MEANING AND SCOPE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

“Man wonders over the restless sea, the flowing waters, the sight of the sky, and forgets that of all wonders Man himself is the most wonderful”.
- Augustine.

When he emerged from his animal ancestry man was gifted with some special features such as:
1) His erect posture, for which he would walk on feet.
2) His free moving arms and hands with which he could make tools and implements to help him survive.
3) His brain capable of keen perception, fine judgment and decisions. When the brain was developed he could think and evolve ways and means to adjust with his environment.
4) His power of speech by which he could exchange and communicate ideas with his fellow beings.
5) His sharp focusing eyes, by which he could have a distant view.

The combinations of these gifts that are partly found in his near relations - monkeys and apes made a man unique and helped him to adapt himself to the physical environment and become master over the earth. The study of this wonderful creature and his varied aspects is comparatively a recent endeavour and has been known as Anthropology. It may be called a subject of half science and half arts. It is a young science which is yet to be intimately familiar with the students of science.

Anthropology, as is commonly misunderstood, is not an idler’s pursuit nor is it a study of queer customs of the savages or digging for the remains left by the prehistoric people. It concerns us primarily with our own lives. It is no longer a vague study or a study without a portfolio. It is a well-defined science which tells us about the various aspects of the life of man, which is both physical and cultural, from the time of his origin till the present day. It embraces a vast field of study which views man from different angles. Anthropology is probably the most comprehensive of the sciences dealing with man and his works.
Meaning of Anthropology:
The word “anthropology” has been derived from two Greek words, *anthropos* (man) and *logus* (study or science). Anthropology is, thus, the science of man. This etymological meaning, of course, is too broad and general. More precisely, anthropology may be called “the science of man and his works and behaviour”.

Anthropologists are interested in all aspects of the human species and human behaviour, in all places and at all times, from the origin and evolution of the species through its prehistoric civilizations down to the present situation.

 Anthropologists study human behaviour not concerned with particular men as such but with men in “groups”, with races and peoples and their happenings and doings. So, anthropology may be defined briefly as the “science of groups of men”.

Unlike many other subjects such as physiology, psychology, pathology, economics, sociology etc. each of which confines to one aspect only, Anthropology studies various aspects of man. The physiologist studies the processes of life of an individual only. Similarly the psychologist deals with the mental conditions of man. The pathologist investigates the pathological conditions or diseases of man. Economics deals with the household management and fulfillment of the needs of man or in the broad sense, production, distribution and consumption of wealth. The sociologist discusses the social groups and institutions and their interrelationships and various social problems. Thus, each of the above biological and social sciences deals with one aspect of man or with particular individuals only. But the anthropologist focuses his attention on men in groups and studies the total society consisting of different races or peoples of the world, both past and present. Kluckholon points out that out of all other scientific disciplines that deal with various aspects of man, Anthropology is the science which comes nearest to the total study of man. It may be called a holistic or synthesizing discipline or a science of “man in its totality”.

Anthropology is both a biological and a social science. It deals on the one hand with man as a member of the animal kingdom and on the other with man’s behaviour as a member of society. Both the structural evolution of mankind and the growth of civilization are studied from the earliest times of which any record survives to the present. Similarly in his concern with the contemporary human groups and civilizations the anthropologist places particular emphasis on comparative studies.
**Scope of Anthropology:**
Anthropology has two main branches - a) Physical Anthropology and b) Cultural Anthropology. But in Europe except in England, U.S.A., Australia and other English speaking countries including India, Anthropology means both physical and cultural anthropology and the term ethnology is rarely used for cultural anthropology. Ethnography has been known as merely a descriptive study of human culture.

**a) Physical Anthropology:**
Physical Anthropology deals mainly with :-
i) Human biology
ii) Human evolution
iii) Human variation and
iv) Human genetics.

