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# UNIT 1 SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: NATURE AND SCOPE

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## Learning Objectives



The unit will enable you to understand:

- what does social anthropology mean;
- the subject matter of social anthropology;
- how social anthropology had developed;
- the journey of social anthropology in India; and
- future perspective and present scenario.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit will trace the emergence of social anthropology and its scope. It is important to know the development and scope of social anthropology as a subject. We know social anthropology today has many stages of development. The subject has not obtained today's form overnight. It has many theoretical debates since its emergence and till today all the matters of debate have not come to an end. So, it is very much important to the students of anthropology to understand these issues and also to know the history related to the subject.

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## 1.2 SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: A BRANCH OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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To understand the emergence of social anthropology as a branch of Anthropology, we need to explore the historical facts related to the debates between social anthropology and cultural anthropology. The term social anthropology has a historical

background in the field of anthropology. We need to explore to some extent the theoretical framework as well to trace the emergence of the term social anthropology. Along with this the term cultural anthropology would also come in our discussion, as these two terms have a close interpretation. Sometimes these two terms overlap in the fields of practice.

Though we have subjective debate over the term social anthropology and cultural anthropology, sometimes we find interchangeable use of these two terms. People use the term socio-cultural anthropology to replace these two terms. But historically there is a debate over the ideology of these two terms and as a student of anthropology we need to know these issues.

Anthropology basically has two dominant schools of thought. One is British school of thought and the other is American school of thought. British school of thought branches out Anthropology into three basic branches

- 1) Biological or physical anthropology.
- 2) Social anthropology.
- 3) Archaeology.

American school defines four branches of Anthropology:

- 1) Physical anthropology
- 2) Cultural anthropology.
- 3) Archaeology
- 4) Linguistic anthropology.

Thus, we see that there are many issues related to the terminology. It is surrounded with many historical debates. We will try to unfold these debates in our next sections.

### **1.2.1 What Is Social Anthropology**

The most common and basic definition of Anthropology is to say that Anthropology is the study of man across time and space. Anthropology deals with every aspect of human being. It not only studies human beings in present context but also studies human beings journey through the path of evolution from Pleistocene period till today's globalised world and also tries to trace the future path. Anthropology studies man irrespective of any geographical boundary. It studies human being as a whole and also tries to study differences within it. Man is the most wonderful creature in the world with cultural, social, and habitational variation in it. Unlike any other species Homo sapiens represents a diverse population in itself in respect of culture. Culture variation gives a diverse look to the same species Homo sapiens. Biologically defined Homo sapiens are an interbreeding population; but culturally man creates different rules for marriage. Same species does not contain interbreeding population. Cultural prohibition defines mating pattern. Likewise, biologically all the members of the same species i.e. Homo sapiens have equal potentialities in its individuals. But human being differentiates themselves on the basis of race. We can mention many such examples that convince us to define anthropology as a unique science to study man comprising all the differences and similarities within it. Anthropologists find out the differences and at the same time it tries to find out the general characteristics within the same species Homo Sapiens. Anthropology professes systematically to research all the manifestations of human being and human activity in a unified way.

Man live in society following a certain culture pattern. In different societies the culture norms differ. Generally speaking social anthropology deals with the study of this aspect of man. But, as a discipline, social anthropology has different meaning in different countries. Reflecting diversity and variation in human thought we find different thought surrounding social anthropology.

The term social anthropology is generally used in Great Britain and other commonwealth countries. With support from Prof. Claude Levi-Strauss, the term is also extensively used in France, Netherland and the Scandinavian countries. Social anthropology refers to different meaning in the countries like USA, England and the other countries of European continent. So, we often see a diverse nature referred by the term social anthropology in different countries. In Great Britain Anthropology refers to physical anthropology which studies biological aspect of man. In England social anthropology is understood as ethnology or sociology as in other countries of the European continent. In short, in Europe itself social anthropology has two different meanings. On the other hand in USA, social anthropology is considered as a larger and comprehensive discipline. It covers up the study of man from different aspects. It not only considers man as a sociological being but also puts emphasis on the cultural aspect.

In nineteenth century, 'ethnology' was the term used instead of social or cultural anthropology. The Greek term *ethos* means race and *logia* means study. Thus, ethnology was referred to be the study of diverse behaviour of ethnic groups. Cultural distinction covered a major part of such study. Along with this, it also studied culture change. Sometimes, social anthropology is defined in the context of ethnology. Ethnologists, who concentrate on social relations, such as family, and kinship, age groups, political organisation, law and economic activities (what is called social structure) is called social anthropology. Supporting the position of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown the English anthropologists denied the usefulness of historical studies in anthropology and concentrated on social structure. In this context, social anthropology is non historical in their view while ethnology is historical. Distinctly, social anthropology represents the thought following the British school which can rightly be defined as the study of social structure and social organisation.

