

## Anthropology Paper-I, Section-A

### The Origin & Development of Anthropology as an Academic Discipline

Different attempts have been made to recount the development of anthropology in the world. Among these, **T. K. Penniman**'s contribution is worth mentioning. He classifies the development of anthropology into four periods. He proposes these classifications in his book '**Hundred Years of Anthropology**' (1935) as discussed below:

**1. Formulatory period (before 1835)** : This is the first and longest period in the history of Anthropology can be divided into Ancient & Medieval periods.

### The Ancient Period : Greek & Roman Era Thought

It extends from the time of the Greek historians, philosophers and naturalists. Penniman considers **Herodotus (484 - 425 BC)** as the **first anthropologist and the 'father of Greek Ethnography'**. According to Penniman, Herodotus was among the first to deliberately engage in travelling worldwide and research about races and customs entirely alien to him. He collected a large number of facts about peoples in different cultural stages and was among the foremost to talk about the origin of culture, diversity of spoken language, physical types, material culture, marriage and divorce, social laws customs etc.

**Protagoras (480-410 BC)**, is another Greek philosopher who has contributed to the knowledge about human beings and culture. In his opinion "man is the measure of all things". He was the first to propose the **theory of relativism**. He also introduced the evolutionary scheme, which explains how different social traits come into existence.

Another Greek scholar of this period was **Socrates (470-399 BC)**. He was of the opinion that every society is guided by certain universal values. He mainly put forward the philosophical aspect of social thinking.

**Plato (428 – 348 BC)**, another Greek thinker proposed the ideas about state, marriage, education, etc. According to him, humans outside social control, are but animals and it is really the society that makes the individual, a social being.

Like Plato, **Aristotle (384 – 322 BC)** also proposed his view of the state and the humans. He had clearly understood the difference between functional and structural similarities. This is clear from the fact that he classified bats with the mammals and not with the birds and the whales with the mammals and not with the fishes. Aristotle believed that the state (synonymous with society) determines the behaviour of humans. Without law and justice, humans would be the worst of all animals and he also proposed that human being is a social animal.

### Medieval Era Thought

In the medieval period, various travellers and explorers wrote details about the people they encountered. Among these, Marco-polo (1224-1313) and Vasco-Da-Gama (1397-1499) contributed a lot towards the enrichment of knowledge on Anthropology.

### Modern Era : European Renaissance

The Renaissance Spirit of Knowledge seeking and Exploration laid the foundation for the Emergence of Anthropology. Several advances were made between the 15<sup>th</sup> & the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

There was a lot of curiosity to learn about the different races of human kind during the 15th century. Demonstration of blood circulation by **William Harvey** in 1628, and the discovery of microscope by **Leeuwenhoek** opened a new world of study. **Vesalius** had made an attempt to compare human being with ape for the first time. He also tried to dissect the human body.

In 1735, **Carl Linnaeus** published his book '**Systema Naturae**' where in he has clearly mentioned about the inclusion of human in the Zoological classification.

German philosopher **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804) wrote the book Anthropology in 1789 suggesting the animal origin of man and concluded that human knowledge comes from pre-human condition.

During the 17th century, **Francis Bacon** and **Thomas Hobbes** formulated different theories for the study of society. **John Locke** provided the metaphysical foundation upon which the Anthropologists of the future formulated their formal definition of culture.

During 16th and 17th centuries, Christian missionaries travelled all around the world for the spread of Christian ideology and conversion of people into Christianity. They studied the culture of native people to make their attempt of conversion easy.

The discovery of new land & sea routes and the expeditions undertaken by European nations between the 17<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Century, brought them in contact with exotic cultures which were alien to the Europeans.

