BLOCK 2
EMERGENCE OF FIELDWORK TRADITION

UNIT 4
Historical Particularism and Critique of Comparative Method

UNIT 5
American Cultural Tradition

UNIT 6
Cultural Materialism

UNIT 4 HISTORICAL PARTICULARISM AND CRITIQUE OF COMPARATIVE METHOD*

Contents

Learning Objectives

In this unit the learners would be acquainted with:

➢ the universal evolutionary thought that lead to the discipline of anthropology taking a racist directionand how the comparative method contributed to the same;

➢ Franz Boas'scritique of the comparative method and the various concepts proposed by him to understand culture of specific communities in holistic terms;

➢ why Boas insisted on the need for fieldwork to collect information of a culture from a holistic perspective and created an academic culture that carried this thought forward; and

➢ the reasons why the thinking of Franz Boas was critiqued by other scholars.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Historical particularism is a concept which was developed by American anthropologist Franz Boas. He was among the key anthropologists who introduced the idea that culture was what differed between different kinds of people separated by race and ethnicity, and there were no inherent biological or irreducible differences between humans of any kind. He explained that all cultures are unique and cannot be compared to each other in hierarchical perspectives, as each is a product of its own historical development. Historical particularism was coupled with the ideas of diffusion and cultural relativism, and was advocated through extensive field work within anthropology.

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* Contributor: Dr. Indrani Mukherjee, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. Delhi.

Historical particularism postulates that each culture has its own particular and unique history and anthropologists need to trace the historical development of specific cultures rather than attempt the construction of a grand evolutionary schema. As Boas focused on the specific histories of individual societies, his approach to anthropology is called historical particularism. Though Boas provided the concept of historical particularism, he did not coin the term. The term 'historical particularism' was coined by Marvin Harris in 1968.

In his paper 'The Aims of Anthropological Research' Boas explains that the objective of anthropology is "to understand the steps by which man has come to be what he is, biologically, psychologically and culturally. Thus, it appears at once that our material must necessarily be historical material, historical in the widest sense of the term. It must include the history of the development of the bodily form of man, his physiological functions, mind and culture. We need a knowledge of the chronological succession of forms and an insight into the conditions under which changes occur. Without such data progress seems impossible and the fundamental question arises as to how such data can be obtained" (Boas, 1932: 605). With this Boas points out two of his key concerns a) that there needs to be a specific focus on how human (within a culture) has come into being and b) there is need to device a method of collection of this information.

In his quest of exploring cultural history, Boas said that "the material for the reconstruction of culture is …. fragmentary because the largest and most important aspects of culture leave no trace in the soil; language, social organisation, religion- in short, everything that is not material-vanishes with the life of each generation. Historical information is available only for the most recent phases of cultural life and is confined to those peoples who had the art of writing and whose records we can read. Even this information is insufficient because many aspects of culture find no expression in literature" (Boas, 1932: 608). In addition to this, he feared that the exposure to colonising forces was drastically affecting indigenous people. He thus believed that it was of utmost importance to gather all possible information about cultures that might become extinct due to assimilation or acculturation. He emphasised on the documentation of the nuances of a culture, so that even when the culture's customs, beliefs and rituals were no longer being practiced they would still be preserved through time, in the anthropological archives, for future reference.

In order to understand the concept of historical particularism better let us first learn a little about the history of the discipline of Anthropology and the context in which historical particularism developed.

4.1 HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF THOUGHT

Anthropology achieved disciplinary identity around 1860-90. The 'evolutionists',who were the classical thinkers among anthropologists, were indoctrinated by the Enlightenment's conception of a science of universal history. Using the comparative method, they attempted to sketch in the details of the evolutionary sequences of society and culture. Historical particularism developed as a critique to the theory of uni-linear evolution.

4.1.1 Classical Evolutionary Theory

Evolutionists endeavoured to provide the first systematic methods of explaining human societies. Europe had conducted explorations all around the world and were conquering and colonising different reaches of the world. These expeditions lead to exposure to different societies and cultures. As information on different types of societies started pouring in, scholars tried to assimilate this information and classify them for some kind of an understanding of the variations that they saw. The scholars were influenced by the academic thinking of the time which favoured evolution as a concept as well as the comparative method of science. They posited their evolutionary theory based on the concept of 'psychic unity of mind', according to which the human mind shares similar characteristics all over the world, thus all societies go through an identical process of development. It was postulated that the differences in the societies can be explained by assuming that spatially dispersed contemporary societies are at different stages of cultural evolution. The comparative method was utilised to compare cultural traits of contemporary societies which implied that the relative progress of individual societies could be assessed in comparison with other societies in order to determine the level of sociocultural advancement that had been attained. To construct this scale the evolutionists (primarily European males) assumed that the western societies, which were dominant because of their military and economic power against technologically simple societies, were at the peak of development.

4.1.2 Critique of the Evolutionary School and its Comparative Method

The term 'primitive' in the evolutionary trajectory sealed the outlook with which the western society judged the 'other' cultures. The unilinear evolutionary schema was not only based on technological advancement, but carried with itself the additional burden of a racist undertone by the very tacit understanding of what was considered as 'civilized'. As Stocking points out, the 'civilized' western society was characterised by its social behaviour/ culture which was "associated with the progressive accumulation of the characteristic manifestations of human creativity: art, science, knowledge, refinement" (Stocking, 1966:870). These encompassed every facet of life including the basics of how to sit, talk, eat, dress, carry yourself, to what art was considered fashionable to the politics of knowledge creation, "those things that freed man from control by nature, by environment, by reflex, by instinct, by habit" (Stocking, 1966:870). Thus, the societies that were seen as closer to nature and geared towards what was naturally instinctive were looked down upon, characterised as backwards, associated with a lower evolutionary status and frequently argued in racial terms (Stocking, 1966). Boas was among the first anthropologists to speak out against this discriminatory framework. According to Boas, societies cannot be categorised as 'savage' or 'civilized'. This approach follows a kind of belittling.

Franz Boas began his work in Anthropology with the Kwakiutl Indians of Northern Vancouver and British Columbia in Canada. In studying this indigenous group, Boas was convinced that all people have equally developed cultures. He writes, "The more I see their customs, the more I realise that we have no right to look down on them. Where amongst our people would you find such true hospitality? ….. We "highly educated people" are much worse, relatively speaking". [This is a quote from Boas's Baffinland diaries (Diah et al, 2014:159)]. Boas's contribution

was noteworthy as he logically criticised the ethnocentrism (belief that one's own culture is more valuable or better than another).

Boas maintained that the sweeping generalisations of the unilineal social evolutionists were hypothetical and not scientifically valid. He discredited the comparative method utilised by the unilineal evolutionary schemes and argued that cultures cannot be compared or be subjected to generalities because each culture experienced a different and unique history, even if it led to a similar cultural product. He said that before extended comparisons are made, the comparability of the material must be proved.

In his paper "The Limitations of the Comparative Method in Anthropology" (1896), Boas argued against the indiscriminate comparison of cultures simply because they have similarities. He gave examples to clarify that cultures may have similar traits for a variety of reasons, including diffusion and trade. He further pointed out that corresponding environments or historical accident may also produce similar cultural traits independent of any universal evolutionary process. Thus, he said that the existence of such traits could not be used as evidence for universal stages of cultural evolution (MacGee and Warms, 2003).

