

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white dress adorned with a dense pattern of yellow and green flowers, is the central figure. She has her eyes closed and a serene expression as water is poured over her face from a dark brown ceramic bowl held by a hand in a gold-colored sleeve. The background is a rustic wooden fence with green vines. The overall mood is peaceful and ceremonial.

HELLO ANTHROPOLOGY

VIDYA MARG

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Originally written for students of Vidya Marg as a support text for our classroom program. But, for general interest, we have decided to release a free PDF version of this text through our website and telegram channel, even for students who have not enrolled for Vidya Marg courses.

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Please note that this edition is a draft edition, and so it will go through rapid changes (including corrections) before we release final version of the document.

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Note: We have put in full effort to make every information in this book correct, but, some errors might have crept in. In those cases, please write back to us.

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Cover image story: Anthropology is all about understating people. So, we included a picture of Javanese marriage custom. The beautiful lady is going through a ritual before marriage.

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PREFACE

This book is written purely for UPSC optional perspective. So, we will try to stick to the UPSC Civil services syllabus.

POINTS TO NOTE

Sometimes, we will pick some quotes and definitions from other materials. Those will be presented as *italics*, along with their source. As and when the author feels that someone has done a better job of explaining the topic, the author will humbly accept his limitations and point you to those sources. Consider these sections mandatory.

The definitions that we borrow from scholars, will be primarily presented along with the scholar's name only. Learning a topic from multiple scholar's perspective is essential to understanding that topic. Hence, you are supposed to take these definitions very seriously and revise them regularly. While writing answers, you are supposed to include these definitions as and when you find them appropriate.

Boxed contents help in understanding the subject better, but they are purely optional.

1. WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY?

Anthropology comes from two greek terms, *anthropos* for man and *logos* for study. Going by the term, it is the study of man.

Anthropology seeks answer to wide variety of questions about humans. For example, Why did humans appear on earth? When did they appear? Where did they appear? How did they appear? How have humans evolved, culturally and biologically? What is the correlation between cultural and biological evolution?

Anthropology not only seeks answer to general questions involving entire humanity, it also seeks answer to questions involving specific human population. It studies variations among different populations and why they came into being? For example, it studies why certain population has certain physical features? Why certain population show high occurrence of a particular disease such as sickle cell anaemia? It tries to understand why a tradition exists and it exists for so long, and how those traditions have evolved?

It doesn't stop there, it tries to find answers to why and how different population interact and the way they do? And how the interaction is like? For example, interaction between tribals and not tribal village folks.

The very of Anthropology has not been constant, it has gone a lot of change since it was envisioned the very first time.

Since Anthropology is about understanding humans, it is of use in solving practical problems too. For example, if government is formulating policies for tribal people, Anthropologists may be the best people to act as channel of communication so that the interests of no side is ignored.

There are several fields that study humans, such as sociology, psychology, medicine etc, but they all have study humans from a singular perspective, whereas Anthropology study humans from a holistic point of view.

Anthropology is a discipline that studies humans, focussing on the study of differences and similarities, both biological and cultural, in human populations. Anthropology is concerned with typical biological and cultural characteristics of human populations in all periods and in all parts of the world. - Ember and Ember

Paul Broca defined Anthropology as, "*the study of the human group, considered as a whole, in its details, and in relation to the rest of the nature*"

Since, Anthropology is a subject of infinite curiosity, no one definition can be preferred over others. Hence, we study how different scholars have defined it. This is true not only about how we define Anthropology, but about every single that we study in Anthropology. Studying Anthropology is like building your own perspective about humans, and this perspective ought to continuously evolve as we keep getting introduced to perspective of others.

HOW NOT TO STUDY ANTHROPOLOGY?

Anthropology exposes us to a variety of human aspects, their cultures and customs. Its very easy to get judgemental towards others. For example, when exposed to fact such as Chinese foot binding or Nayar marriages, a care has to be taken that we don't judge, rather we understand.

By thinking of ourselves as superior or inferior, or better or worse, we defeat the very purpose of Anthropology. When Europeans thought that it is white man's burden to civilise everyone, they destroyed much of world's indigenous cultures.

Anthropology doesn't mean inaction, rather it calls for action, but not with a feeling of superiority or a sense of judgement.

We will study this in detail later.

SCOPE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

People generally think of Anthropologists as someone who study exotic people and uncover little known secrets about origin of humans by digging out fossils and structures of earlier civilisations such Indus Valley Civilisation. This is true, but not the whole truth.

As already mentioned, Anthropology is a subject of infinite curiosity in humans, it is much broader than what the stereotypes suggest. Anthropology involves studying people spread across all geographical locations and across all historical periods. A person living in a city nearest to you, or a person who is a member of a tribe living in innermost jungle of Andaman, they are all studied in Anthropology. But, this study is not limited to today's time period, Anthropology is concerned with what their ancestors were like and what were their living conditions. When we say ancestors, we don't just mean their immediate ancestors, we also mean their ancestors few hundred years ago, and a few thousand years ago, and also a few million years ago.

And this going back in ancestry doesn't stop at their human ancestors, we go beyond that. Anthropologists study, how our non *homo sapiens* ancestors were like, how they were impacted by their environment.

Anthropologists try to answer modern day questions like impact of feminism on society, or the impact of urbanisation. Anthropology tries to answer questions like how religion came into being, and how religions impact us, and also how we impact religion. Anthropologists doesn't dismiss magic practitioners as superstition, instead they study their impact on humans.

Anthropologists try to understand and explain our food preferences. Not every population is fond of drinking milk. Case in point being African American population, they lack the necessary enzyme after a certain age to digest milk, and hence their lack on interest. Contrast it with Indian population, where milk is considered central to our nutrition.

As you can now see, scope of Anthropology is very broad. It touches all aspects of human being. It is important to note that this comprehensive nature of Anthropology was not there since the emergence of the discipline.

HOLISTIC NATURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

As is evident from the previous section, Anthropology is worldwide and historical in its approach. That explains the breadth of the problem that Anthropologists seek to answer. In this section, we will see if we are fixated on seeking answer to a particular problem, how we will go on to seek the answer to that problem.

There are a lot of disciplines that study human beings, for example biology or psychology. But, every other discipline seeks answer to a problem using one particular perspective. Biologists will explain something from one particular angle, and a scholar of anatomy will do so from the angle of his own discipline, and so will the Psychologists do.

But Anthropologists try to combine the perspective of all disciplines to answer a problem. Because Anthropology is comprehensive study of humans, it has to be holistic, otherwise it will loose its essence.

So, when an Anthropologist describe a group of people, or you can say when they present an ethnographic profile of a group of people, they include things like location, economy, family system, physical environment, history of the area, general features of their language, political systems, religion, settlement patterns, their problems, legal aspects of the problem that they face wrt local govt's rule, their art and dressing patterns.