The establishment of trade, commerce with these new cultures and their subsequent colonisation by the Europeans, provided the need for colonial administrations to understand all aspects of the culture of the natives. For e.g. in British India, Scholar-Administrators such as Edgar Thurston, (Castes and Tribes of India) William Crook (Tribes and Castes of the North Western Provinces) , Verrier Elwin, (Philosophy of NEFA) and John Russel made significant contributions in Anthropology by conducting various studies on the culture of different groups in India.

This gave a fillip to the emergence of a multidisciplinary study of humanity –**Anthropology**.

In the early phase of its development as a distinct discipline, the scope of anthropology was limited to gathering and documenting the physical appearance (anthropometry) and compiling peculiar cultural traits of the natives through second hand accounts given by travellers, traders, voyagers and mercenaries.

The recording of the ethnographies was done by 'arm-chaired anthropologists' who practically had no field experience & training. These accounts about these cultures suffered from ethnocentric bias and racist overtones.

**2. Convergent Period (1835-1859) :** During this period, divergent views about the origin of biological and social aspects of human being were expressed by scholars of different countries. Among these, the contribution of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) , Charles Lyell (1797 – 1895), and of William Smith (1769 – 1839) are important. Marx accepted the dialectical process as the moving power of history.

In the field of Archaeology, Boucher Deperthe's discoveries of flint implements at Abbeville in 1838 and 1846, Dr. Rigollet's discovery at Saint Acheul in 1854 are some of the new developments.

The discovery of the skeletal remains of a Neanderthal at Dusseldorf in 1857 gave a new outlook about human evolution. James Prichard classified and systematised the facts about races of humankind in his book **The Natural History of Man** in 1833 and **Physical History of Man** in 1836. He proposed the differences of colour, hair, stature and form and examined the criteria of racial classification. The convergence of all these ideas was completed with the publication of **Charles Darwin's** book **The Origin of Species (1859)**.

In this book, he proposed his theory of organic evolution popularly known as 'Darwinism'. With the publication of this book, physical evolution of human being based on scientific investigation was established. Thus, diversities of arguments expressed about origin of human being and society came to an end with the publication of **Origin of Species**.

**3. Constructive Period (1859–1900):** During this period Anthropology started as an independent discipline in many universities. A Department of Anthropology was started in Oxford University in 1884 and Cambridge University in 1900. Scientific researches and publications by scholars like E B Tylor, James Frazer, Henry Maine, and L. H. Morgan, came out during this period. Different branches of anthropology like ethnology, pre-history, social anthropology and physical anthropology were also evolved.

Apart from England, Germany and USA, anthropological researches had flourished in France and some other countries as well. Contributions of Emile Durkhiem in France helped to popularise Anthropology in France. Some important journals like 'American Journal of Folklore', 'Bulletin of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland' (now known as 'Man') etc. were also started during this period.

**4. Critical Period (1900 onwards) :** Penniman used the term 'critical' to denote this period because of the crucial contribution made to the development of Anthropology during this period. Some significant developments had also marked this period. The first chair of social anthropology was started in 1908 in the University of Liverpool in Britain. It was chaired by Sir James Frazer.

The first Anthropology department in India was started in the University of Calcutta in 1920. In 1919, Social anthropology had been introduced as a subject in the Department of Sociology at the University of

Bombay. During this period, different schools of thought in anthropology were founded. The Functional school of thought, structural school of thought, school of diffusion, and culture and personality school are prominent among them.

With the establishment of anthropology as a distinct academic discipline in Europe and America, the 20<sup>th</sup> century explorations were carried out by trained anthropologists. A distinctive fieldwork tradition through systematic development of research methodologies, techniques & tools to compile ethnographies was pioneered by Franz Boas and later Bronislaw Kaspar Mallinowski.

These served as a template for anthropologists undertaking fieldwork and resulted in the emergence of various theoretical orientations in anthropology viz. Evolutionism, Diffusionism, Functionalism, Structuralism, Structural-Functionalism, Culture Personality studies, Neo-evolutionism, Cultural Materialism, Cognitive, Symbolic & interpretative studies etc.