The evolutionists compared contemporary societies (which were geographically isolated from each other), with historical data, archaeological finds, cultural remnants/ survivals (cultural traits that were dying out) etc. Boas pointed out the incomparability of such material. He especially critiques the use of such data in the evolutionary comparative scheme as used by the classical evolutionists, mentioning that "historic and prehistoric data give us little or no information on the biological development of the human mind" (Boas, 1932: 608).While evolutionists spoke of the 'psychic unity of human kind' in order to explain the unilinear evolution, in the presentation of their schema they put the so called lesser developed cultures into the status of 'organic mental inferiority' or mentally less evolved than the more advanced cultures, by default. This was done with the help of existing prehistoric and historical artefacts and comparing them with present day existing societies which were still either using these artefacts or following the customs. Boas argued that cultures cannot be classified as biologically or mentally inferior based on incompetent comparisons used to validate the already existing racist notions of the evolutionists.   He says that "we find in modern times isolated tribes living in a way that may very well be paralleled with early conditions. A comparison of the psychic life of these groups does not justify the belief that their industrial backwardness is due to a difference in the types of organism, for we find numbers of closely related races on the most diverse levels of cultural status" (Boas, 1932: 608). Boas points out that the present times have all kinds of societies, some of these are industrially backwards, however it does not point towards any kind of biological or psychic inferiority. Further, one finds racial groups which are biologically closely associated to have branched out into diverse culture. With this, Boas critiques the use of un-contextual archaeological and historical data in a comparative framework.

Boas combated racism the majority of his life. He expressed in his ideals in his Baffin Island letter-diary. He spoke out against World War I, and the resulting xenophobia and jingoism the war had triggered in America. A staunch champion of the rights of immigrants and African Americans, he fought against the poll tax, racial discrimination, the intimidation of teachers in colleges and high schools, and the rise of Nazism in Europe. Boas was deeply involved in the early years of

the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He contributed the lead article for the second issue of that organisation's journal, 'The Crisis,' and spoke out on the subject of race and racism repeatedly throughout.

Thus, evolutionists were critiqued on their comparative method based on a) its ethnocentric approach and b) the incomparability of the cultural material used. However, these critiques brought to the forefront certain other exploratory aspects namely that each culture is a product of a unique history. Also, that these cultural trajectories were not governed by any universal evolutionary pattern, but were responses to various stimuli, including adjustment to environment, sudden innovation, diffusion and so on. In the next section we will explore how these realisations influenced the discipline of anthropology.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Why did Franz Boas consider the documenting of culture as urgent and imperative?

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2) Discuss how the Cultural Historical Approach developed as a critique of the evolutionary theory?

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4.2 FRANZ BOAS'S INFLUENCE ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Boas suggests an alternative to the generalisations of the comparative method. Rather than following a 'nomothetic' (generalised) approach, Boas encouraged the anthropologists to follow an 'idiographic' (dealing with particular/ specific cases) approach (Langness 1974; 57). In his paper 'The Limitations of the Comparative Method in Anthropology', Boas advocates that anthropologists need to conduct a detailed study of customs in relation to the relevance of these customs to the total culture of the tribe practicing them. These customs, he says, also need to be studied and investigated in connection with an understanding of their geographical distribution among neighbouring tribes. This kind of a holistic approach towards investigating culture and customs as well as their contiguousness, could help determine with considerable accuracy the historical causes that led to the formation of the customs in question and to the psychological processes that were at work in their development. The results of inquiries

conducted by this method, he said may be three-fold. "They may reveal the environmental conditions which have created or modified cultural elements; they may clear up psychological factors which are at work in shaping the culture; or they may bring before our eyes the effects that historical connections have had upon the growth of the culture" (Boas, 1896:905). Highlighting certain aspects of this dialogue can help us understand some key concepts that Boas proposed:

a)   'total culture of the tribe' and 'psychological processes' which are reflective of cultural particularism.

b)   'connection with other tribes' bringing in the idea of diffusion and

c)   "historical causes that led to the formation" reflecting on historical particularism.

Let us discuss these concepts in greater details:

4.2.1   Historical Particularism

Boas distantly differentiated his historic method from the comparative method where he says that one is careful and slow detailed study of local phenomena while the other was indiscriminate use of similarities of culture for proving historical connection. He says that there is need for through and comprehensive examination of the 'continuity of distribution' of customs and traits that are common to neighbouring and contiguous communities and tribes. This kind of an examination would help in proving historical connection between commonality of practices. However, he cautioned against the assumption of lost connecting links and advised that it must be applied most sparingly so as to avoid conjectures. Boas believed that to explain cultural customs, one must examine them from three fundamental perspectives: the environmental conditions under which they developed, psychological factors, and historical connections. He points out that "the apparent stability of primitive types of culture is due to our lack of historical perspective. They change much more slowly than our modern civilization, but wherever archaeological evidence is available we do find changes in time and space. A careful investigation shows that those features that are assumed as almost absolutely stable are constantly undergoing changes. Some details may remain for a long time, but the general complex of culture cannot be assumed to retain its character for a very long span of time" (Boas 1932: 609).The function of the historical method of anthropology is thus seen to lie in its ability to discover the processes which in definite cases led to the development of certain customs. Boas insisted that the focus should be on 'discovering the inner dynamic of change' and why a culture took a particular direction. Thus, historical particularism of culture focuses on the explanation of not only what happened and where but also why and how of different aspects of a specific society.

4.2.2   Diffusion

Boas includes the idea of diffusion in his historical method. We have seen in the previous sections that Boas speaks about the interconnections between cultural groups in the development of cultural history.

While Boas does talk about environmental influence on the historical development of a culture, he believes that this developmental history is difficult to trace due to the influence of diffusion. Boas points out that "inter marriages, war, slavery,

trade, have been so many sources of constant introduction of foreign cultural elements, so that an assimilation of culture must have taken place over continuous areas" (Boas 1896: 905). Boas tried to bring to the forefront the fact that while there might be similarities in the cultural development of neighbouring tribes due to environmental similarities there might also be other influencing social factors in the history of these tribes which might have influenced them differently as well as in isolation from each other. He thus, believed that it is equally important to trace the development of separate cultural traits in order to understand the differential effects of diffusion on neighbouring tribes as well as their unique cultural history.

Boas visualises an understanding of diffusion as an integral part of historical particularism in the understanding of a culture, however he does admit to the difficulties it might pose. He explains that in studying the distribution of cultural traits in a geographical area with similar traits and customs, it might not necessarily be easy to determine the direction of diffusion, especially because one has to examine both diffusion as well as the composite of the development of customs and traits within a particular culture (in a chronological order). Simultaneously he cautions that one cannot take for granted that an area rich in a particular cultural trait signifies that it is the place of origin of that cultural trait. He points out that it is possible that complex customs and traits might have emerged from one place and were simply adopted by neighbouring communities, or that a simple trait might have been adopted by neighbouring communities and developed into more complex forms over time. However, Boas reiterates that "the study of geographical distribution of cultural phenomena offers a means of determining their diffusion" (Boas 1932: 608). He, insisted that though difficult to construct, the historical particularities of cultural customs and traits will help understand the 'logic' of their development within a culture, i.e., the factors that influenced the direction of development.Thus, while Boas discusses a need to understand diffusion, his historical particularistic approach concentrated on its contribution to the understanding of a particular culture. This perspective of understanding a culture in itself was developed further by Boas's students. Boas thus, laid the groundwork for the concept of cultural relativism.

4.2.3 Cultural Relativism

The concept of cultural relativism was important in countering the ethnocentrism of the evolutionist school. Cultural relativism explained that each culture is said to constitute a total social world that reproduces itself through enculturation (the process by which values, emotional dispositions, and embodied behaviours are transmitted from one generation to the next). These values and practices are usually perceived by members of a society as uniquely satisfying and superior to all others, hence one can assume a universality of ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism creates an understanding that there are many cultures in the world and that each culture has its own values, beliefs, and practices that have been developed over time in a particular context, and that none of the cultures are necessarily wrong or right. Each culture must be seen as '*sui generis*', offering a satisfying way of life, however repugnant or outlandish particular aspects of it may seem to outsiders.