**Human Biology:**
The Physical anthropologist studies human biology as he is interested in *Homo sapiens* alone. He studies man out of the vast range of creatures that claim the attention of the general biologists. Therefore, there is close relationship between the Physical Anthropology and the study of other living beings. The Physical anthropologist tells about the man’s place in the animal kingdom by making a comparative study on the different groups of man and his near relations like apes, monkey, etc. whom we call primates.

**Human Evolution:**
Another object of Physical Anthropology is to deal with human evolution. Like other creatures man is also a living organism. It is difficult to explain under what conditions life had appeared on earth. But from the geological and palaeontological evidences it has been known that the first living organism that had appeared on earth consisted of one cell only, which is known as a unicellular organism or amoeba. In course of time this simple homogeneous organism through the process of changes attained the heterogeneous form at various stages. Ultimately, a complex form of animal called man had emerged. All living forms of humanity today belong to the single genus and species of *Homo sapiens*. Man is said to have emerged during the quaternary epoch of Cenozoic era. As time elapsed varieties of man had evolved from the date of his origin.

In analysis of human evolution palaeontology plays an important role. Anatomy is essential for studying different human forms especially in the study of racial differences, and no one can specialize Physical Anthropology without prior training in anatomy. On the basis of geological evidences it has become possible to find out the age of the different forms preserved under the earth.
Human Variation:
The physical anthropologist after having studied the origin, development and place of evolution of man focuses his attention on the study of the different varieties of man. Outwardly through they appear different, all men have some common characteristics and belong to the species - *Homo-sapiens*. However, it is generally found that the common hereditary does not resemble those of other groups in various ways. Each of these groups is designated as race. So, in Physical Anthropology the different aspects of race are studied. Somatology - Somatos-copic observation and anthropometry is useful for this purpose.

Human Genetics:
The methodology of Physical Anthropology has now been changed. The days of descriptive stage are gone and the analytical stage has taken its place. The classical Physical Anthropology was mainly interested in the classification and not in the interpretation. For example, a Negro has platyrrhine nose whereas the European has the leptorrhine nose. Previously it was not interpreted why these two groups of people had different types of noses. Now, explanations are being put forward why they have different types of noses.

In recent times the attention of physical anthropologist has been diverted to Genetics a branch of biology, which deals with descent, variation and heredity. They now study the blood types, difference in musculature etc. They also study the group differences in time of sexual maturation, in growth rates and various disease immunities. These studies have practical value and the results may be used in various ways.

The physical anthropologist studies also the influences of the natural environment on man and trees to find out whether the physical traits of man are affected by environment. Moreover, he studies the problems associated with physical changes, effects of food and mode of life on racial and physical characteristics.

Other Studies of Physical Anthropology:

Another aspect of study of Physical Anthropology is demography which is directly related to fertility and mortality. There are various factors including heredity and environment that influence fertility and mortality. These are studied by the physical anthropologists.
There is another subject called pedagogical anthropology which is directly concerned with education. In various educational fields pedagogical studies are utilised by many advanced countries. On the whole, the Physical Anthropology is highly a specialised branch of Anthropology.

b) Cultural Anthropology:
There are almost as many definitions of culture as there are scholars. In order to understand culture one must know the steps by which mankind has transformed itself from an instinct dominated anthropoid into a cultural adaptive human being. Cultural Anthropology deals with learned behavioural characteristics of the past, present and future of human societies.

Now, the main fields of studies under Cultural Anthropology are: Prehistoric archaeology, ethnology and ethno-linguistics. Under ethnology again economic anthropology, social anthropology, ethnography, religion, art, musicology, recreation, folklore etc. are studied.

Prehistoric Archaeology:
It is now a specialised branch of Cultural Anthropology. The prehistorians with their pick and shovel have been contributing much to get the first hand knowledge about the extinct peoples and their cultures and the past phases of living peoples. They enlighten us with how the prehistoric people coped with the natural setting by making tools and implements, weapons and other necessary equipments in order to serve their biological and psychological needs such as food, clothing, art etc. Prehistoric archaeology has also been helpful in finding out the sequence of culture and dating the past by adopting the various methods such as Stratigraphy, Radio-carbon methods, etc.