### **1.2.2 Cultural Anthropology**

The split in socio-cultural Anthropology is not readily accepted all over the world. We have already stated how Social anthropology has different terms of reference in different countries. Likewise the term socio-cultural Anthropology has also different domain of practice in different countries. Cultural anthropology is a term of reference popular in America. In America, the stress on cultural anthropology is laid with the objective that man is more than merely organic man, but a cultural being also. Culture of a particular society helps us to understand civilisation irrespective of time and space. The American cultural anthropology also includes Archaeology. Stress on culture study created a specialty to American school of thought which resulted into the creation of ethnology – the science of people.

Anthropology as knowledge about 'cultivated human' that is, knowledge about those aspects of humanity which are not natural, but which are related to that which is acquired. According to Herskovits, Cultural Anthropology is to study the ways man has devised to cope up with his natural settling and has social milieu and how bodies of customs are learned, retained and handed down from one generation to the next. The term 'culture' itself is a complex one. Culture has been defined by different anthropologists differently. The most accepted and briefed definition of culture can

be stated as ‘culture is anything acquired by members of society’. Whatever material and non-material things man has acquired as a member of society that constitutes the subject matter of cultural anthropology. The works of man include everything created by man-traditions, folkways, social institutions and other social networks. Thus, it can be said that American Anthropologists study things not only with cultural orientation but also socially oriented under the domain of cultural anthropology. It can be stated that cultural anthropology is a broader term covering all social aspects of man but emphasises on cultural aspects. For cultural anthropologists, social system is a part of society and culture cannot emerge without a social system. David Bidney says in this context that social and cultural anthropology are then understood as few branches of a common discipline of anthropology, covered with the study of man and his culture in society.

#### **Reflection**

Anthropology is a large and diversified subject, which is practiced somewhat differently in different countries, although it retains its distinctive character everywhere. Since the Second World War, the core areas have been Great Britain, the US, France and Australia. British anthropology, which is generally spoken of as social anthropology and which also enjoys a strong position in Scandinavia and India, emphasises the study of social process and is thus close to social anthropology. The British social anthropologist Edmund Leach (1982) once characterised this subject as a comparative micro-sociology. In the US, one speaks of cultural anthropology wherein, the general sociological underpinning characteristics are dominant. On the other hand, linguistics and pre history have formed American anthropology in different ways. Several important specialisations such as cultural, ecology, linguistics anthropology and various approaches in psychological and interpretive or hermeneutic anthropology have developed in the US.

### **1.2.3 How Social Anthropology Developed**

From the very beginning of human life, people have been wondering about themselves and their surroundings. Therefore, it is futile to talk about the beginning of the study of man. For the genesis of systematic thinking all usually refer back to the Greek Civilisation especially to the writings of Herodotus in fifth century B.C. Some also call him ‘the father of Anthropology’. He did not merely record what he saw, and what people told him about the different countries around the shores of the Mediterranean. He asked some basic questions which at present is the subject matter of social anthropology like ‘what made people so different?’

To trace the development of social anthropology, we will talk about the scholars whose pioneering works gave the shape to the present day discipline ‘Social Anthropology’. But to begin with, we will go through the works of different travelers who actually collected the basic data which eventually build the foundation of Ethnographic study. Many early social anthropologists followed these travel accounts to frame their social anthropological study.

Every age of geographical discovery has seen a burst of interest in the new kind of society that the explorers have found. The travelers and also the colonisers considered these newly founded societies as “other culture”. The first and foremost thing they recognised about these new society or cultures was that these were completely different from their own society and culture. The explorers and colonisers being accustomed to their own ways, set the standard of what people ought to be like, were always prompted to ask why other people were so unlike themselves. The sixteenth and eighteenth century were such periods. The French essayist Montaigne (1553-92) was much interested in the apparently paradoxical constraints between the customs of his own country and others. Theoretical arguments were also there

at that time whether people with brown skin who wear no cloths could really be descendants of Adam.

