

Anthropology Paper-I, Section-A

Syllabus Head : 1.1 Meaning Scope & development of Anthropology

Basic Introduction: Meaning of Anthropology

The term 'Anthropology' may be etymologically split into '**Anthropos**' meaning humankind and '**logos**' which means 'scientific study'.

Anthropology is a holistic and inter-disciplinary study of the origin, evolution and variation in the biological and cultural development of humankind across space and time. It's central focus concerns the study of biological and cultural uniqueness and variations of the most cognisant species on planet earth - **Homo Sapien Sapiens**.

Each and every aspect of Human beings (Physiological, Genetic, Cultural, Social, Behavioural, Psychological etc) is of interest to Anthropology. Further, every human or pre-human society that existed since the first ancestors of humans emerged among a group of mammals referred to as the 'primates' are studied by Anthropologists holistically.

Some of the popular definitions given by the prominent anthropologists and social scientists about Anthropology is as follows:

"Anthropology is the science of man" - **A L Kroeber**

"Anthropology is the study of man and his works" - **Melville J Herskovits**

"Out of all the sciences which study various aspects of man, anthropology is the one which comes nearest to the total study of man" – **Clyde Kluckhohn**

"Anthropology is the scientific study of the physical, social and cultural development and behaviour of human being since their appearance on earth" - **M Jacob and B T Stern**

In the definition given by Herskovits, the term 'man' implies human as a 'biological organism' and 'works' stands for 'culture'. Anthropology studies organic or biological factors as well as social/cultural factors of human beings.

As it accepts and uses the general principles of Biological and Social Science, it is considered as a '**bio-social science**'. Anthropology is an applied bio-social science which aims to use the knowledge accrued through inter-disciplinary research for elimination of all human problems, overcoming human conflict, achieving human welfare and progress.

The Major branches of Anthropology:

The Academic Discipline of Anthropology can be classified into four distinct domains based on the aspect of human being under study and the core focus. The four fields are:

1. **Socio-Cultural Anthropology**
2. **Biological Anthropology**
3. **Archaeological Anthropology**
4. **Linguistic Anthropology**

Socio-Cultural Anthropology

The branch of Anthropology that examines the Origin, Evolution & Variation of the 'Cultural' and 'Social' aspect of **'all human populations that existed everywhere and at all times'** is called a 'Social Anthropology' or 'Cultural Anthropology' or **Socio-Cultural Anthropology**.

Different terminology is used by academics/researches to refer to this field, depending on the aspect being studied.

For e.g. if the focus is on human society, social dynamics, social organisation, social stratification etc then 'Social Anthropology' is used. Radcliffe Brown defines **"Social Anthropology as the natural science of society"**. Likewise, if culture is the focus then 'Cultural Anthropology' is used.

Socio-cultural anthropology attempts to understand culture as a major mechanism by which human beings adapt to their environment. It focuses on the interplay between society and culture.

Social Cultural anthropology describes, analyses, interprets and explains the social and cultural similarities and differences found among all human populations. **'The cross-cultural and cross-temporal studies'** undertaken by socio-cultural anthropologists is based on rigorous fieldwork. Several research methodologies, techniques and tools of data collection, collation and interpretation are employed by anthropologists to study socio-cultural phenomena.

The major focus areas of Socio-Cultural Anthropologists can be understood under the following heads:

1. Deducing the Origin of social bonding, interdependence, formation of society and social organisation etc among ancestral species.
2. Understanding how our biological evolution contributed to the 'Cognitive Revolution' in our ancestral species and led to the origin & development of 'Culture'.

3. Studying the evolution and variations found in 'Socio-Cultural Universals' such as – Society, Marriage, Family, Kinship, Economic Organisation, Political Organisation, Religion etc in all human populations- '**independently, comparatively, synchronically and diachronically**'.
4. Understanding the innovations, adaptations in socio-cultural phenomena such as – customs, traditions, belief systems, worldview etc found among different human populations residing in varied geographies and ecological settings. Studying their uniqueness as well as diversity.
5. Building a theoretical knowledge base on socio-cultural and bio-social aspects of humanity through inter-disciplinary research and use that knowledge to overcome human suffering, misery, conflict and further aid in sustainable human welfare, progress.