Boas said that Culture is integrated, and with this he laid the foundation stone of cultural relativism.   In his paper 'The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart' (in context of display of ethnographic data at the national museum)

Boas writes, that ethnographic collections should be "arranged according to tribes, in order to teach the peculiar style of each group. The art and characteristic style of a people can be understood only by studying its productions as a whole" (Boas1887: 486). Franz Boas argued that detailed studies of particular societies had to consider the entire range of cultural behaviour, and thus the concepts of anthropological holism and cultural particularism became twin tenets of American anthropology (Moore 2009). 'Holism' for Boas was that a culture should be treated as a unified system; it referred to the importance of understanding a particular phase or pattern in relation to its entire relevant cultural background. Further, Boas described the need to study psychological processes to understand how a society developed, in this it is important to note that he described psychology as 'the native point of view', explaining that understandings are relative to enculturation thus ethnographer must interpret a culture on the basis of its own 'internal web of logic' (Brown 2008).

Boas in his conceptualisation of historical particularism proposed a method of exploring "how the culture of each group of human came to be what it is". In this he emphasised that one needs to understand the internal logic of the people being explored, highlighting that culture as an integrated whole. Environment, diffusion, acculturation etc. were seen as exposures that lead to cultural change, however it was maintained that the internal dynamics of the culture is the key to the direction that development takes. Thus, arose the significance of cultural relativism that, cultural material has to be understood within its cultural context.

The recognition of the need to collect cultural material in a cultural context propelled Boas to promote the tradition of fieldwork within anthropology. Just like Historical particularism was critique to the comparative method so was its procedure of data collection.

Check Your Progress 2

3) Define Historical Particularism.

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4) Discuss cultural relativism.

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4.3 FRANZ BOAS'S INFLUENCE ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

We have already discussed in the introductory section that according to Boas one of the key concerns of anthropological research was the collection of data. Boasian anthropology was, among other things, a reaction to the classical evolutionary school of thought, and their competitive method. Boas felt that evolutionists made premature generalisations based on poor and inadequate information. This information was obtained, not from a qualified researcher, but rather from individuals "who often had only a biased, superficial understanding of the people they were observing" and provided more conjecture than fact (Barnouw 1971:39).

In order to overcome these biases Boas used a four-field approach in his fieldwork (cultural, archaeology, physical/biological, and linguistics) to ascertain the collection of proper information in the proper context. Boas believed that anthropologists needed to ground their arguments with empirical evidence. He highlighted the importance of comprehensive and detailed fieldwork and conducted several fieldtrips over his lifetime. Boas insisted that meticulous collection of ethnographic data by a properly trained researcher is paramount to understanding the material in its correct and intended format. During his initial commentary on field work it looked like Boas believed that the individual has very little influence on the whole. Here he emphasised that the researcher needed to collect information through observations of the perspective of those being studied, however he changed this view in his later discourses claiming that whether or not the person was "typical" to his/her society, the society or culture therein has boundaries set up to keep individuals within the norms of what is and what is not acceptable to them. Boas used this as a crutch supporting his view on the collection of data from informants. He felt that he could obtain all the knowledge needed to understand a culture from a few key people. (Goldschmidt 1959). Boas trained a number of students in his methodological perspective creating an academic environment which believed in the importance of intensive fieldwork. Some of Boas's influential students include Alfred L. Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Robert Lowie, Paul Radin and Edward Sapir and Boas's legacy is evident in the myriad of their works and theorisations.

Check Your Progress 3

5) Did Franz Boas have an impact on anthropological fieldwork?

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6) Discuss how Franz Boas influenced the conduct of anthropological fieldwork.

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4.4   A CRITIQUE OF FRANZ BOAS'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Boas did not technically leave behind a 'school of thought'. Boas's students argued that this was not the case; he recognised the need for new theoretical perspectives but believed that more general theories of human behaviour would become obvious once enough data had been collected. Boas's refusal to theorise about anthropological laws, was seen as a detriment to the field, to the extent that he was perceived as anti-theoretical, by some of his contemporaries. Boas was also criticised on his duration of fieldwork cause though he conducted several fieldtrips in his life, he did not stay in the field for long periods of time.

Further, Boas critiqued standardised anthropological data of not examining the individual of society as an entity of concern. He felt that within the individual lies the true interpretation of human behaviour. Boas opined that the anthropological focus remains on customary behaviour, and in that it neglects or pays little attention to the understanding of the relation between individual and his culture. It misses out on perceiving both how individual reacts to culture and how individual changes culture. Boas in turn was critiqued by his student Alfred Kroeber for this line of thought and his focus on individuals during research. Kroeber did not believe in this idea as he considered culture was all pervasive.

Kroeber also differed from Boas'sthought that anthropology was ultimately a discipline devoted to the study of humankind's origins. Inspite of these differences Kroeber and his other students continued to carry forward and developed Boas's concepts of historical particularism and cultural relativism, as well as contributed significantly to anthropological theory. Inspite of critique Boas left behind an academic tradition of fieldwork and a significant contribution to anthropological thought.

Check Your Progress 4

7)   Examine the critiques of Franz Boas anthropological thoughts.

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4.5   SUMMARY

Historical particularism marks a significant point in the history of anthropology, as it changes the direction of the discipline from its racial past, and establishes the recognition that all cultures are equally developed.This concept agrees with the need to study social development however it discredits the comparative method used by the evolutionists as ethnocentric, hypothetical and non-scientific (in terms of comparability of material). Historical particularism goes hand in hand with the concepts of diffusion and cultural relativism aspiring for a holistic approach towards understanding culture. It speaks of a shift from nomothetic approach (generalised and broad based), to an 'idiographic' (dealing with particular/ specific

cases) approach, especially cause it recognises a dearth of (holistic) cultural data as well as the need to document vanishing cultures.

Boas's inclusion of the concepts of environment and individual psychology in the cultural historical approach paved the way for the development of two approaches: (a) the cultural ecological and (b) culture and personality in anthropology. American anthropology therefore developed diverse branches, moving away from the closed system approach of the British school. Later developments include a full fledged psychological anthropology, historical anthropology and medical anthropology among others.

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4.7   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1)   Refer to section 4.1

2)   Refer to section 4.1

3)   Refer to section 4.2.1

4)   Refer to section 4.2.3

5)   Refer to section 4.3

6)   Refer to section 4.3

7)   Refer to section 4.4

UNIT 5   AMERICAN CULTURAL TRADITION*

Contents

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5.4   Summary

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5.6   Answers to Check Your Progress

Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

➢   understand the key concepts in the Culture Personality school;

➢   comprehend the impact of Culture on Personality formation; and

➢   relate how Culture and Personality influence each other.

5.0   INTRODUCTION

By now the learners are well versed with the meaning of Culture and its role in society (see BANC 102 Unit 4 and 5). In this unit our emphasis would be on the development of personality within a culture. We shall discuss about the role a culture plays in the development of a personality, with emphasis on the group rather than individual. The unit would acquaint the learners with the Culture Personality school within the domain of anthropology, its growth and development and the key contributors and their work. While reading this unit the learners should also be able to discuss how culture and personality impact each other.

5.1   HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND FEW CONCEPTS

In the United States, in the early twentieth century under the vision of Franz Boas (1858- 1942), his students developed the Culture and Personality school of thought which focussed on the inter-relationships between culture and personality. Attempts were made to study culture as it is embodied in the character of its members and examined how humans acquired culture and also studied culture's effect on one's personality.

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*Contributor: Dr Gunjan Arora, Post- Doctoral Fellow, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Boasian influence:

Franz Boas(1858-1942) was a German physicist who following a research expedition to Baffin Islands in Canada switched to Geography and then to Anthropology. He strongly critiqued classical cultural evolutionism and the Comparative method. He was a prolific scholar publishing more than 700 articles and books. He was an ardent empiricist and rigorously recorded as much information as possible about the Native North American cultures. His approach has been called 'Historical Particularism'; 'historical' because he described the present in terms of the past and 'particular' because he considered the history of each culture to be unique (Erickson and Murphy 2008).