Eighteenth century Europeans were less certain than sixteenth century ones that all the advantages were on their side. North America and Polynesia became the point of interest. Rousseau described the Indians as 'noble savage' of the golden age of natural man and interestingly these same people were described by the Spanish missionaries as people having no soul. Hobbes in the seventeenth century had already thought the American Indians approached pretty closely to his imagined state of nature where every man's hand was against his neighbours and man's life were 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'

During this period only, the reports of the manner and customs of distant lands collected by these travelers and missionaries began to be treated not just as interesting information about other cultures but a data for constructing historical schemes of the development of society. Some writers started the history of the comparative ethnography with the Jesuit missionary Lefitau, who in 1724 published a book comparing American Indian customs with those of the ancient world as described by Latin and Greek writers. A little later Charles de Brosses wrote on parallels between ancient Egyptian religion and that of West Africa. In 1748 Montesquieu published his *Esprit des Lois*, based on reading and not on travel, and thus became for some the first theorist of social anthropology. He considered that differences in legal systems could be explained by relating them to differences in other characteristics of the nations which possessed them, population, temperament, religious beliefs, economic organisation, and customs generally, as well as to their environment. Considering this we can entitle him to be the first functionalist.

Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith from Scotland based their generalisation, as did Montesquieu, on the widest reading about the institutions of different societies that was available at that time. This perspective of evolution became popular with the discovery of Darwin's principle of natural selection in the evolution of biological species. It greatly influenced the study of society and culture. Before this also the concept of evolution was there. People like Henry de Saint Simor, August Comte, and Herbert Spencer spoke about evolution in philosophical terms. But they didn't offer any empirical evidence of how evolution had taken place. But in the latter half of the nineteenth century we find a set of scholars both in USA and UK who are concerned with the stages of evolution.

According to some historians, the origin of social anthropology is traced to David Hume and Immanuel Kant who were the first philosophers to define social anthropology. As already mentioned some consider, Herodotus as the father of Anthropology, who did raise some basic questions of social anthropology. But, it is believed that the systematic History of social anthropology rightly begins from Henry Maine and Lewis Henry Morgan. These two thinkers are considered as founding father of social anthropology. They also followed the works of travelers and missionaries.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century social anthropologists were greatly influenced by the work of Darwin and his associates. They established that the origin of man has passed through several stages from apes to Homo Sapiens. The Anthropologists tried to follow the logic of Darwinism and applied it to establish the origin of social institutions. This trend prevailed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The definitions of social anthropology given by social Darwinists is a landmark in the development of this discipline. The foundation of present Anthropology goes back to Henry Maine's *Ancient law* (1861) and Lewis Henry Morgan's books, including *Ancient Society* (1877). Both of them were the profounder of evolutionary theory in Anthropology. This theory is considered to be the theoretical beginning in social anthropology. Maine worked in India. He proposed a distinction between status and contract societies. In status based or traditional societies, Maine argued, kinship was usually crucial in determining one's position in society; in a contract-based society, it would rather be the individual achievements of persons that provided them with their positions. On the other hand Morgan's contribution to early Anthropology formed the theoretical background. It resulted into the formation of evolutionary theory. It supports the notion of social evolution stating that human society has passed through the stages of savagery, barbarism and civilisation. Each stage has also been characterised by a certain economy. Savagery had an economy characterised by subsistence. During this stage man earned his livelihood through hunting and food gathering. Agriculture and animal husbandry were the source of living at the stage of barbarism. While those societies which reached the stage of civilisation, developed literacy, technology, industry and the state. This theory expounded by Morgan got support of many other scholars. Westermarck set out the theory of human marriage while Briffault propounded the theory of family. Evolutionary theory of religion also came out with the study of Tylor. Evolutionists like W.H.R. Rivers, Sir James Frazer, A.C. Haddon and Charles Seligman contributed to different fields. All these early social anthropologists defined social anthropology as a science of social evolution.

When evolutionary theory emerged in Anthropology many schools came up with an anti-evolutionary idea. They criticised evolutionists for depending on travel accounts, which they claimed to be unscientific. This school of thought is often referred to as structural–functional school of thought represented by the work of British Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown. Another school that came up before this was the school of diffusionists. They were also critics of evolutionary school, who were not convinced by the concept of evolutionary progress of society and culture. According to their view, culture not only developed, but it also degenerated. Again, they followed that man was basically uninventive, and important inventions were made only once at a particular place from where it was diffused, migrated, borrowed and initiated, to the other parts of the world. There were three schools of diffusion – British school, German school and American school of diffusion. Smith, W.J. Perry, Rivers, Franz Boas, Clerk Wissler, Kroeber etc. were the scholars of this school.

Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski are regarded as the first modern Anthropologists, who argued the necessity of doing fieldwork. Boas, a profound critic of classical evolutionists argued the necessity of doing field work. He emphasised in collecting empirical data and conducted fieldwork in USA to study American Indians in 1880. He founded Modern American Cultural Anthropology. He began to study the influence of culture on personality and vice versa and ultimately formed a school. The pioneers of this school are Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Linton, Kardiner and Cora Du Bois. Boas contributed substantially to the field of Anthropology. The most important contribution seems to be the doctrine of 'cultural relativism'. It is the concept which argues that each group should be studied according to its own culture. In other words, culture is specific to a group. Today also, Boas' contribution of cultural relativism is considered to be an indispensable Anthropological tool of social and cultural anthropology. Boas defined anthropology as a social science of culture study. This is one of the aspects of modern Anthropology.

Malinowski, founder of functional school of thought is known for his work on the Trobrianders living in the island of New Guinea. He conducted fieldwork among these tribals between 1915 and 1918. According to Malinowski, social anthropology is concerned with the interrelationship of various parts of tribal society. In other words, tribal economy, politics, kinship etc. are all interrelated. According to him, social anthropology is interested in studying functional relations among the member of tribal society. Malinowski contributed a lot to the fieldwork tradition in anthropology. His ethnographic account based on his fieldwork '*Argonauts of Western Pacific*' is a landmark publication in Anthropology. The concept of participant observation was developed by him. He emphasised the importance of studying the interrelationships of various aspects of society, and therefore held the view that intensive field study was absolutely necessary.

Radcliffe-Brown, contemporary of Malinowski, developed the social structure concept to explain forms. It is another important development in social anthropology. According to him, social structure deals with the study of status and role of a person within an institution. In other words, it deals with network of social relation within an institutional framework. Radcliffe-Brown, criticising classical evolutionists said that the study of change is also essential. But, unlike classical evolutionist study, these must be based on reliable document. He said that classical evolutionism was based on conjectural history. It is nothing but a conjectural speculation of the life of the people. He called it pseudo historical. So, he argued that classical evolutionism has no place in scientific investigation.

Anthropologists study pre-literate society. Therefore, whatever knowledge, they have of their tradition; it exists on the oral level. The oral history may mix up with myth and other stories. Therefore, it may not be totally relied upon as an authentic source. The early twentieth century scholars, those who are critical of evolutionary theory thought rather than studying how society has evolved, all must study how society lives and functions. It is a shift of paradigm. The approach which was born out of it is popularly known as structural–functional approach. The founder of this theoretical trend argued that instead of understanding a diachronic study of society social anthropologists should carry out synchronic study – the study of present society. Radcliffe-Brown called anthropology as the study of here and now. He also stressed upon doing first hand fieldwork. Thus, social anthropologists started studying present social structure focusing on interrelationship of social institutions and their functions.

But this trend also faced certain criticisms like – (1) it does not account for social change. It is concerned with order. (2) Whatever it has considered change, the change is adaptive. But every society goes through a process of change. Sometimes change comes following a revolutionary path. So, structural functional study was unable to cover this area and it opened the door for criticism. Therefore, by 1940s anthropologists revived the need to study evolution. The approach of neo-evolutionism was introduced in the field of archeology. V. Gordon Childe, Leslie White and Julian Steward represent this school of thought. They defined social evolution with new perspective. Various new approaches to the study of evolution called attention to the question, how to combine particulars with general. The issue became sharpened by the writings of Marvin Harris who emphasised upon Radcliffe-Brown's earlier distinction between nomothetic and ideographic approach to the study of culture.

In between, Robert Redfield introduced the study of civilisation to social anthropology. Redfield developed the concepts of folk–urban continuum and great and little traditions which were very useful concepts for studying a civilisation and its various dimensions such as tribal, folk, semi-urban and urban. Thus, village, town and city studies were

introduced. The other scholars who contributed to this field are – Morris E. Opler, Milton Singer, Meckim Marriot, Mandel Baum etc.

Like any other discipline Anthropology has also been experiencing many new trends. In the theoretical dimensions many new theories like symbolism, new ethnography etc. have come up with new promises. This field has been continuously expanding with many other new theories and ideas. Along with this applied aspects, social anthropology has also been expanding. Developmental studies in social anthropology are occupying a major area. New field methods and techniques are also coming up enriching the research pattern. Ideas like postmodernism are creating new platform for the social anthropologists to explore. Several Anthropological sub-fields are coming up, stressing separate and specific cultural aspects and all using the prefix 'Ethno' to indicate their alliance with culture, such as ethno-science, ethno musicology, ethno-psychology, ethno-folklore and so forth. Thus, social anthropology has constantly been developing as a branch of Anthropology.