Major sub-disciplines of Socio-Cultural Anthropology

a) Familial Anthropology: It makes a comparative study of families of different cultures and societies. It studies the origin of family, its forms and functions in different societies. Marriage is the basis of family and hence Familial Anthropology also studies different forms of marriage, ways of acquiring mates and marriage payments in different societies.

b) Economic Anthropology: All aspects of culture are closely related. Economic activities play an important role in social organisation. Sometimes sudden change in economic sector leads to radical change in the structure and function of other sectors also. Economic Anthropology studies the economic organisation of human societies ranging from pre-literate food collecting economy to modern industrial economy.

c) Political Anthropology: The administrative set up prevailing in a society also plays a shaping the ways important role in shaping the ways of life of the people. The branch of social cultural anthropology that deals with the types and forms of government, state as well as stateless political organisations, regulations including mores and norms as well as customs and laws, nature of sanctions including punishment and rewards, etc. is known as political anthropology.

d) Anthropology of Religion: Beliefs and practices related to supernatural powers and forces play an important role in shaping the culture of a group. Beliefs and practices associated with supernatural elements, and rituals and performances, etc., come under the purview of this specialised area of anthropological study.

e) Ecological Anthropology: Ecological Anthropology studies the inter-relationship between humans, environment and culture. Environment plays an important role in shaping the culture of the people. Relationship of culture and environment, natives' attitude of their relationship with environment etc., are studied in Ecological Anthropology.

f) Medical Anthropology: Medical Anthropology is concerned with the bio-cultural understanding of humans and their works in relationship to health and disease. Local beliefs regarding health and disease, treatment and preventive measures are some of the aspects studied in Medical Anthropology. This is a sub field also referred to as '**Epidemiological Anthropology**' is an area which is regarded as a sub branch of both Socio-cultural and Biological Anthropology.

g) Development Anthropology: This sub-field addresses some of the basic concerns of human society in terms of welfare, progress and development, with the ultimate aim to ensure security, and decent livelihood for human beings. Hence, the questions of poverty, inequality, human welfare, social justice, human development and environmental sustainability become the core concerns under this specialisation.

Basic Research in Socio-Cultural Anthropology -A Field Science

Fieldwork is the backbone of anthropological research. Anthropologists employ several Methodologies, Methods and use several techniques and tools for collecting reliable and valid data through participant observation of socio-cultural phenomena. During fieldwork, an anthropologist goes to the field, stays with the people with whom he wants to interact, learns their native language observes the phenomena under study and records them systematically.

Applied Socio-Cultural Anthropology

Major Areas of Application of Socio-Cultural Anthropology

- ◆ Education / health / culture
- ◆ Family planning programmes
- ◆ Community development programmes
- ◆ Problems of crimes and criminals
- ◆ Labour problems
- ◆ Industrial and urban problems
- ◆ Problems of culture contact

Applied Socio cultural anthropologists undertake studies concerning human social problems. They contribute to the understanding of labour disputes, minority problems, community development projects, economic development schemes, friction in industry to minimise tension, etc.

Since Anthropologists undertake a deep study of the values, norms, beliefs, traditions etc, they understand the psychological outlook of people in society well. This places them in a god position to evolve contextual solutions to problems faced by that society.

At any point of time, there are a large numbers of external agents which continuously threaten to modify a customary way of life. Socio-cultural Anthropologists due to their expertise in the study of social change can come up with remedies to conserve traditional mores, evolve new values and cope with the effects of change.

Action Anthropology – A paradigm of Applied Social Anthropology developed by American anthropologist Sol Tax, urged practicing anthropologists to involve themselves with a social problem by accepting the said problem as their own and proceeding through a trial and error method to address it.