He opined that the task of Anthropology was to study empirically the disappearing Native cultures and the rigorous fieldwork was the key to attain an in-depth knowledge of the cultures world-over. He emphasised studying the diversity of cultures, to understand cultures in their terms and their historical contexts. The Boasian paradigm offered a new dimension to the study of culture with two major strands one being historical i.e., studying the distribution of cultural traits, and the other being psychological i.e., what makes individual minds different in different cultures. These two threads were picked up by his students like Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, M.Herskovits, Edward Sapir, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict in a different manner. It was during the 1920s and 1930's that the psychological thread gained prominence which was also influenced by psychoanalysis and Gestalt psychology. Those who followed this Boasian strand later came to be known as the proponents of Culture and Personality school and included Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Ralph Linton. Both Mead's and Benedict's work were concentrated on the relationship between the psychological (personality, emotion, character) and the cultural conditions (socialisation, gender roles and values).

Before dealing with the theories of Culture and Personality school it is essential to understand these terms. E.B. Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture (*1871) gave the first comprehensive definition, but there are over 300 definitions of 'culture' in Anthropology. The simplest way to express or define culture is, any knowledge that an individual acquires as a member of his/her society.The term 'acquired' is the keyword in this definition as it denotes that culture is the product of social learning rather than of biological heredity. It, therefore, includes all the socially learned behaviour.

The word 'personality' comes from the Latin word *persona* which literally means mask or character. Ralph Linton in his book *Cultural Background of Personality* (1945) defines personality as the organised aggregates of habits that have been established in the individual to form the bulk of personality and give it form, structure and continuity. He defined personality in relation to habits and he is of the view that every society has a basic culture and all its members undergo a similar process of socialisation and share similar customs, beliefs and traditions. And therefore, a common pattern in the behaviour of the member of that group is visible.

Other determinants that are believed to affect the personality of an individual are heredity, environment, and experience. When a child is born into a group, he carries the genes and traits from his/her parents. The child resembles his/her

parents in physical appearance and intelligence and it is said that they have common heredity.

The environment too plays an important role in determining the personality construction, for instance, people living in the Himalayan region in India have different cultural practices, varied food habits, and different personalities than those residing in the plain region. Occupations and lifestyles are influenced by the habitat and to some extent affect personality development.

But an individual who lives in society also has his own set of unique experiences in life and these life experiences also mould one's personality. Family members, siblings, peers play a crucial role in the overall personality development of the child through daily interactions and reciprocal experiences that are incorporated within the early childhood experiences.

It thus appears that personality is a blend of mainly four factors i.e., physical environment, heredity, culture, and particular life experiences. However, the relative contribution of each factor towards the overall development of the personality of an individual varies.

Before we go further and discuss the individual theorists of this school in detail it is essential to understand the influence of the discipline of Psychology on Culture and Personality studies. Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict were both aware of Freudian psychology and found elements of Freudian theory appealing, especially his theory of the influence of early childhood experiences on the adult personality, even as they critiqued and rejected most of Freud's ideas as speculative, overly generalised, evolutionary and sexist.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is well known for his thesis on the origin of totems, incest taboo, exogamy and the Oedipus complex. Freud's major work was on psychoanalysis and it was an attempt to uncover the repressed feelings an adult had due to the trauma he/she faced during childhood. He developed the Oedipus complex theory according to which a son is jealous of his father's attention on his mother; develops a hostile nature towards his father and an erotic attachment with his mother. Freud established this Oedipus complex as a universal story rooted in human sexuality but also the heterosexual, patriarchal, nuclear family, so characteristic of the West. It was Malinowski who tested this hypothesis among the matrilineal Trobriand society (1922) and rejected the universality of Oedipus complex theory. Malinowski in his work among the matrilineal South Pacific Trobriand Islanders demonstrated that the Oedipus complex was irrelevant because in their kinship system it was the mother's brother and not the father who was the source of authority over the sons. Boas also criticised the origin of the concept of the Oedipus complex claiming that Freud's method was one-sided and did not aid in the understanding of cultural development. Boas and Mead also tried to disprove Freud's pronouncement that adolescent psycho-sexual turmoil was universal.

Freudian psychology was subjected to a new synthesis by Psychological anthropologists like Mead and Benedict that resulted in the development of a Neo-Freudian phase in Psychological anthropology characterised by the study of the development of personality cross-culturally with a strong emphasis on the importance of early childhood experiences.

Check Your Progress 1

1)   Define Historical Particularism.

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2)   Discuss the development of Culture and personality school of thought.

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3)   Discuss the influence of Freud on culture and personality school of thought.

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5.2   CULTURE AND PERSONALITY SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

5.2.1   Ruth Fulton Benedict

Ruth Fulton Benedict (1887-1948) was a student of Franz Boas and her PhD work was "The Concept of the Guardian Spirit in North America". She did her fieldwork among Zunis, Cochiti, Pima and Kwakiutl tribes. Her field experience with Pima was crucial because here she developed the idea of 'culture pattern', in her paper 'Psychological Types in the Culture of South West'(1928) which was later elaborated in her book *Patterns of Culture* (1934). According to her, a culture pattern is formed when cultural traits and complexes become related to each other in functional roles. **Cultural traits** are the smallest unit of a culture which organise and form cultural complexes. And when many traits and complexes of culture become integrated into a functional whole, they form a cultural pattern. In a way, it was Benedict who provided a methodological model for studying human culture in terms of patterns. She further added that many cultural patterns integrate themselves into a functional whole and form a special design of a whole culture and called it **Configuration.** This configuration expresses itself as the ethos or 'special genius' of culture. One can say that Benedict described cultures as having personalities, or overall characters. She

further says that there are three types of geniuses found in human society namely Apollonian, Dionysian and Paranoid.Benedict borrows the first two from philosopher Friedrich Nietzche (1844-1900), who in turn had borrowed these terms from Greek drama.The word Apollonian comes from the Greek word *Apollo* meaning peaceful Sun God. In the Apollonian pattern of culture, we find the existence of peace, discipline, and kindness. The word Dionysian is derived from the name of the Greek God *Dionysius* connected with drinking and luxurious life. Thus, the Dionysian culture is characterised by aggressiveness and fluctuations. The third type i.e., Paranoid is fearful suspicious and engaged in sorcery. These three geniuses mould the personality of their respective group members and thus leads to the formation of special cultural characteristics. For instance, the Apollonian genius compels the members of the group to behave in a disciplined and peaceful way and this defines the personality of the individual group members.

Benedict in her comparative study on cultural practices among three Native North American tribes namely Pueblo Zuni, Dobu and Kwakiutl described the three different societies in terms of their basic personality configurations. Benedict had done fieldwork only among the Kwakiutl, she borrowed the Zuni data from Boas and the Dobu ethnography from Reo F Fortune.

She found the Pueblo Zuni of New Mexico were Apollonian because they appeared peace loving, cooperative, helpful, kind and restrained by moderation. They valued communality of the group, rejected individual displays of power and avoided disruptive impulses (Moore,2011;64). This basic personality type was reinforced in other elements of the Zuni culture. Child training practices were designed to suppress individuality. Initiation ceremonies and marriages were simple and casual and death was an occasion of little mourning. Religious and magical performances were held for the common welfare of the group. The Zunis had a strong sense of group solidarity, political leadership was non-authoritarian, rituals undramatic and child-rearing practices mild.

In contrast, the Dobu of Melanesia was aggressive, competitive, violent and prone to conflict. The religion among them was mixed with magic with an intention to harm others or to defend oneself against others. They were highly suspicious of witchcraft and lived in fear. They have been described as Paranoid, borrowing the term from psychoanalysis. And the Kwakiutl (Dionysian) of the North-west coast of America were individualistic and competitive. Among them, wealth determined the status and prestige of the individual. The ideal man in the community would be one who would always strive to prove his superiority. And the child-rearing practices reinforced this cultural pattern. Leadership among them was characterised by a constant struggle for power and the shaman in this society wielded enormous power.