#### **1.2.4 Methods of Social Anthropology**

Social anthropology may be described as a scientific study of man, culture and society. The objective is to know the truth about the affairs of society. It seeks to develop skills so that human beings can live a better life. For this employment of scientific method is essential. If there is a science, there is certainly a method. Theory, method and data go together. Social anthropology has a well developed methodology for learning about society.

What is unique to social anthropology 'in the realm of Social Sciences' is its fieldwork methodology which is the guiding force of this discipline. Method is logic. What anthropologists do when they face a problem – they try to solve it logically. In short, they make a logical understanding for the problem. They argue how the problem can be approached logically so that the desired objective is fulfilled. It is this logic which leads to attainment of the objectives of logic to put forward the research problem. In short, method is the logic of inquiry; it is the role of accomplishing an end.

In social anthropological research fieldwork and empirical tradition have been constant characteristics of social anthropology. It started with the travel accounts written by the travelers who had been traveling to distant corners of the globe for about four hundred years, since 'the age of Columbus'. As already discussed, these travel accounts provided the basic data for the early social anthropologists. The facts gathered by these travelers, missionaries, and government officials were valuable to make the other Europeans aware about the varied human life on earth. Many European thinkers became interested about the non-European cultures and gradually 'study of man' was initiated basing on the accounts of travelers, missionaries and government officials.

The Anthropologists of nineteenth century were totally involved in exploring the variety of human culture but they were apart from the rigorous life of actual field. Sitting in their home they simply looked into the accounts served by other people. The value of fieldwork was realised at the beginning of twentieth century when the outlook of social anthropology changed. It was understood that experiencing the real life situation was very important for the social anthropologists, to get accurate and relevant data. So many anthropologists of this time engaged themselves with the groups of aborigines. E.B. Tylor was the first scholar who emphasised the need of direct data-collection in Anthropology, but Boas was the first to begin with this practice. The earliest attempt of professional data gathering, as mentioned previously,

was made in America by Franz Boas. He conducted Jessup North Pacific Expedition in 1897. The second attempt at fieldwork was made in England under joint leadership of Haddon, Rivers and Seligman in 1898. It is known as Cambridge Expedition to Torres Straits.

The most outstanding fieldwork tradition in Anthropology was developed by Malinowski. He believed that the various aspects in the life of people were interrelated. Malinowski also stressed on fieldwork as primary way of anthropological data gathering. According to Malinowski (1922 : 6), a cultural anthropologist must “possess real scientific aims and know the values and criteria of modern ethnography ... he has to apply a number of special methods of collecting, manipulating and fixing his evidence”. Malinowski established participation as an important technique of fieldwork. Next to Malinowski, we can put the name of A.R. Radcliffe–Brown who did extensive fieldwork in Andaman Islands.

The early fieldworkers tried to understand how all the parts of a society fit together to make a working whole. They emphasised on detailing. They tried to gather each and every information available on the field. They developed the habit of filling their notebooks with details of what they saw and heard, and those unprecedented ethnographic activities resulted into ethnographic monographs. As a matter of fact, a social anthropologist has to live and work in two worlds. Field becomes the laboratory where one collects data and leads a very different life living with the aborigines far away from his/her own world. Once he/she comes back from the field one sits with the gathered data and starts analysing those to come up with a conclusion.

Subjectivity became a big issue in this ethnographic description. Since social anthropology is an empirical discipline, it languishes for the absence of a deep respect for facts and for loose attention to their observation and description. A self-indulgent attitude may produce a disastrous effect. But, beyond all these, fieldwork became an essential part of social anthropology and the tradition developed with certain new methods and techniques making itself relevant to the present day context. Qualitative research that involves huge descriptive accounts has become very useful and important in today’s world. Not only Anthropology but also other disciplines like Sociology and Management studies have also indulged into this type of research. But fieldwork remains unique to social anthropology.

Fieldwork is a part of training in social-cultural anthropology. Every anthropologist should undergo this training in course of his/her preliminary study. It enables a student to perceive an alien culture with objectivity. Learning about two different societies (including his own) gives a student a comparative view i.e. he acquires competency to estimate the similarity or dissimilarity between any two societies or cultures. Comparative method holds a very important place in fieldwork tradition in Anthropology. During nineteenth century extensive comparisons were attempted by social anthropologists. This pertains to the whole society and also to particular institutions and practices such as kinship system, marriage practices, magical practices, and religious beliefs and so on.