Palaeontology:
There is another scientific discipline called palaeontology which is closely associated with prehistory and helpful to make a study on the extinct races from their fossilized forms. It tells us how the modern races have evolved from those extinct fossil races.
Technology:
In order to satisfy his wants and to live by adjusting with the natural environment, man had to make some material objects such as tools and implements, weapons, utensils, clothes, houses, canoes etc. This is called the material culture of the people. The study of the techniques of making these objects of material culture is known as Technology. This aspect of culture in the past is being studied with the help of Prehistoric Archaeology.

Ethnology:
Ethnology is another field of study under Cultural Anthropology. It made its appearance as a recognised branch in about 1840 and it developed very greatly during the next hundred years. It makes a comparative study of the cultures of the world and emphasises the theory of culture. It is often called Cultural Anthropology and sometimes used as synonym for Anthropology also.

Ethnography:
Ethnologic studies are essential for a cultural anthropologist to know the links between the different cultures and the principles guiding the socio-cultural systems. Ethnology includes in its fold Economic Anthropology, Social Anthropology, Religion, Art, Musicology and Recreation, Folklore etc. As a matter of fact Ethnology interprets the facts on data collected through ethnographic studies, classifies them and formulates principles with regard to the nature of human behaviour and the evolution and functioning of culture. Ethnography is the study of the cultures of the living peoples of the world through direct and indirect observation of behaviour. Ethnography is not the study of races, which is the work of the physical anthropologist. It involves the collection of data only, the raw materials for scientific analysis.

Economic Anthropology:
The anthropologist studies under Economic Anthropology the different means of subsistence of man. He studies different features of production, distribution and consumption of material goods and their relationships with other aspects of the socio-cultural complex. Thus, the anthropologist studies what man produces, how he produces, what and how he consumes and what and how he distributes or exchanges. He also analyses how far the economic factors are responsible to the growth of socio-cultural system of a people.

Social Anthropology:
Man is a gregarious animal and lives in a society. So he has to adapt to the social environment and learn to live in social cohesion. A man is born in a family, the smallest unit of a society. He is socialized through this unit. As a society is a web of social relationships, a man is tied to the society with various strings of social relationships. He is a member
of different kinship groups such as the family, the lineage, the clan, the phratry, the moiety etc. as well as he may be a member of various non-kin groups or associations viz. boy’s club, secret society, village council etc.

Man is also involved in social institutions such as marriage, government, law etc. So in adjusting with social environment and to keep the society in continuity, one has to abide by the various laws and customs formulated by the society. But society has got intimate relationship with culture which is created by man. Culture exists to make the society survive but without the existence of society culture has no entity. So the social anthropologist studies various aspects of society in keeping with the cultural development.

**Religion:**

It is a product of psychic reaction and adjustment of man to the supernatural world. Man could not explain why there exist the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, water, air, other etc. Man also did not know what were the causes of storm and thunder, earthquake and volcano, drought and floods, life and death, etc. He most often questioned why man suffers from diseases. Similarly he was curious about many other natural phenomena. These made him think and believe that there were some supernatural powers in the background by the action of which these phenomena had come into being. Thus religious ideas and beliefs seemed to have arisen out of these situations. Man believed that of these supernatural powers, some were benevolent and some harmful. So he did some magico-religious performances in order to propitiate those powers. With these were associated some rituals which represent the various techniques that are applied as a means of controlling or influencing the supernatural world. These techniques were
generally used by some specialists called shamans and priests who were known as religious practitioners. The shaman deals with spirits. He may have power either to cure or to do harm. The priest worships gods for the welfare of men and acts as an intermediary between gods and men.

Thus the anthropologists study the varieties of rituals connected with different beliefs and practices found among different groups of people living in different parts of the world and how they are related to their day to day activities which make them survive peacefully.