Benedict's characterisation of entire cultures as personalities led to the study of national character. During Second World War she turned to the study of Japanese character as Americans were intrigued by the exceptional bravery of the Japanese. Benedict and other American anthropologists analysed the Japanese culture through films, books and other historical documents. She took interviews of Japanese prisoners and Japanese immigrants in the USA; took their life histories and case studies and this information was later produced in her book *Chrysanthemum and The Sword* (1946). The work concluded that the strict toilet training among the Japanese made them aggressive fighters in warfare. She also

described that Japanese culture has two methods of child-rearing. During childhood, an individual is given full freedom, love and care but when he/she reaches adolescence, strict discipline is imposed. During adolescence, the child is expected to not break any cultural traditions and his/her behaviour should be appealing to other members/elders of the society. The two different rearing practices, one during childhood and the other during adolescence are compared to Chrysanthemum and the sword respectively. Chrysanthemum (also the National flower of Japan) symbolises the socialisation during childhood when the child is given full care so that he/she blossoms like a Chrysanthemum flower but when the child reaches adolescence stage, they have to face tough life. Parents leave them to earn and lead an independent life. As a result, the child becomes aggressive and violent.

Thus, 1940s saw the rise of such studies on the National Character. Another similar study by Geoffrey Gorer and John Rickman's *The People of Great Russia: A Psychological Study* (1949) attributed the manic-depressive culture of Russia to prolonged infant swaddling (Erickson and Murphy 2008: 107). The book advanced the hypothesis that Russians prefer the authoritarian leadership that could be linked to their experience of having been swaddled as infants. But such studies on the National Character which used a Neo-Freudian approach that linked the early child-rearing practices with adult personality faded during the 1950s.

Check Your Progress 2

4)   Define culture pattern.

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5)   Define cultural traits.

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6)   What is National Character?

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5.2.2 Margaret Mead

Margaret Mead (1901-1978) like Benedict was also a student of Franz Boas. She was a well-known anthropologist in America and many of her publications dealt with linking child-rearing practices with differences in culture.

Her book *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (1949) was based on nine months of intensive fieldwork, where she compares Samoan and American adolescent girls. In this classic work, she hypothesised that the stresses that marked adolescent personality in American culture were culturally determined and not biologically influenced. During her fieldwork, she found that the facts of birth, sex and death were not hidden from Samoan children; premarital sex was considered natural and did not demand emotional involvement. Children were taught to be quiet and obedient thus making adolescence among the Samoan children less stressful and was seen as a phase in one's life. Mead's work among Samoa was supported by Edward Sapir who emphasised that the anthropological studies of personality represented an entirely new approach to the study of culture and that the application of psycho-analytic methods in the study of culture would add a new dimension to the ethnological fieldwork.

Mead's next major work was among the Manus tribe of New Guinea. In her book *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1930) she highlights the kind of enculturation processes by which the Manus of New Guinea brought up their children. The book deals with the educative role of culture in the development of the personality of a child from infancy to childhood and from childhood to adulthood.

The third important work of Mead is *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935). Here in this study, she compared three different cultures namely Arapesh, Mundugumor and Tschambuli staying in the same geographical region of New Guinea. She noted the variation in the cultural patterns of the three cultures and argued as to why people of societies living in the same area differed in character, personality and temperament. She further dealt with the question of the degree of malleability in the behaviour of sexes especially concerning the sexually assigned behavioural roles in these three societies. The geographical position of the Arapesh was such that they were protected naturally from the enemies and the population was low. There were sufficient resources for each member and hence there was no conflict, struggle, or competition among them. She found Arapesh to be cooperative, peace-loving, caring and non-quarrelsome, and both males and females demonstrated submissive temperament. This submissive temperament was valued among them and everyone tried to follow this type of temperament.

The Mundugumor, showed the characteristics like jealousy, suspicion and competitiveness. Both men and women were aggressive and reflected such traits and the entire cultural environment of Mundugumor was tensed and filled with struggle and competition. The third cultural group. i.e., Tschambuli had a very different arrangement, the males acquired a submissive temperament and the females were found to be aggressive. Her study revealed that differences in the personality types of the male and female were due to the cultural processes which differ from one cultural group to another. Mead's work importantly indicated that gender was not biologically constituted and men and women were not limited by their bodies. This was particularly emancipatory for women.

Later like Benedict, Mead too contributed towards the National character studies. In her book *Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America* (1942) she dealt with the National character of America but she did not compare the personality of a baby in America with that of Japan or Russia. The early personality was similar and it is only when the child grows up that he /she is socialised as per the norms of that particular culture that a particular personality develops which later gets reflected in the National character. Another work of great value is *New Lives for The Old: A Study in Cultural Transformation* (1956) where she approached the Manus of New Guinea after 25 years to restudy them and note the changes and continuity in the formation of characters and personality.

Check Your Progress 3

7) 'Differences in the personality types of male and female were due to cultural processes'. Discuss.

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8) Discuss Margaret Mead's contribution to culture and personality school of thought.

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5.2.3 How Culture And Personality Influence Each Other

Here in this section, we discuss three other anthropologists who contributed to Culture and Personality studies. They are Ralph Linton (1893-1953), Abram Kardiner (1891-1981) and Cora- Du-Bois (1903-1991). These three scholars believed that culture and personality complement each other and greater cooperation of at least three disciplines namely Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology was required to understand the basic premisesof the formation of personality. **Ralph Linton** in his famous book *Cultural Background of Personality* (1945) attempted to define culture based on behaviour; defined personality and showed how personality is formed in a particular cultural setting; and how personality influences cultural behaviour.

Based on his study, he divided culture into three groups

a.   Real culture (actual behaviour)

b.   Ideal culture (philosophical and traditional culture)

c.   Culture construct (what is written about the culture)

Defining Real culture Linton said that it is the sum total of the behaviour of the members of the society which are learned and shared by members of that society, Ideal culture are the traits of a culture that are considered as ideal and worth emulating and the last is when a culture is studied and gets written or talked about. According to Linton, each society has its own culture, defined as the 'organised group of ideas, habits and conditioned emotional responses shared by the members of a society'(Bohannan and Glazer 1988: 199).

The individual learns to live in culture by imbibing cultural ways and ideals. Further, Linton also talks of cultural universals, cultural specialities and cultural alternatives. The traits which are followed by all members are called cultural universals; for instance, the use of a particular language or the patterns of the tribal costume are examples of cultural universals and form part of the basic personality. Whereas cultural specialities are the traits that are followed and shared by only few members of the society who are socially recognised for that role, for instance, a craftsperson in society has certain special skills and a cultural repertoire associated with it, which he calls as 'status personality'.Third, there are some traits that are shared by certain individuals but which are not common to all the members of even the same group. They refer to different ways of doing the same thing like one may use different modes of transportation to reach a particular place. One may cycle while everyone else is using a bus. They are the social inventors. Linton developed the concept of 'basic personality' with Abram Kardiner which we discuss in the coming section.

Abram Kardiner (1891-1981) was a student of Freud and psychoanalyst by profession. He along with Linton developed the concept of 'basic personality type' in the book *Psychological Frontiers of Society* (1945). Kardiner understood that the foundations of personality development are laid in early childhood. He observed that the child-rearing practices such as duration of breastfeeding, methods of weaning, maternal love/neglect are often similar in a group. Thus, the adults have certain important common experiences and that gives rise to a common *basic personality type*. He further added that this basic personality exists in the context of particular institutions as people have different status personalities in different institutional settings. Kardiner divided the institutions into primary and secondary types. Primary institutions include the family organisation, feeding pattern, methods of weaning, care/neglect of children, sexual training, toilet training, etc. which are directly concerned with disciplining, inhibiting, or gratifying the child. The secondary institutions include religion, rituals, taboo system which are an integral part of the society but also affect the overall personality development of the child/individual. The primary institutions contribute to the formation of the basic personality which then projects onto the secondary institutions like religion.