There is a clear mark of history as a method in Anthropological monograph. There are two classical streams in social anthropology to the employment of history as a method of study. One use of history is non-chronological. The evolutionary Anthropologists used this kind of history as a method to study society. The second stream is Marxian.

Another important method in Anthropology is the functional method. Functionalism,

as a method of study in social anthropology, came up as a revolt against historical method. Interestingly, the evolutionary historicism came into disrepute owing to the emergence of empiricism. Empiricism is experience. When social anthropologists took to holistic studies through empiricism, functionalism came to be known as a new idiom of methodology. Functionalism advocated the holistic study of society through fieldwork.

New methods have been emerging in social anthropology with new demands in response to the new challenges. Techniques related to these methods are also changing. New techniques have also been designed to suit the methodological demands. The traditional techniques are – observation, schedules, questionnaire, interview, case study, survey, genealogy etc. With the new methods like ethnography, new techniques have been coming out. Emergence of new branches like developmental anthropology, visual anthropology etc. is also demanding new methodological framework. Like any other discipline Anthropology is also experiencing new dimensions with the passage of time. Methodological dimension is also not exclusive of such changes.

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## **1.3 NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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Generally speaking, social anthropology aims to study human society as a whole. It is a holistic study necessarily and covers all parts related to human society. Culture comes naturally under this, as it is an integral part of human society. So, the basic aim of social anthropology is to study human being as a social animal. Thus, to fulfill its aim it explores, in a broad area, covering almost every aspects of human social life.

The aim of modern social anthropology is just not to study human society but also to understand the complex issues of modern human life. As primitive people have been the focus of anthropological study, the problems faced by these people in the process of development in modern days become very important for the anthropologists to study. Anthropologists not only deal with the study of these problems but also try to find out a solution for this. Developmental anthropology and Action anthropology etc. are the specialised fields within social anthropology which deal with such problems. Therefore, we can say that the scope and aim of social anthropology go together; one influences the other. As much as the scope increases a new aim comes out of it.

### **1.3.1 Scope of Social Anthropology**

According to Evans–Pritchard (1966), social anthropology includes the study of all human cultures and society. In basic, it tries to find out the structure of human society. Social anthropology considers every human society as an organised whole. Customs, beliefs whole pattern of working, living, marrying, worshipping, political organisation – all these differ from society to society. As the structure and the idea working behind it are different, societies also vary a lot. Social anthropology first tries to find out these differences and then tries to establish the similarities as well. As we can see different cultures and societies, we also see similarity among these different cultures and societies. So, anthropologists study these differences as well as the similarities. Basically, the study revolves around the social structure. We can take up the example of studying religion. People in different parts of the world practice different religions. Every religion has different rituals to perform and people perform these rituals according to their own religious roles. The common thing among these different religions is the

belief in super-natural. So, both the differences and similarities become the study matter of social anthropology.

Evans-Pritchard, by comparing social anthropology with Sociology, states that Social anthropology has primitive society as its subject matter. In other words, it is concerned with the study of the primitives, indigenous people, hills and forest people, scheduled tribes and other such groups of people. Fieldwork is another integral part of social anthropology. Data in social anthropology are collected from the field. Thus, social anthropology can be defined in respect of two broad field of study – (1) Primitive Society (2) Fieldwork.

John Beattie (1964) advocated that social anthropologists should study other cultures. This makes Anthropology a comparative discipline of the study of social institutions. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1995) supports the study of small places in social anthropology. Eriksen says that social anthropology does not remain restricted to primitive people; it studies any social system and the qualification of such a social system is that it is of a small scale, non-industrial kind of society. According to Eriksen, social anthropology studies:

- 1) Small scale society
- 2) Non-industrial society
- 3) Small and larger issues of the society.

Different theoretical frameworks came out as social anthropology started exploring its matter of study– the primitive society. Morgan postulated Evolutionary theory and propounded the study of evolution in human society. According to him human society has come across three basic stages – savagery, barbarism and civilisation. With such evolutionary approach social anthropologists started examining human society in the light of evolution. The theoretical framework of structural – functionalism became a popular approach in Britain. The British anthropologists using the term Social anthropology have emphasised on the concept of society, which is aggregate of individuals who live in face to face association and share same common sentiments. Different social interrelationships and interactions are their object of study. Functionalism propounded the functional study of social institutions. On the other hand, American anthropologists preferring the term Cultural anthropology have concentrated on the concept of culture which is the sum total of human behaviour, verbal or non-verbal, and their products- material or non-material. Cultural anthropologists try to analyse each and every intervention and interrelationship by judging the value behind it.

