretism

Anthropologists use the word syncretism to describe the general cultural changes which result when different cultural traditions appear to be blended together.

5. Major Theorists

5.1 Britain

5.1.1 Edward Tylor and the Evolution of Culture

For the first time an anthropological definition of culture was given by Edward Bernett Tylor (1832-1917) in his book “Primitive Culture” (1871) which runs as “culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society”.

5.1.2 James Frazer

James Frazer was another great believer in sociological laws, who postulated three stages of development through which all societies pass viz. Magic, Religion, Science. According to Frazer, early man was dominated by magic, which views nature as “a series of events occurring in an invariable order without hate intervention of personal agency”. These magicians, according to Frazer, believed in nature and developed imaginary laws, which are, of course, not real. However in course of time the more intelligent members of the society, in the state of disillusionment, conceive of spiritual beings with powers superior to man, who could be induced by propitiation to alter the course of nature to his advantage. According to Frazer this was the stage of religion. Later on this was also seen to be an illusion and men entered the final, the scientific stage of his development.
5.1.3 Bronislaw Malinowski: The Functions of Culture

Malinowski treated culture as an instrumental reality and emphasised its derivation from human needs, from the basic universal needs of the individual organism to the highly elaborated and often specialised needs of a complex society. According to functionalists, all cultures are set up to deal with the universal problems that human societies face (physical or psychological needs). Societies must have a set standard of laws and practices to provide stability. These are referred to as social institutions.

Functionalists investigate the social function of institutions i.e.

- What is the purpose?
- How are they run?

A fundamental belief is that society is a logical institution and functions in the best interest by the needs of the majority; culture then must be logical although a society’s practices may at first seem strange to the outsider, functionalists believe that the role of anthropologists is to explain not judge.

5.2 Canada

5.2.1 George Mercer Dawson

Dawson earned his reputation as “one of Canada’s foremost contributors to ethnology” and as a “father of Canadian anthropology.” He included systematic ethnological inventories in his geological surveys, intending his reports on native peoples to advise government in the formulation of policy. His Sketches of the past and present condition of the Indians of Canada (1879) surveyed the distribution and declining numbers of aboriginal peoples in the light of the apparent inevitability of political dominion in the west by European Canadians. Dawson’s view of Indian policy in the west was informed by ethnology. For him, as for other ethnologists, social evolution prophesied the inevitable extinction of “socially inferior” people. He followed the example of John Wesley Powell and other American ethnologists concerned with the “Indian question” and the moral dilemma created by the organized assault on native territory during the late 19th century. Like these Americans, who were motivated by a philanthropic concern for the plight of the vanishing tribes and by a desire to promote their social evolution, Dawson discouraged the government from pursuing policies of state tutelage and segregation on reserves. Instead, he encouraged a program of education and assimilation into white society.
5.2.2 Edward Sapir: Culture, Language and the Individual

In 1910, appointed as director of anthropology in the Geological Survey of the Canadian National Museum, a post he held until 1924. During those years, Sapir continued to do field work on the Northwest coast and to publish work on Yiddish and Judaic studies. Sapir led the reaction against Alfred Kroeber's theory of the super organic nature of culture, arguing against the cultural determinism implicit in Kroeber's theory, and favouring instead the active participation of individuals in the cultural process.

5.3 France

5.3.1 Marcel Mauss: Elemental Categories, Total Facts

Marcel Mauss, French sociologist and anthropologist whose contributions include a highly original comparative study of the relation between forms of exchange and social structure. His views on the theory and method of ethnology are thought to have influenced many eminent social scientists, including Claude Lévi-Strauss, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, and Melville J. Herskovits. He possessed an encyclopaedic mind familiar with an exceptional breadth of ethnographic and linguistic knowledge. Although he never did fieldwork, Mauss turned the attention of French sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists toward ethnology. He took pains to distinguish points of view in non literate societies, thus preserving their freshness and specificity and, at the same time, strengthening the link between psychology and anthropology.

