

BRANCHES OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropologists study man as a member of animal kingdom and his behavior as a member of society. Different branches of anthropology focus on different aspects of human experience. One branch focuses on how our species evolved from earlier species. Other branches concentrate on the learned traditions of human thought and behavior, how ancient cultures evolved and diversified, and how and why modern cultures change or stay the same. In its attempt to study the various dimensions of man's existence and behavior, it tends to generate many specialized branches.

The major elementary branches are mentioned as under ;

1. Socio - cultural Anthropology
2. Physical (Biological)Anthropology
3. Archaeological Anthropology
4. Linguistic Anthropology
5. Applied Anthropology

1. Socio-Cultural Anthropology

Second half of the 19th century was the beginning period of the socio-cultural Anthropology. It is being inspired by the idea of evolution after the Darwin's Publication of the Origin of Species. Many socio-cultural anthropologists become interested in exploring the possibility of a similar process of evolution in the field of society and culture. They focused in the study of preliterate societies in the belief that they represented the earliest condition of human society and culture. All of them who got themselves involved in the comparative study of preliterate societies and cultures at that time, with the intention of studying origin and evolution preferred the term ethnologists for them. It deals with man in the context of society and culture. While society's presence is attested at sub-human level, culture is exclusively a human phenomenon. Broadly speaking, it concentrates on the life patterns of people. It develops as a science of socio cultural similarities and differences with no limitation of time and space. In the beginning it studies only among the preliterate people, but now it entertains no such limitations. By the beginning of the 20th century its earlier designation as Ethnology was gradually abandoned. It is replaced by the terms cultural Anthropology in America and by social Anthropology in Britain.

In America, a tradition of study of whole cultures developed, while in Britain the comparative study of social structures was considered to be the subject matter of social anthropology.

The American Anthropologists, however, considered the study of culture of people to include social structure. So the two differed only in degrees.

Unlike its earlier exclusive pre-occupation with the preliterates, it has extended its domain to cover complex societies as well, though the study of small scale non-literate societies is still important to it.

The life of people has several dimensions, and the attempts to study each one in detail has resulted in the origin and growth of several sub-branches from the elementary branch of socio-cultural Anthropology such as Economic Anthropology, Political Anthropology, Psychological Anthropology, Anthropology of Religion and so on and so forth. We shall overview only these sub-branches of major interest.

a) **Economic Anthropology:** Production, consumption distribution and exchange are the basic structures of economic transactions and its processes. Economic Anthropologists concentrate on these activities mainly in non-literate and peasant societies. They focus on the modes of exchanges including ceremonial exchanges. The concept of reciprocity and redistribution are crucial here. The nature of trade and market systems are also studied.

The process of economic growth and development in societies are ultimately studied. Some scholars argue that the economic activities of man are not studied in isolation but in their socio-cultural setting with the emphasis on those socio-cultural factors that influence and determine economic activity in each society. It resulted in a hot debate between the formalists and substantivists i.e those who feel that the theories formulated in the discipline of Economics are equally sufficient in explaining economic processes in simple societies, and those who counter by arguing that the economy of each society is embedded in the bed of culture and so that economic theories that have been constructed with the modern monetized systems in mind do not find a credible place in the anthropology of simple societies.

b) **Political Anthropology :** It concentrates on the ubiquity of political process and the functions of legitimate authority, law, justice and sanctions in simple societies ; focus of power and leadership. It focuses on the Anthropological point of view in the formulation of the typology of political structures based on differences and similarities observed among the societies of the world and its political processes emerging among nations and complex societies. Moreover, it also studies political culture and the nation building processes.