Following Kardiner, **Cora-Du-Bois,** another psychoanalyst developed a concept of 'Modal Personality' which was considered as an improvement upon Kardiner's Basic Personality theory. Her concept of Modal Personality involved statistical analysis so that the modal personality would be the most recurring personality type in a culture, but it is not necessarily common to all members of that society. Modal personality is indicated by the central tendency of a frequency distribution.

In 1937 Cora-Du-Bois visited the island of Alor in the East Indies and collected rich ethnographic data through fieldwork. Also, she administered Rorschach tests (inkblot test), Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), children's drawings and

psychological life histories. She also analysed the available oral literature. The data she collected was analysed independently by three different scholars upon her return from the field. The life histories she collected were analysed by Kardiner; the interpretation of children's drawings was done by Trude Schmidt, and Emil Oberholzer interpreted the Rorschach tests and TAT test results. Each of them prepared their independent evaluation and their evaluations coincided to a great extent with the ethnographies and field details Du-Bois had collected. From this, a Modal Personality of Alorese that emerged was one full of insecurity, shallowness in emotional life, indifferent and apathetic personality. They were prone to violent emotional outbursts and tended to be uninterested in the world around them. The researchers concluded that it was because of the early childhood experience of maternal neglect that caused the development of such Modal personality. The women in the Alorese society need to spend extended periods away in the field to tend the crops and the emotional needs of an infant/child were not readily satisfied. The critical and formative years of an Alorese infant/child had sporadic and inconsistent attention of mother and gradually they learn to live with this. The psychological tests confirmed the Alorese to be suspicious, anxious and mistrustful. This was projected onto Alorese religion where the deity was not considered to be having great power. She published her findings in her book *The People of Alora: A Social Psychological Study of East Indian Island* (1944).

The beginning of the 1950's saw anthropologists innovating and using statistics on similar lines of Kardiner's and Du-Bois's work. A new generation of Psychological anthropologists emerged who used statistics to make cross-cultural generalisations more precise. The pioneering work was by John Whiting and Irvin Child's who in their book *Child Training and Personality: A Cross Cultural Study* (1953) generated cross-cultural data, manipulated it statistically to reveal significant cross-cultural associations. Whiting and Child renamed Kardiner's concepts. The primary institutions were called **maintenance system**, (as they affected the child training practices); the secondary institutions became the **projective systems** and the basic personality structure became the **personality variables** (Harris 2001: 450)

Check Your Progress 4

9) Differentiate between Real and Ideal culture

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10) Define Basic Personality type

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11) Define Modal personality

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5.3 CRITICISMS OF CULTURE AND PERSONALITY SCHOOL

In the twenty five years between the *Coming of Age in Samoa* and *Child Training and Personality: A Cross-Cultural Study,* American Psychological Anthropology evolved through pre-Freudian to Freudian and post-Freudian phases. Throughout all these phases the American contribution to anthropological theory and particularly Culture and Personality school has been immense. But it had its share of criticisms.

The early phase in the Culture and Personality school tended to be very simplistic. They argued that each culture was having a single *pattern* and all members reflect that theme. Both Benedict and Mead assumed culture as given and it determined the personality, but neither questioned how it happened. Applying individual personality attributes to whole cultures was criticised and was named faulty as was later found in the National Character studies. Derek Freeman in his book *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983) strongly criticised Mead for her study among the Samoan. In her Samoan study, she found girls carefree about sexual experimentation whereas Freeman found a strict virginity complex among them. Mead found a free male-female relationship whereas he found male-female hostility. Marvin Harris also criticised Mead for being too generalised about the emotions of Samoan girls.

Ruth benedict's theory of culture patterns has been criticised by Morris E. Opler in his work *An Apache Life-way: The Economic, Social and Religious Institutions of Chiricahua Indians*(1941). He criticised the cultural configuration theory of Benedict as being narrow in approach, emphasising that there is much more variability within cultures than Psychological anthropologists were discussing. The Basic Personality type and Modal Personality were also criticised for making generalisations about group personality. In the early 1950's Anthony F.C Wallace conducted a psycho-cultural study of the Tuscarora band of Iroquois Indians. He administered the Rorschach test to a significant sample of the population to assess personality types of informants along few dimensions, but he found that only 37% fell within the Modal Personality (most common) (Moberg 2013: 176)

We cannot say that one personality is representative of culture nor can we say that members of different cultures are radically different from one another in personality type. Despite these criticisms, the Culture and Personality school

has been among the most influential anthropological school of thought.

Check Your Progress 5

12) What are the points on which the Culture and Personality school has been criticised?

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5.4   SUMMARY

Attributed to famous anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, the Culture and Personality school of thought that arose principally in the United States combined elements of psychology, anthropology and sociology and even applied psychoanalytical principles to ethnographic data. The culture and personality theorists argued that the personality of an individual developed through socialisation patterns and focussed on child-rearing practices, toilet training and weaning practices. Different cultures with different socialisation practices produced different personality types. The idea was that cultural practices produced certain personality types and this further led to national character studies within the school. It was suggested that anthropologists could gain knowledge about the national character by examining individual personalities. The school in a way brought focus on the individual as a unit of study. Using clinical interviews, projective tests, life histories and participant observation, the scholars asserted that scientific treatment to ethnographic data would reveal cross-cultural variations prominently. The school had its share of criticisms but to date is one of the major thoughts that emerged in the American tradition.

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5.6   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1)   Refer Section 5.1

2)   Refer Section 5.1

3)   Refer Section 5.1

4)   Refer section 5.2.1

5)   Refer section 5.2.1

6)   Refer section 5.2.1

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12) Refer section 5.3

UNIT 6   CULTURAL MATERIALISM*

Contents

6.0   Introduction

6.1   Main Concept

   6.1.1 Theoretical Perspective

   6.1.2 Cultural Ecology and Julian Steward

   6.1.3 Leslie White and Neo-evolutionism

6.2   Methodology

6.3   Positive Points

6.4   Criticisms

6.5   Summary

6.6   Glossary

6.7   References

6.8   Answers to Check Your Progress

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, the learners would be able to:

➤   understand the focus of this approach;

➤   trace the development of this concept;

➤   relate to the term cultural ecology and neo-evolution;

➤   comprehend about the contribution of this approach; and

➤   present a critical appraisal of the approach.

6.0   INTRODUCTION

Cultural Materialism is a research strategy. It tries to explain similarities and differences between humans with reference to behaviour patterns and thought patterns. It denies the ideational basis of culture, emphasising that material and environmental conditions are primary in determining human behaviour.This theory was influenced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.This doctrine was conceived by Marvin Harris, the anthropologist from North America. This approach incorporates ideas from Marxism. In addition to that, it also incorporates ideas from cultural ecology and cultural evolution. Cultural Materialism was coined by Marvin Harris in. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*in 1968. However, though he based his theory on Marxist anthropology, his theory is not dialectical. In the early 1980s, this theory did not receive wide acceptance from anthropologists, but gradually in the late 1980s many anthropologists began to depend upon cultural materialism to analyse development of society and other problems of capitalist societies.

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* Contributor: Dr. Chandana Sharma, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam.

6.1 MAIN CONCEPT

Cultural Materialism tries to compare human thought and behaviour by studying the material constraints to which humans are subjected. These material constraints include the need to produce food, shelter, tools, and machines and to reproduce human populations within limits set by biology and the environment. According to cultural materialists, the most likely causes of variation in the mental or spiritual aspects of human life are the differences in the material costs and benefits of satisfying basic needs in a particular habitat.

This research strategy focuses on technology, environment and economic factors as key determinants in socio-cultural evolution.

6.1.1 Theoretical Perspective

The two basic assumptions of cultural materialists regarding societies are:

- There is inter-relationship among the various parts of the society leading a change in one part to change in the other parts too.

- Environment is the basis of the socio-cultural system.