5.3.2 Claude Levi-Strauss

He helped to formulate the principles of structuralism by stressing the interdependence of cultural systems and the way they relate to each other, maintaining that social and cultural life can be explained by a postulated unconscious reality concealed behind the reality by which people believe their lives to be ordered. Claude Lévi-Strauss developed the idea that totemism resulted from a universal mode of human classification that created homologies between the natural and cultural spheres. The important factor was not the way an individual totem related to an individual clan, but how relationships between totems reflected relations between social groups.

5.3.3 Emile Durkheim and the Organic Society
Durkheim was a positivist. In his work on The Rules of Sociological Method (1895-1982), the French sociologist Durkheim defined social facts as ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that were external to individuals and exercised a constraint over them. Although the concept of social facts is closely identified with Durkheim, it is also relevant to the understanding of any type of social theory that treats society as an objective reality apart from its individual members. In general, it can be distinguished from theoretical paradigms that place a greater emphasis on social action or individual definitions of reality.

5.4 United States

5.4.1 Lewis Henry Morgan and the Evolution of Society

Morgan’s kinship study led him to develop his theory of cultural evolution which was set forth in Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization (1877). This was among the first major scientific accounts of the origin and evolution of civilization. Morgan posited that advances in social organization arose primarily from changes in food production. Society had progressed from a hunting-and-gathering stage (which he denoted by the term “savagery”) to a stage of settled agriculture (“barbarism”) and then on to an urban society possessing a more advanced agriculture (“civilization”). He illustrated these developmental stages with examples drawn from various cultures. Morgan’s ideas about the development of technology over time have come to be regarded as generally correct in their fundamental aspects. His theory that human social life advanced from an initial stage of promiscuity through various forms of family life that culminated in monogamy has long been held obsolete.

5.4.2 Franz Boas and the Culture in Context

Boas greatly influenced American anthropology, particularly in his development of the theoretical framework known as cultural relativism, which argued against the evolutionary scale leading from savagery to Culture, laid out by his 19th-century predecessors. Boas realized two things:

- Culture works in between human perception and the physical properties of the world
- History of a place matters in how people act and how they understand the world.

Boas also pushed “historical particularism,” or the need to understand people’s culture and human variation in terms of their own history. Rather than some universal ranking of civilized or primitive, societies are best understood with reference to local environments, the accidents of history, and the interaction and diffusion of ideas and customs over space and time. As he wrote in 1887 in his essay,
“The Principles of Ethnological Classification”. Boas and his legacy: four sub-fields in American anthropology; professionalizing the discipline:

- Particularism,
- Cultural relativism,
- Anti-evolutionism.
- Valorization of cultural diversity

Franz Boas, one of the pioneers of modern anthropology, often called the "Father of American Anthropology"

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_anthropology

5.4.3 Alfred Kroeber; Configurations of Culture

A.L. Kroeber, influential American anthropologist of the first half of the 20th century, whose primary concern was to understand the nature of culture and its processes. His interest and competence ranged over the whole of anthropology, and he made valuable contributions to American Indian ethnology; to the archaeology of New Mexico, Mexico, and Peru; and to the study of linguistics, folklore, kinship, and social structure. Kroeber pointed that the cultural area should be understood with cultural context.

5.4.4 Ruth Benedict: Patterns of Culture
Ruth Benedict originated the controversial concept of patterns of culture, which combined anthropology with sociology, psychology, and philosophy. In her 1934 book Patterns of Culture, Benedict proposed her holistic theory of culture to explain why certain personalities and types were valued in one society while discouraged in another. In an era of fascism, racism, and ethnic stereotyping for political purposes, Benedict's theory was controversial because it called for judging each culture only on its own merits and values, and argued that no culture should be forced to conform to the standards or values of another.

- The Integration of Culture
- The Individual and the Pattern of Culture

Ruth Benedict in 1937

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_anthropology

5.4.5 Margaret Mead: The Individual and Culture

US anthropologist who established the practice of fieldwork in anthropology and – with her account of adolescence in Samoa – popularized the idea within her own country that there are alternatives to the American way of life.
5.4.6 Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., 1952

Radcliffe-Brown, along with Bronislaw Malinowski, is credited as a co-founder of the functionalist school of anthropology and in Radcliffe-Brown’s case the structural-functionalist branch of that school.