c) **Psychological Anthropology:** It is the study of psychological, behavioral and personal approaches of man. The basic human conflict between human and personal needs are varied and must be studied at individual as well as social level simultaneously was realized, but neither psychologists nor anthropologists alone could satisfactorily handle all the dimensions of the problem in the frame work of one single discipline. This gave rise to the need for a co-operative endeavor between them. Culture was not the gift of God nor did it grow by itself. It was achieved at a great psychic

cost. It thus developed as an interdisciplinary approach within the folds of American cultural Anthropology. Modern Psychological Anthropologists are very much interested in the process by which culture is transmitted from one generation to next. The process of enculturation forms the basis for difference in cultural configurations which are the moulders of personality. It was this configurational view, a product of psychological tendencies uniquely tempered in different cultures by cultural factors which opened up an area of research. Ruth Benedict conducted her research in many American Indian cultures and published her 'Patterns of Culture' in 1934. Margaret Mead studied among the Samoans to tell us how adolescence and sex attitudes come to be acquired in different cultures.

d) Ethno-archaeology - The term ethnic refers to a group distinguished by common cultural characteristics. The comparative study of cultures in historical perspective is the subject matter of ethnology whereas the descriptive account of the total way of life of the people at a given time is devoted as ethnography. Archaeology is that branch of anthropology which is concerned with the historical reconstruction of cultures that no longer exist. It helps to reconstruct the human past in its material features including how people lived and worshipped, how they built, their arts, tombs and travels. It provides material on man's prehistory about which no written records are available. It is concerned with all of man's material remains. Thus, the use of archaeology to study ethnography becomes imperative. That's why this branch is referred to as Ethno-archaeology.

e) Ecological Anthropology - It deals with the relationship between human beings and their environments. It is the use of the concept of environment in the explanation of both the origin of different cultural elements and also the diversity of cultural groups. It also attempts to understand of cultural groups. It also attempts to understand the relative influence of environment on human society and how it is used by different societies. The ecological perspective is based on the assumption that constant interplay takes place between man and his environment. They cannot be understood as isolated entities. The ecological perspective in Anthropology was first expressed by Steward in the 1930s through his most important concept, 'cultural ecology', which recognized that culture and environment are not separate spheres but are involved in a dialectic interplay or reciprocal causality.

f) Anthropology of Religion : There are many theories regarding the origin of religion among people. Some of the major theories are Animism, Animatism, Manaism and Primitive monotheism. The perceptions of people regarding the differences between man and nature are studied first of all. The beliefs in natural forces and super-natural forces, and/or being are investigated. The operation of religious traditions including the rituals and ceremonies among non-literate and peasant societies are studied in detail.

The practices which fall within the domain of religion such as taboo and totemism are also examined. The differences between magic, religion and science are discussed and debated. Witch craft and Sorcery are examined as important aspects of non-literate magic. Above all, the social and Psychological functions of magic and religion are emphasized .

2. Physical Anthropology: It is a branch of Anthropology which attempts to explore human mystery related to their origin, differentiation, diversities and distributions. With the advancement of genetical sciences, it becomes more and more biology oriented, and by virtue of it, its area of study got considerable extension. By considering the whole situations, it can be divided into the following sub-branches.

a) Primatology - It is the Scientific study of primate group of mammal . Man, the central figure of Anthropological study, belongs to the order primate of animal kingdom. The primates, starting from the smallest rat like micro cebus to the largest huge bodied gorilla, in their various stages of development show different life patterns. The integrated study of the primates, in the background of physical Anthropology gives an intrinsic value to understand the position of man.

b) Ethnology - It is the study of human diversities. All the living men in the world are categorized into different groups broadly known as races. These are now understood as the Mendelian Populations, an inbreeding group of humanity sharing a common gene pool. It also attempts to explain the nature, formation and differentiation of the racial groups

c) Human biology: It deals with the concrete biological principles and concepts of man. It is differed from the biology of other animals because of the impact of cultural achievement. It is highly influenced by culture as well. Culture, sometime, remodelled biological phenomenon. Physical anthropologist attempts to understand this biological feature of man and their successive development, changes in structure and function through time.