Cultural materialists divide all sociocultural systems into infrastructure, structure and superstructure. So, what is then infrastructure?

Infrastructure is composed of the material realities like technological, economical and reproductive factors. These on the other hand, influence the other two aspects of culture. Material infrastructure includes the technology and social practices by which a society adopts to its environment. The infrastructural component includes technology (modes of production) and population (modes of reproduction). These two modes act as balance between population level and consumption of energy from a finite environment.

Modes of production consist of behaviour patterns required to satisfy needs for subsistence. These include the production of food and other forms of energy, like, horticulture, pastoralism, agrarian and industrial society. Modes of reproduction include the behaviour which aims to control the destructive increases or decreases in population size. These include the practices employed for expanding, limiting and maintaining population size and some examples are mating patterns, fertility, mortality, natality etc,.

The structural component of socio-cultural systems comprises of the organised patterns of social life managed by the members of the society. Each society needs to maintain orderly relationships among its members, constituent groups, and neighbouring societies.This component consists of Political and Domestic Economy. These groups (Political Economy) perform functions to regulate production, distribution, consumption, and exchange between groups and socio-cultural systems like military, education, police, caste, class and so on. Domestic Economy comprises of small groups interacting on the basis of intimacy. They regulate reproduction, socialisation, education and maintain domestic discipline. These include domestic family structure, friendship networks, community, domestic discipline and so on.

The superstructure component includes the ideological and symbolic aspects of society. It may be Behavioural or Mental. Behavioural includes recreational

activities like art, music, dance, sports, hobbies, science and so on. Mental superstructure consists of the patterned ways in which the members of a society think, conceptualise and evaluate their behaviour like ideologies, religion, aesthetics, myths and so on.

As the infrastructure changes, the structure and superstructure may change accordingly.Technology, energy and environmental factors are crucial to the development of all aspects of society.

6.1.2 Cultural Ecology and Julian Steward

Julian Steward developed the theory of cultural ecology which "stresses the inter-relationship among the natural resources in the environment—rainfall, temperature, soils—and technology, social organisation, and attitudes within a particular sociocultural system" (Scupin and DeCorse 2005:309). It tries to focus on the adaptations of specific sociocultural groupings with environmental conditions. He divides his cultural ecology structure into two domains: culture core and secondary features. The environment, technology and economic arrangements, that is, elements mostly associated with subsistence are considered as culture core. Secondary features include the remaining characteristics like politics, religion, social organisation and the like.

Steward argued that the Shoshoni had no organised social groupings larger than the family due to scarcity of game in the Basin Plateau of the south-west United States (Layton 1997: 161). According to him their dependence on gathering sparsely distributed wild seeds during the pre-colonial period led each family to wander alone across the ranges. In winter several families camped together at Pinyon pine groves but each grove bore fruit irregularly and different sets of families assembled at different groves in successive years (Steward 1938 as cited in Layton 1997: 162). It is therefore evident that the environment and resources available play a great influence on the form of social organisation for these people during various seasons. Through cases like this, Steward demonstrated how environmental influences (part of the culture core) affect the cultural developments in a sociocultural system (Scupin and DeCorse 2005: 309). He even examined the agricultural civilizations of South America, Mesoamerica, the Near East and the Far East and attributed the similarities found among them to similar environmental conditions.

He developed the theory of multilinear evolution. Steward was of the view that all cultures of the world passed through different stages in different areas. He was greatly impressed with the parallels in the evolution of the ancient civilizations. These ancient civilizations include those of Peru, Mexico, Egypt, Mesopotamia and China. He studied the cultures of these ancient civilizations and opined that there are remarkable uniformities among them but they have followed different paths of evolution in different areas and timeframes. He distinguished his scheme of cultural evolution from that of nineteenth-century evolutionism. Unlike the unilinear evolutionists who stressed on a unilinear sequence of stages of development of society, Steward "postulated many, or multilinear, paths of development depending on initial environment, technological, and other conditions" (Harris 1995: 277). He based his work on cross-cultural comparisons of different environments focussing on detailed features.

He also developed the concepts of core and peripheral culture. Steward's cultural ecology framework divides socio-cultural framework into culture core and peripheral (or secondary) culture. "The culture core consists of those elements most closely related to subsistence: the environments, technology and economic arrangements. The other characteristics such as social organisation, politics and religion constitute secondary features" (Scupin and DeCorse 2005:309) or peripheral culture. Marvin Harris is of the view that similar environments produce similar arrangements of labour in production and distribution leading thus to similar kinds of social groupings. Just like Steward's culture core and periphery, he divided socio-cultural systems into infrastructure, structure and superstructure. The theoretical perspective of Harris represents an extension of the foundations laid down by White and Steward (Scupin and DeCorse 2005: 310).

6.1.3 Leslie White and Neo-evolutionism

Leslie White suggested energy capture as a measure to find out the complexity in a culture. His perspective on the evolution of society is sometimes referred to as neo-evolutionism. His approach was influenced by Marx and Durkheim. According to White, societies are entities that evolved in relation to the amount of energy captured and used by each member of the society. The energy captured is directed towards the production of resources for their survival. According to him, 'Culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is increased, or as the efficiency of the instrumental means of putting the energy to work is increased' (1971:368 as cited in Scupin and DeCorse 2005: 308). In other words, the sociocultural system will be more evolved when the energy harnessed is greater. He proposed that Culture = Energy x Technology, suggesting that "culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is increased, or as the efficiency of the instrumental means of putting the energy to work is increased" (Bohannan and Glazer 1988:340). He tried to explain the differences in the level of development of society in comparison to differences in technology and energy production. White argued that because the earliest cultural systems exploited the energy of the human body alone, they were condemned to remain simple in form (White 1949:382 as cited in Layton 1997 :128). The Agricultural Revolution witnesses the harness of energy through domestication of plants and animals. This resulted in the growth of cities and empires and new ideologies. The 'Fuel' (Industrial Revolution saw the use of new forms of energy, like coal, oil and natural gas, leading to global transformations. As White used only a single criterion, energy capture and the efficiency with which it is used, he could measure cultural variation on a unilinear scale only.

But both the views of Steward and White were criticised for emphasising the environmental role without considering historical or political factors and reducing human behaviour to simple adaptations to the external environment. However, it has become an area of sophisticated research influences by other related sciences.

Reflection

Neo-evolutionists never assumed a unilinear approach to development of society like the 19th century evolutionists. They were never biased in their approach to understand the development of societies at various levels. They never held the view that socio-cultural evolution can be considered equal to progress and believed that some aspects of simple societies are better than those of complex societies.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Who developed the theory of cultural ecology?

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2) Discuss how Marvin Harris, conceptualises the structure of society?

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3) Discuss multilinear evolution.

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4) What is Leslie White's theory of energy and evolution?

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6.2 METHODOLOGY

Cultural materialists try to focus on those events and variables which are observable and measurable and can be applied across societies with the help of empirical methods to develop nomothetic theories. Epistemologically, cultural materialism focuses only on those entities and events that are observable and quantifiable (Harris 1979: 27). His approach reveals how material considerations are conditioned by emic thoughts and behaviours. He tried to lay stress on those practices that lead to basic biological survival of those in society. His cultural materialist approach uses the Hindu belief that cows are sacred and should not be killed. Western agronomists believe that taboo against cow slaughter is the main cause of India's poverty. There is fight for croplands and foodstuff between

the unproductive ones with useful animals and hungry human beings. The taboo has led to a surplus of this animal. Massive slaughter of cattle during famines constitutes a much greater threat to aggregate welfare than any likely miscalculation by particular farmers concerning the usefulness of their animals during normal times. Cow love with its sacred symbols and taboos protects the farmer against calculations that are 'rational' only in the short term. The Western experts believe that 'the Indian farmer would rather starve to death than eat his cow'. They do not realise that the farmer would rather eat his cow than starve, but that he will starve if he does eat it (Harris 1974:21). First, he argued that the taboos on cow slaughter (emic thought) were superstructural elements resulting from the economic need to utilize cows as draft animals rather than as food (Harris 1966: 53-54 as cited in Buzney and Marcoux). He also observed that the Indian farmers claimed that no calves died because cows are sacred (Harris 1979: 38). In reality, however, male calves were observed to be starved to death when feed supplies are low (Harris 1979: 38). Harris argues that the scarcity of feed (infrastructural change) shaped ideological (superstructural) beliefs of the farmers (Harris 1979: 38). Thus, Harris shows how, using empirical methods, an etic perspective is essential in order to understand culture change holistically (as cited in Buzney and Marcoux).