Structure and Function in Primitive Society.

(1) On the Concept of Function in Social Science.

(2) On Social Structure.

5.4.7 Lowie, Robert, 1920, Primitive Society

Lowie was one of the first generation of students of Franz Boas. His theoretical orientation was within the Boasian mainstream of anthropological thought, emphasizing cultural relativism and opposed to the cultural evolutionism of the Victorian era. Like many prominent anthropologists at the time, including Boas, his scholarship originated in the school of German idealism and romanticism espoused by earlier thinkers such as Kant, Georg Hegel and Johann Gottfried Herder. Lowie, somewhat stronger than his mentor Boas, emphasized historical components and the element of variability in his works. For him, cultures were not finished constructs, but always changing and he stressed the idea that cultures could interact.

5.4.8 Spencer, Herbert, 1860

Spencer developed an all-embracing conception of evolution as the progressive development of the physical world, biological organisms, the human mind, and human culture and societies. He was "an enthusiastic exponent of evolution" and even "wrote about evolution before Darwin did." As a polymath, he contributed to a wide range of subjects, including ethics, religion, anthropology, economics, political theory, philosophy, literature, biology, sociology, and psychology. During his lifetime he achieved tremendous authority, mainly in English-speaking academia.

6. Colonialism and the Emergence of Anthropology as a Discipline in the Late 19th Century
It is undeniable that the initial basis for anthropological research, and the rise and consolidation of anthropology as an academic discipline from its inception, is intimately linked to colonialism. From the founding fathers onwards, anthropology has sought out the exotic “other”, and had usually concentrated this search in the colonial possessions of the British Empire, at least until the period of decolonisation and independence. Thus, anthropologists had a concrete, scientific method for analysing “others”, and, thanks to the colonial system, easy access to objects of study. Such has been the accepted myth of origin for the discipline of anthropology for well over eighty years. For anthropologists, more than for any other type of scholar, colonialism is not a historical object that remains external to the observer. The discipline descends from and is still struggling with techniques of observation and control that emerged from the colonial dialectic of governmentality.

In Great Britain and the Commonwealth countries, the British tradition of social anthropology tends to dominate. In the United States, anthropology has traditionally been divided into the four field approach developed: biological or physical anthropology; social, cultural, or sociocultural anthropology; and archaeology; plus anthropological linguistics. These fields frequently overlap, but tend to use different methodologies and techniques. European countries with overseas colonies tended to practice more ethnology. In non-colonial European countries, social anthropology is now defined as the study of social organization in non-state societies. It is sometimes referred to as sociocultural anthropology in the parts of the world that were influenced by the European tradition.

7. 20th Century Developments

This meagre statistic expanded in the 20th century to comprise anthropology departments in the majority of the world's higher educational institutions, many thousands in number. Anthropology has diversified from a few major subdivisions to dozens more. Practical anthropology, the use of anthropological knowledge and technique to solve specific problems, has arrived; for example, the presence of buried victims might stimulate the use of a forensic archaeologist to recreate the final scene. Organization has reached global level. During the last three decades of the 19th century a proliferation of anthropological societies and associations occurred, most independent, most publishing their own journals, and all international in membership and association. The major theorists belonged to these organizations. They supported the gradual osmosis of anthropology curricula into the major institutions of higher learning.

Summary
In above discussion, we will be able to outline major and historical developments in the discipline of anthropology and have a clear chronological development of anthropological theory by the end of the term. Anthropological tinkers, whose theories and contribution are discussed under the anthropological thought, can be grouped together and form distinct schools for the purpose of analysis and are become problem solvers; drawing upon the cultural context for clues about how to address a problem in ways that will make sense to the people of that culture. They provide information about communities that help agencies adapt projects to conditions and needs. Thus an anthropological perspective on issues of human development is cross-cultural, and includes an examination of the present social, political and economical theology of globalization, with a clearly articulated emphasis on the context-appropriate rebuilding or retention of economies, with a view toward the protection of the environment, the preservation of cultural diversity, and the empowerment of communities and their members.