d) Palaeoanthropology - It is the branch of physical anthropology which deals with the documentation of biological history of mankind. They work on fossil evidences collected from the different layers of the earth. It also attempts to reconstruct the link between the human and non-human traits that had so long been lost. They evaluate the fossil remains found from different sites and establish their status and evolutionary significance.

e) **Human Genetics:** Genetics deals with the inherited characters. There is a genetic relation between parents and their offspring. The tendency of inheritance of parental characters is known as heredity. The heredity and its mechanism must be well understood in order to know the origin and evolution of man. Human genetics is a specialized branch of physical Anthropology which reveals the mechanism of heredity of various traits in men.

f) **Nutritional Anthropology:** It deals with the matter related with the nutritional perspectives of human beings and their subsequent growth and development. The population of a country needs proper growth and development. Growth, however, is depended on two factors ó heredity and environment. This branch of knowledge concerns with the impact of these two factors on human beings as well.

g) **Medical Anthropology** ó It studies disease patterns and their impact on human societies. Medical Anthropologist attempts to bring into light the socio-cultural as well as genetical or environmental determinants of disease within a population through the close study of the people and their way of life. This proves very much effective in combating different diseases in human societies.

h) **Physiological Anthropology:** This branch deals with the internal organs of the human body in order to understand their bio-chemical constitutions. It is also concerned with how the physiology of man interacts with the external factors like climate, food habit, etc. Moreover, it studies bio-chemical variations in man and other primates.

i) **Forensic anthropology :** It deals with the skeletal structure of hominids and non-hominids to understand the similarities and differences of the body parts. This branch of knowledge becomes very effective in the detection of criminals as well as in the identification of the nature and status of individuals through their biological remains.

j) **Dental Anthropology :** This branch of knowledge deals with teeth and its pattern. The teeth provide the body shape and size as well as food habit, and related behavior patterns. The dental morphology helps us to understand human evolution, growth, body morphology, genetical features, etc.

It is therefore, a specialized knowledge which attempts to study the distribution of different dental traits among different population.

k) **Anthropometry:** It is the anthropological Science of measurement. This study is not only useful in the study of gradual human development through evolution and in understanding the racial discrimination patterns but also helpful in the day to day way of life which is exclusively related to human bodily forms.

l) Ergonomy: This branch of physical Anthropology is concerned with the correlation between the static body dimensions and the designing of machine to be driven by man ó this branch of knowledge is very important by the very fact that many groups of people differ in body size as a result of varied biological and environmental factors.

m) Demography: It is the Science of population. It deals with fertility and mortality. These two factors are again influenced by heredity and environment. As it is concerned with the traits like growth, age ó sex structure, spatial distribution, migration in addition to fertility and mortality of the population, it naturally becomes a specialized branch of physical Anthropology.

n) Ethology: It is the science of animal behavior. The data obtain from the study of other primate behaviors are being used to help explain the basic background of human behaviors and to suggest how human ancestors may have acted on the different issues.

3. Archaeological Anthropology:

This branch of knowledge attempts to trace the origin, growth and development of culture in the past. By past we meant the period before history when man had not acquired the capabilities of language, not merely to speak but also to write in order to record the story of his life.

The Archaeological Anthropologist differs from the socio ó cultural Anthropologist in two important aspects :

- a) The former studies past cultures while the latter studies present.
- b) The former lacks the advantage of personal contact and interaction with the people he is studying which the former enjoys.

Archaeology can tell us about the technology of peoples by analyzing the tools they have left behind. Based on this, it can shed light on the economic activities of the people who utilized that technology. The artistic capabilities of people become apparent through the remains of fine engravings on pottery, intricate designs on jewellery , etc. Physical remains of housing can reveal certain aspect of social structure. Besides, certain aspects of religions beliefs can also be guessed by observing burial sites and the articles kept in graves. Such various aspects that Archaeological Anthropologists study begin with an attempt to understand the geological processes, particularly the Great Ice Age, and the succession of climatic phases that have left behind stratigraphic evidences in river terraces and moraines. Further, it studies man as an artificer. Based on the types of stone tools, they divided the cultural development of man into three stone Ages : Paleolithic (Old stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) and Neolithic (New Stone Age).