Reflection

One example of cultural materialism at work was cited by Maxine Margolis (1984). Margolis studied the role of women in the post-World War II United States and found that women in large numbers were engaged outside. The 1950s ideology however claimed that women's duties should be restricted entirely to the home (emic perspective). This developed due to the economic requirements and ultimately led to increase in productive and reproductive capabilities of U.S. households. Thus, this whole movement of feminism turned out to be a movement caused by women into the workforce and not a movement which forced women into the workforce. This proved how infrastructure determined superstructure as ideology changed to new infrastructural innovations (Buzney and Marcoux).

Pigs are considered as a taboo by the Muslims. On the other hand, it is quite the opposite among the New Guinea and South Pacific Melanesian Islanders. They consider pigs to be holy and offer as sacrifices to the ancestors and also partake the meat offered on important events like marriages and funerals. Among some tribes, declaration of war and peace are reverberated by sacrifice of pigs. Huge feasts are arranged both for the dead ancestors as well as for the living and villagers almost exhaust the total supply of pigs on such occasions. The feasts continue for several days, villagers gorging on huge quantities of pork, even vomiting the undigested amount and making space for some more of it. After they exhaust the total supply of pigs then they again gear up for another plentiful supply involving painful years of husbandry. They then again make preparations for another phase of feasts and merry making with huge quantities of pork. Other than being branded as a dirty and unhealthy animal, the pig was condemned by the Muslims as it served as a threat to the integrity of the basic cultural and natural ecosystems of the Middle East. Within the overall pattern of this mixed farming and pastoral complex, the divine prohibition against pork constituted a sound ecological strategy. The nomadic Israelites could not raise pigs in their arid habitats, while for the semi-sedentary and village farming populations, pigs were more of a threat than an asset (Harris 1974: 41). Thus, Harris cites these strange explanations

as functional and social responses to material society. No matter how peculiar or strange a people's behaviour may seem to be, it always originates from concrete cultural and ecological constraints and opportunities.

6.3 POSITIVE POINTS

Do you have any idea that this strategy earned some good points too? So what are those? By now it is clear that Harris discourages to rely on native explanations and rather urges to use more scientific methods. Cultural materialists also lay stress on the fact that culture change can be studied across boundaries, geographical and temporal to reach universal theories. Harris' work (1966,1977) reveals that cultural phenomena such as beef taboos (India) using scientific and logical explanations are possible. These do not require the use of mystical or other causal factors as found in functionalist or structuralist interpretations. It thus in a way makes anthropology more dependable on the use of scientific research methods.

Archaeologists have also used cultural materialist approaches. Archaeologist William Rathje excavated modern landfills in Arizona and other states to verify the assumptions archaeologists made regarding waste from the past. He tried to analyse and verify the stated alcohol consumption and actual alcohol consumption of informants which were based on the evidence of refuse. The study revealed significant discrepancy between what people said they drank and what was found in the refuse. The study brings to light that an emic analysis may sometimes miss some vital points but an etic approach reveals the real picture.

6.4 CRITICISMS

The cultural materialist approach has been criticised by the many. Marxists like J.Friedman have termed it as vulgar materialism. According to them, cultural materialists give more importance to infrastructure-superstructure relationship to explain culture change and their ignorance to notice the effect of superstructure on shaping structural elements may lead to wrong assumptions. Durkheim and such other structuralists opposed the cultural materialist dependence on etic perspective to understand culture change. According to them, etic view is not relevant and ethnocentric. They believe that etic perspective of the cultural materialists gives distorted assumptions and conclusions.

Another criticism against them has been levelled by the postmodernists. Postmodernists are not in favour of the use of scientific methods by the cultural materialists. They favour the study of culture based on relativism and particularism. In fact, some postmodernists argue that science is a tool used by upper classes and dominate lower classes (Rosenau 1922:129 as cited in Buzney and Marcoux).

> **Reflection**
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> Marxists in opposition to cultural materialists' regard production as a material condition determined by infrastructure, considers infrastructure – structure relationship as reciprocal and believe that only ruling class benefits from culture change. Cultural materialists consider infrastructure-structure relationship as unidirectional and believe that both upper and lower classes are benefitted from culture change.

Check Your Progress 2

5)   What are the aspects on which cultural materialists try to focus upon?

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6)   Name one major accomplishment of cultural materialism.

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7)   Why cultural materialist approach is criticised?

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6.5   SUMMARY

This approach urges anthropologists to give causal explanations for variations and similarities in human societies. They believe like the dialectical materialists that this can be done by studying the material constraints humans are subjected to for their survival. Production of food, providing shelters, tools and machines and reproduction of humans within biological and environmental limits are some of the constraints faced by them. They do not agree with the dialectical materialists that anthropology needs to become associated with a political movement. Cultural materialists allow for a diversity of political motivation among anthropologists united by a common commitment to the development of a science of culture (Harris 1995: 277). Harris developed cultural materialism in opposition to cultural relativism and idealism. For Harris, cultural relativist and idealist perspectives remove culture from its material base. Their approach is emic and not holistic. On the other hand, cultural materialism focusses on those phenomena that are measurable and observable. They, thus give an etic perspective of society.

6.6   GLOSSARY

Cultural ecology: A field developed by Julian Steward which studies the inter-relationship between natural environment, technology and social organisation within a specific sociocultural system.

Dialectical Materialism: This term refers to Marxist theory conceived by Engels and others. It points out that dialectical laws determine all material phenomena and processes.

Emic: Emic refers to behaviour which is meaningful to the people studied (insider's view of culture).

Etic: Etic refers to behaviour meaningful to the one who studies the group (outsider's view of culture).

Infrastructure: Technology and practices applied to expand or control the modes of production and reproduction.

Neo-evolutionism: A new twentieth century perspective on the evolution of society.

Structure: Structure includes domestic economy like family structure, age and gender roles, domestic division of labour. It includes political economy like class, castes, police, military and political organisation.

Superstructure: Superstructure includes aesthetic component of society. Arts, games, religion, philosophy, literature, science and values are all included within superstructure.

6.7 REFERENCES

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6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1) Julian Steward developed the theory of cultural ecology. It studies the inter-relationship between natural environment, technology and social organization within a specific sociocultural system.

2) Harris views structure of society as comprising of two components. They are Domestic Economy which includes family, domestic division of labour, age and gender roles. The other is Political Economy including political organization, class, castes, police and military.

3) The theory of Multilinear evolution was developed by Julian Steward. It is based on the assumption that all the cultures of the world have passed through different stages in different areas. They (cultures) followed multiple paths in the course of evolution.

4) Leslie White considered societies as entities. According to him societies evolve in relation to the amounts of energy used. The greater the amount of energy harnessed and used, higher the development of socio-cultural system is. He cited examples of simple hunting and gathering societies with no complex sociocultural systems as they depended on human energy alone and the modern industrial ones with complex sociocultural systems due to use of new forms of energy.

5) Cultural materialists try to focus upon technology, environment and economic factors. These are the key determinants in sociocultural evolution.

6) One major accomplishment of cultural materialism is its reliance on scientific methods.

7) Durkheim and such other structuralists criticized cultural materialism because of its etic perspective and postmodernists were not in favour of its use of scientific methods.