**Art, Musicology, Recreation:**
By adapting to the natural, social and supernatural environments in order to satisfy his biological, social and spiritual needs man wants to undertake such other activities as would give him some satisfaction and relaxation. That is why man took to art and recreation such as songs and dances, folk tales, poetry, play, art and various other intellectual pursuits. With a view to improving the standard of life man takes to spiritual pursuits like morality, nurses and values of life. So the cultural anthropologist includes these topics to make a comparative study.

**Folklore:**
Folklore may be treated as one of the branches of Cultural Anthropology. But it has also been treated as a separate discipline. It is a science “which deals with the survivals of archaic beliefs and customs in civilized peoples. It embraces everything relating to ancient observances and customs, to the notions, beliefs, traditions, superstitions and prejudice of the common people. But also folk tales, songs, legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, folk music and folk dance as well as folk drama belong to the sphere of folklore”.
Ethnolinguistics:
Another branch of Cultural Anthropology is the Ethnolinguistics which is highly specialised. It is the study of human speech and of the various dead and living languages and dialects of the different groups of people of the world. By studying these anthropologist tries to find out the origin and development of the languages and their interrelationships. Then they are classified. The linguist also helps to unveil the men’s past and the diffusion of their culture.

In the American universities there is a growing trend to establish independent departments of ethnolinguistics. As a science the study of language is somewhat older than Anthropology. The two disciplines become closely associated in the early days of anthropological fieldwork, when anthropologists took the help of linguistics to study unwritten languages.

Other Specialties of Cultural Anthropology:
Ethno-ecology: This is a special sub-field of anthropological study which deals with adaptation of human beings to their total environment.

Urban Anthropology: Urban Anthropology came to grow as a distinctive area of study in Anthropology in recent times. Although some anthropologists studied ethnic populations in urban settings since the beginning of this century, urban anthropology in fact was started as special study since 1967 when there broke out riots in some cities of the United States. The urban anthropologists are trying to bring the unique attributes of anthropology to the study of urban cultures in contemporary cities.

Political Anthropology:
Since World War II and the consequent emergence of independent developing countries from the erstwhile empire holdings in Asia and Africa, the economics and political science have become actively interested in studying the indigenous cultures of these parts of the world. The study of primitive and the colonial system of politics has been undertaken since 1950.

Applied Anthropology and Action Anthropology:
Nowadays, there are various applications of Anthropology. Mentioned below are some of its applications.

Anthropometry:
Anthropometry is the science of measuring the different limbs of the body. It is an inevitable part of Physical Anthropology, and with its help various measurements of the limbs of the body are taken so as to know the proportions of the limbs. With this knowledge the physical anthropologists can give advice in respect of sitting arrangements in aeroplanes, railways, class rooms, offices etc.
Physical Anthropology is also useful in detecting criminals. With the knowledge of foot and hand prints it becomes easier to detect criminals as the types of foot and hand prints are never changed during man’s life time. Similarly analyses of hair texture and blood groups also help in detecting criminals. The physical anthropologist can also advise with regard to finding out the father of the son born to an unmarried mother.

The population explosion is a great problem in India, Bangladesh and North Africa. Population explosion has become a menace to the whole mankind. Two-pronged strategy to produce more food as well as to control human population by way of green revolution and family planning programmes had been made to cope with this problem. The services of the cultural anthropologists are useful in the planning of these development programmes. Similarly for successful implementations of prohibition, family planning, adult education and various other development programmes the services of the cultural anthropologists are essential.

National disintegration is another erosive problem in India. The services of both the physical and cultural anthropologists are essential to help solve the problems of casteism, communalism, regionalism, racialism etc.

Nowadays, the problems of labour management in various industries have been acute and labour strikes frequently take place. These problems could be mitigated to a great extent if the living and psychological conditions of labourers are studied earlier with the help of the cultural anthropologists.

**Action Anthropology :**

It has been coined by Sol Tax. According to him an action anthropologist is to study the processes of change in the society and help the people to overcome the adverse effects of change and guide planning in such a way that the people do better in the process of change.