This method adopted by Action Anthropologists is a wholly clinical or experimental approach in which they don't regard themselves as mere observers. Rather, they recognise their own responsibilities in solving human problems by committing to a '**cause**' through '**action**'. In course of problem solving, action anthropologists may generate new theories and findings acceptable to general anthropology.

Archaeological anthropology

The discipline of Archaeology has developed into a major sub branch of Anthropology in the USA known as '**Archaeological Anthropology**', while in Europe it has developed as an independent discipline. Archaeological anthropology is a branch of anthropology which deals with past cultures/ pre-historic & proto-historic cultures, in relation to the environmental climatic, geological conditions that prevailed during the earliest phases of the development of our species.

It examines the origin and development of human culture. The Pre-historic period covers 99% of human existence and is hence among the most important periods for tracing the origin of our species. Archaeological Anthropologists scientifically **excavate, conserve, restore and interpret** cultural material from archaeological sites and use the evidence to reconstruct the past in the absence of written records.

They analyse the tools, pottery, other material remains left by humans and ancestral species as well as the remains of plants and animals pertaining to those times. They conduct inter-disciplinary research by working with Paleo-botanists, Palaeontologists and Paleo-zoologist, geologists etc and arrive at dates of **Artefacts, Eco facts, Relief and Features** using relative and absolute dating methods.

Ethnoarchaeology is a methodology & research technique used in archaeological anthropology which involves using '**information from living cultures**'—in the form of ethnology, ethnography, ethnohistory, and **experimental archaeology***—to understand patterns found at an archaeological sites (pre-historic cultures).

Applied Archaeological Anthropology

The **Archaeological Anthropologists** offer general information and education to the people through cataloguing material culture, restoring damaged artifacts, preserving them in museums where the reconstruction of human culture found through excavated materials are kept open for public view. It enhances the knowledge about the past on which our existence depends.

Linguistic Anthropology

Among the most distinctive features of human beings is the ability to speak and learn language(s) based on a complex set of rules, syntax and usages – both **verbal and non-verbal**. It is language that helped generations of human populations to store knowledge, culture, traditions etc, share them across generations and progress exponentially compared to any other species.

Hence the Study of Language as a '**Vehicle of Culture**' and a '**Maker of Culture**' has been given prominence by creating a dedicated sub discipline for studying the Origin, Evolution and Variation of all human languages (both surviving and extinct) across space and time. This sub field is called **Linguistic Anthropology**.

Linguistic Anthropology seeks to discover the ways in which languages are similar or different from one another. Linguistic Anthropologists study the origin, nature, meaning and development of languages in relation to culture and patterns of speech, patterns of acting, behaving and communicating as found in different cultures. The areas of linguistic anthropology may broadly be categorised into- structural linguistics, social linguistics and historical linguistics.

Structural linguistics	Grammatical pattern of languages
Social linguistics	Social behaviour in culture
Historical linguistics	Origin, comparison and classification

The Central Research conducted by linguistic anthropologists is on the bio-cultural factors that led to Linguistic capability, complexity and on understanding how development of language led to cultural progress. In this role, Linguistic Anthropology is considered as a sub discipline of both socio-cultural and biological anthropology.

The Biological component pertaining to the development in the size and the quality of the brain during the course of evolution and other anatomical changes associated with the Larynx-Pharynx complex have come under the expanded scope of Linguistic Anthropology.

Applied Linguistic Anthropology

Linguistic Anthropologists conduct research into the social dynamics in multi lingual societies in terms of the role language play in access to social, economic, political status and other resources. They also improve the methods and materials for intensive instruction in a large number of foreign languages. Linguistic Anthropologists work with governmental, non-governmental and international aid agencies to conserve languages spoken by indigenous people and document disappearing languages.

Biological Anthropology

Paul Broca defines Biological Anthropology as "the science whose objective is the study of humanity considered as a whole in its parts and in relationship to the rest of the nature".

The branch of Anthropology that examines the Origin, Evolution & Variation of biological aspects of all human populations viz. 'Physiology, Biology, Bio events associated with humans, Anatomy, Genetics, ecological adaptation, growth, development during various stages of life etc is called **Biological Anthropology**.