Excavation to discover artifacts, dating the assign an approximate time period and clever conjectures to build the cultural history of man's past are the methods used by Archaeological Anthropologists. Basically, they often work with the socio ó cultural Anthropologists to study and reconstruct past cultures by the method of extrapolation i.e. by inferring the unknown from those things that are known.

4. Linguistic Anthropology:

Linguistic Anthropology is that branch of anthropology which deals with language. It is concerned with the languages of all people, past and present as it is the chief vehicle through which man preserves and transmits his culture from generation to generation. It also interested in the relationship between language and cultural cognition as well as cultural behavior.

The major difference between Linguists and Linguistic Anthropologist is that the former are mainly concerned with the study of how languages, particularly written ones, are constructed and structured. But the Linguistic Anthropologists study unwritten languages as also written languages. Another crucial difference between them is that those features which the former taken for granted into consideration by the latter. These features are related to the systems of knowledge, belief, assumptions and conventions that produce particular ideas at particular times in the mind of people. Each of these features are the mind of people. Each of these features are culturally conditioned and hence unique to each culture and society.

Linguistic Anthropology has following branches

- a) Descriptive or structure linguistics ó It deals with the description of languages.
- b) Historical Linguistics ó It deals with origin and development of languages.
- c) Socio ó cultural linguistics or Ethno linguistics ó It studies how languages are used in actual speech and cognition. It not only sheds light on the universal properties of languages but also answers many questions like how languages of people differ and how they are employed to perceive the socio -cultural milieu in which a people live are sought. The Linguistic Anthropology thus, tries to understand the roles of language in human life and the part it has played in the amelioration of humanity.

5. Applied Anthropology:

The ultimate aim of the study of man is not only merely acquiring knowledge regarding man, society and culture, but in applying the knowledge so gained in solving the practical problems faced by mankind all over the world. In this effort, Anthropologists often work closely with the administrators of the government. The applied Anthropologists role may be seen as that of a consultant to the government. The Applied Anthropologist has a role in all the three events ó before,

during and after of a welfare programme. His initial work comprises a pre-study of the people and their culture. The diagnosis of the problems affecting their society comes next. Suggesting specific solutions to those problems involve at the outset the careful consideration of the pros and cons of the developmental project. The Anthropologist has to undertake the job of on-going supervision and analysis during the application of the approved scheme for its proper implementation. Moreover, an evaluation of the entire project has to be done in order to review the work, correct any mistakes that might have crept in and recast the work for better results. Evaluation thus serves the important purpose of exposing the pitfalls in the project that serves as a sanction in future.

The efficiency of Applied Anthropology lies in overcoming the barriers of change and in igniting the stimulants of change. The cultural barriers to change arise from factors relating to values and attitudes including tradition, Fatalism, ethnocentrism, pride and dignity, norms of modesty, the logical incompatibility of culture traits, superstitions, etc. Social barriers to change arise from group solidarity, public opinions, conflict, factionalism, vested interest, lack of authority within family as well as political structure, social stratification, class, caste, etc.

In brief, Applied Anthropology has mostly dealt with planned change and development in third world countries. The two major areas in which Applied Anthropologists have contributed substantially are improvements in technology and health. They also help governmental and other welfare agencies in formulating policies and plans for improvement in several areas as well. Some of the areas concentrated on by Applied Anthropologists are birth control, malnutrition, growth, medicine, juvenile delinquency, tribal rehabilitation, solving industrial problems such as labor unrest, adult education, etc.

Seemingly, Anthropologist is given the status of social engineer by some scholars while social doctor by others, which in fact, is not an exaggeration.