Each of these theoretical orientations differed fundamentally with regard to 'what' the principal focus of the ethnographer should be while studying a culture (i.e. what aspect of culture an ethnographer should study) and 'how' the culture must be studied (i.e. the perspective he/she should employ while studying and the method/ methodology they should use to record ethnographies).

A parallel development in late 19<sup>th</sup> & early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the emergence of Darwin's theory of evolution followed by advancement in the field of genetics. The extensive effort undertaken by paleoanthropologists led to unearthing of fossil evidences to support human evolution.

A systematic study of inheritance in human beings expanded the scope of biological anthropology. The focus shifted towards understanding the underlying mechanisms of inheritance and explaining variation among human populations at the genetic level with regard to their response to socio-economic, ecological conditions, susceptibility to disease etc.

### **The Latest Phase (Post 1945)**

Many of the Theoretical Orientations in Anthropology were criticised and new orientations emerged to replace them. After decolonisation began in the post WW-II period, generalised theory building was challenged by the Post-modernist school and the orientation of Anthropology was completely overhauled.

The knowledge accumulated through multidisciplinary research began to be used to offer solutions to long standing problems faced by humanity across the world. Socio-Cultural anthropology's focus also underwent a shift to address several acute human problems which emerged in the aftermath of World War II & decolonisation such as refugee crisis, War-genocide, poverty and malnutrition, Socio-economic disparity and unrest, ethnic conflicts, insurgency etc.

The study of the underlying social and cultural processes which contribute to the persistence of all human problems became the central concern of anthropologists. New subfields such as Developmental

anthropology, Civilisation studies, Village studies, Tribal Studies & Caste studies etc which aimed to understand the dynamics & interplay of cultural processes in everyday life came to become established.

With the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Anthropologists have begun to collaborate actively with specialists from other knowledge domains such as the humanities, social sciences, behavioural sciences, life sciences, medical sciences, earth sciences etc by learning from advances in these fields and using this knowledge to aid global organisations, Non-governmental institutions, think tanks and government agencies across the world involved in addressing the challenges faced by humankind.

The Integration of the Biological, Linguistic, Socio-cultural and archaeological fields enhanced the nature & scope of Anthropology's enquiry to a multi-dimensional one. The deeper association with all domains of human knowledge made Anthropology a truly interdisciplinary and holistic discipline concerned with each and every aspect of human beings.

### **The Relevance of Anthropology today**

Today's world is characterised by huge differences in wellbeing between human populations residing in urban, industrial, rural or tribal settings. There are long standing chronic problems plaguing the majority of human populations either in the economic, social, political, religious, healthcare, education sphere etc.

Discrimination, Exploitation, Competition and Conflict are the modes in which human populations and groups within populations interact with each other. This has led to deepening inequalities, deprivation, suffering and misery.

Anthropology in its current avatar, facilitates social scientists, policy makers, administrators, educated sections and other vital stakeholders of the society to identify and be conscious of inherent biases in decision making.

It provides a robust platform for the adoption of an objective, sensitive and empathetic attitude towards marginalised and downtrodden sections of the society thereby ensuring that these communities despite being isolated, simple or remote are not excluded from the ambit of welfare activity.

The basis of most human problems lies deep within culture, traditions, attitudes and belief systems. Anthropological studies being a part of the study of cultures and life style of unfamiliar societies cultivates critical thinking and promotes a cross cultural perspective on issues.

It allows to see ourselves as part of one human family. The self-reflection that results from applying the holistic approach and comparative method provides a broadened world view of looking at each and every issue. It helps to avoid ethnocentrism (Outlook that one's own culture is superior to that of others) and be open to acceptance of other ways of living, thinking and believing.

Hence, it can be said that, the holistic & interdisciplinary nature of Anthropology ensures that it remains as a relevant antidote to all forms of human suffering and conflict.

End of Section 1.1 : The Meaning, Scope & Development of Anthropology

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