There are two major focus areas of Biological Anthropology:

1. Concerning Biological Origin & Evolution of our Species
2. Concerning the Variations observed within different populations of our species across the world (intra-ethnic & inter-ethnic variation)

Some Questions considered by Biological Anthropologists regarding the Origin & Evolution of our species:

- Who are we? Where did our species originate?
- What were the factors which contributed to our emergence?
- Who were our ancestral species?
- What is our biological relationship with other members of our order (primates)? What was the habitat and diet of our ancestral species?
- What are the anatomical features we share with other fossil primates and modern-day primates?
- How did the early ancestral species behave with each other?
- Can we draw lessons from cooperative, competitive and affiliative behaviour found among living primates? What can we deduce /infer about our origins from such studies?
- What are the various stages of evolution of our species?
- What is the evolutionary relationship we share with diverse fossil primates who are being discovered continuously?
- Who is the Last common Ancestor (LCA) which we share with Apes?

- What are the inferences we could arrive about our evolution, by comparing the Anatomy of fossil primates, hominids and hominins with modern humans?

The questions given above form the core concern of Biological Anthropologists with regard to the origin & evolution of humankind. Knowledge gathered from various fields such as **Primatology, Human Palaeontology** is used to reconstruct the evolutionary history of our species. **Primatology** is the study of living and extinct primates. Primates include human, apes, monkeys and prosimians. The Different stages of human evolution can be understood by analysing the fossil evidence of the primates.

Human Palaeontology or Paleo-anthropology: Human Palaeontology studies the fossil evidences of human skeletons of different stages and thereby reconstructs the evolutionary history of humans. This helps in the classification and comparison of the fossils of different stages to determine the link between the modern humans and their ancestors.

Other fields used by Biological Anthropologists to conduct research include Ethology, Primatology, Paleo-Primatology, Paleopathology, Evolutionary biology, Bioarchaeology etc.

Some Questions considered by Biological Anthropologists regarding the Variation seen among our species:

- Why do people within populations and between populations look different?
- What are the factors which influence – fat distribution, body mass, height, hair colour/texture, skin colour/texture etc?
- Why are there different body types among individuals of a given population?
- What is the effect of environmental factors –physical & socio-cultural on variations found among individuals of a populations?
- Why are some populations immune to or susceptible to certain illnesses?
- What effect does nature and nurture have in determining the growth and development of individuals?
- How are important bio-events in an individual's life influenced by genetic and non-genetic factors?
- What causes individuals belonging to different socio-cultural backgrounds and ethnicities to age differently?

The questions given above form the core concern of Biological Anthropologists with regard to the variation (intra-ethnic, inter-ethnic, age, gender etc) among human populations found across the world.

Biological Anthropology gives an opportunity to understand the physical, physiological and genetic differences between human populations despite belonging to a single species.

Human Genetics: To understand how evolution works, it is important to know the mechanisms of heredity. Human genetics is the branch of biological anthropology that deals with inheritance and variation.

Human Variation is caused by a multitude of factors – some of them are genetic in character and others are caused due to natural selection of favourable genes in response to environmental factors across generations.

The Researched knowledge, methods & techniques drawn from various Biological Sciences, Medical Sciences, Behavioural Sciences and Humanities is integrated with that of Biological Anthropology, to arrive at a host of biological, medical, nutritional, genetic, recreational and utilitarian applications for human development, welfare and progress. This subfield of Anthropology is referred to as **Applied Physical/Biological Anthropology**.

Applied Biological anthropologists cover a large number of spheres in applying the knowledge of biological anthropology. They use the knowledge of anthropometry in designing clothes, footwear and furniture and designing machinery, artificial limbs etc.

Data on human osteology, serology and genetics have medical application. They also contribute to disease research, diet and nutrition, health planning, reconstructive surgery, genetic counselling and eugenics. Inputs of biological anthropology also help in forensic tests to identify criminals and crime.

Diagrammatic Expressions of the Scope of Anthropology & its Subfields