The term civilisation was known to Anthropologists since the postulation of evolutionary theory, but it was the pioneering work of Robert Redfield, who brought a movement in the history of development of social anthropology by introducing the study of civilisation. He made study of folk villages and urban centers and attempted to understand the patterns and processes of interception between them. Thus, he developed the concept of folk society, urban society and folk–urban continuum. Since then the study of village as a unit of rural civilisation and town as a center for urban civilisation came into existence. Thus, Anthropology is not the study of primitive people only. The subject matter of social anthropology covers a vast area. It studies tribal society as well as urban society. It studies change as well. No culture and society regardless of circumstances, is beyond change. Isolated / primitive societies also change over time. Sometimes with due pressure of circumstances also society

does not change. It follows strictly a traditional path, constantly trying to keep alive the tradition. Social anthropology studies why or why not society/ culture changes. But, change is must, whether it is a remote and isolated village or industrialised city, everywhere people experience a variety of changes in their pattern of living, which is manifested with the passage of time.

The life of man 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 Social anthropology such as Economic anthropology, Political anthropology, Psychological anthropology, Anthropology of Religion and so on and so forth. Many new sub-branches are also coming up like – Communication and Visual anthropology, with the new demands of society. Social anthropology has to accommodate all the new changes in human society to maintain the relevance of its study. Thus, new areas would expand its field.

### **1.3.2 Future Perspective**

Anthropology has been playing a very important role in each and every sphere of human society. During colonial times, it was used as an administrative tool. Social anthropology came out of that colonial impression and now had created a new disciplinary path. As an academic discipline it has a firm theoretical base and unique practical dimension. In the near future also it is truly capable of accommodating disciplinary changes with new theoretical frameworks. Anthropology covers not only contemporary patterns of human life but also carefully records the changes in human society and life. It covers historic and prehistoric account of human life as well. So, it becomes very relevant for each and every stage of human civilisation.

Claude Levi-Strauss envisages the future of social anthropology as a study complete by itself in terms of communications between persons and groups. The study of communication, of words and symbols conveying meanings between persons in a society would constitute the study of linguistics, knowledge, art etc. The study of communication of spouses (man in matrilineal society and woman in patrilineal society) between various groups would constitute the study of marriage, kin groups and kinship usages. And communication of goods and services between persons and as also groups would constitute the scope of study of economic organisation and material culture. Thus, studies of human society may be studied not in terms of culture but in terms of structures which embody culture. Many such innovative ideas are coming up in the field of social anthropology and its scope is increasing in terms of both theory and practice.

### **1.3.3 Social Anthropology in India**

In the scenario of World Anthropology, Indian anthropology appears as very young. Andre Beteille (1996) used the term 'Indian Anthropology' to mean the study of society and culture in India by anthropologists, irrespective of their nationality. Indian society and culture are being studied by various Anthropologists from inside and outside of the country. However, Anthropology owes its origin to the latter half of the nineteenth century with the ethnographic compilation of traditions and beliefs of different tribes and castes in various provinces of India. It was only during the British colonial rule that Anthropological data was gathered. With no academic interest government officials and missionaries first collected some anthropological data in the eighteenth century. But, the motive behind this was not to study the Indian societies and cultures but to help the British administration for smooth governance. Missionaries had a religious motive. However, both the administrators and missionaries were

baffled when they came across various types of people having entirely different cultures. They tried to communicate their strange experience through writing, by describing the people and their facts. At the end of nineteenth century, the administrators and missionaries in India wrote a lot about the Indian people and their life. Trained British officials namely Risley, Dalton, Thurston, O'Malley, Russell, Crook, Mills etc. and many others who were posted in India, wrote compendia on tribes and castes of India. During this time some British anthropologists like Rivers, Seligman, Radcliffe-Brown, Hutton came to India and conducted Anthropological fieldwork. Throughout the whole century after this, Anthropologists in India proceeded successfully. Indian anthropologists borrowed the ideas, frameworks and procedures of work from western anthropologists and practiced these studying their own culture and society instead of other cultures.

Different scholars like S.C. Roy, D.N. Majumdar, G.S. Ghurye, S.C. Dube, N.K. Bose, L.P. Vidyarthi and S. Sinha had tried to find out the genesis and development of Social Anthropology in India. S.C. Roy's paper *Anthropological Researches in India* (1921) reflects upon the works on tribes and castes published before 1921. The anthropological accounts consisted of the writings of British administrators and missionaries as before 1921 anthropological work in India was mainly done by these people. After this, D.N. Majumdar tried to trace the development of Anthropology in India. This attempt was made after twenty five years of S.C. Roy's work. D.N. Majumdar tried to relate the developing discipline of Anthropology in India with the theory of culture that originated in Britain and America. American influence was first recognised besides the works of British administrators and missionaries.

G.S. Ghurye, in his article *The teaching of Sociology, Social Psychology and Social Anthropology* (1956), wrote, 'Social Anthropology in India has not kept pace with the developments in England, in Europe or in America. Although Social Anthropologists in India are, to some extent, familiar with the work of important British Anthropologists or some continental scholars, their knowledge of American Social Anthropology is not inadequate'. S.C. Dube in (1952) discussed the issue in the light of research oriented issues. He stated that Indian Anthropology needed more attention from the social workers, administrators or political leaders, so that the research oriented issues can be dealt with properly. N.K. Bose in 1963 discussed the progress of Anthropology in India under headings - Prehistoric Anthropology, Physical Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology. Recent trends like village studies, caste studies, study of leaderships and power structure, kinship and social organisation of tribal village and Applied Anthropology came to the Indian scenario in 1970s and L.P. Vidyarthi discussed these issues, tracing the growth of Anthropology in India. He felt the need of an integrated effect from various disciplines for a proper understanding of man and society. His main stress was laid on 'Indianess'. According to him ideas of Indian thinkers as reflected in ancient scriptures were full of social facts and so those could be explored in the understanding of cultural process and civilisation history of India. Surajit Sinha (1968) supporting the view of L. P. Vidyarthi stated that the Indian Anthropologists readily responded to the latest developments of the west but they had laid logical priority to the Indian situation.

In India, Anthropology started with the work of missionaries, traders and administrators where the prime focus was the different cultural backgrounds of Indian people. The rich tribal culture attracted the study of social anthropology. Tribal culture became a dominant field for Social anthropological research. This continued along with the changing trend and accommodated the study of village system, and Indian civilisation. Other social institutions like – religion, kinship, marriage etc. also came to the field

of research. The variety of customs and diversity of Indian culture created a unique area of research among the social anthropologists of India. Different ideas like dominant caste, sacred complex, tribe-caste continuum, little and great tradition, sankritisation etc. came up, giving a new direction to Indian Anthropology. Thus, a body of strong Indian anthropological thought was created. Development of Indian anthropology is continuing with additions of new ideas. Emerging areas like ecology, developmental study etc., are also coming up. Anthropologists in India take keen interest in tribal studies. The new challenges in the era of globalisation are also coming up and Indian social anthropologists are focusing on that.

### 1.3.4 Present Scenario

After independence India faced new challenges of social reform, as a new government took charge. The whole notion of Indian culture had to be rebuilt, as diverse culture areas had come under one roof. Various tribal societies and cultures were unable to cope up with this changing situation. Apart from administrative policies, Indian social anthropologists took initiatives to overcome such crisis and showed interest in the study of diverse cultures in India under the common roof of Indian civilisation. Government policies were influenced with these social anthropological works as these works dealt with the sensitive issues like tribal development. This trend continues in the field of Indian anthropology. Today, in the era of globalisation, social anthropologists in India deal with the new challenges in front of the tribal communities. Identity and gender issues are popular among them, along with development studies. Study of folk culture occupies a major area. With development studies, issues like tribal displacement and rehabilitation have also been a prime focus for social anthropologists. Tribal art, study of indigenous knowledge system etc. are gaining popularity with the new global issues like – global warming.

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## 1.4 SUMMARY

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In this unit the focus was on how social anthropology has developed as a discipline covering the different aspects of human life. Social anthropology thus, developed through various time periods with various goals and perspectives and it has covered almost all the aspects of human life.

You learnt about different theoretical frameworks of social anthropology. Along with these theoretical frameworks, how social anthropology deals with the various issues of human life was also discussed. Different approaches have also been discussed considering the geographical variations.

Present and future scenario of social anthropology have also been discussed. You would be able to conceptualise about the Indian and world scenario of social anthropology after going through this unit.

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### **Sample Questions**

- 1) Describe the history and development of social anthropology.
- 2) How social anthropology has developed in India?
- 3) Briefly describe the aim and scope of social anthropology.
- 4) Describe history as a method in social anthropology.