

FUNDAMENTAL OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY (IN BRIEF)

Anthropology is a subject in which theory is of great importance. It is also a subject in which theory is closely bound up with practice. For every discipline, theories can work as the building blocks (Barnard,2000). Hendriksen (1970) described theory as ‘a coherent set of hypothetical, conceptual and pragmatic principles forming the general framework of reference for a field of inquiry’ (p.1).

Diachronic, synchronic, and interactive perspectives

- **Diachronic perspectives (relation of things through time)**

Evolutionism

Diffusionism

Marxism (in some respects)

Culture-area approaches (in some respects)

- **Synchronic perspectives (relation of things together in same time)**

Relativism (including ‘culture and personality’)

Structuralism

Structural-functionalism

Cognitive approaches

Culture-area approaches (in most respects)

Functionalism (in some respects)

Interpretivism (in some respects)

- **Interactive perspectives**

Transactionalism

Processualism

Feminism

Post-structuralism

Postmodernism

Functionalism (in some respects)

Interpretivism (in some respects)

Marxism (in some respects)

(Barnard, 2000)

Perspectives on Society and on Culture

- Evolutionism
- Functionalism
- Structural-functionalism
- Transactionalism
- Processualism
- Marxism
- Post- structuralism (in most respects)
- Structuralism (in some respects)
- Culture-area approaches (in some respects)
- Feminism (in some respects)

Perspectives on culture

- Diffusionism
- Relativism
- Cognitive approaches
- Interpretivism
- Postmodernism
- Culture-area approaches (in most respects)
- Structuralism (in most respects)
- Post-structuralism (in some respects)
- Feminism (in some respects)

(Barnard, 2000)

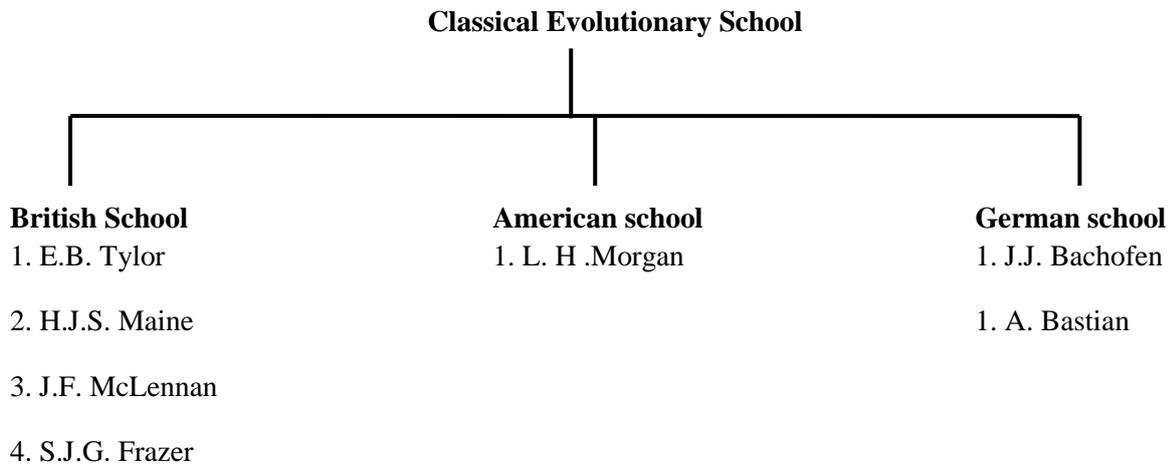
EVOLUTIONISM

Evolutionism is an anthropological perspective which emphasizes the growing complexity of culture through time. The main protagonist of the theory evolution is Herbert Spencer. He influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and applied this theory to his explanation of the development of the society. The other evolutionist are McLennan, Tylor, Morgan, Frazer, Bastian and so on. The evolutionary tradition is divided into two such as Classical evolutionism and Neo-evolutionism.

Classical Evolutionary School of Thought

Evolutionary school of anthropological thought developed in the second half of 19th century. The theory of Nineteenth century Evolutionism claimed that culture generally develops (or evolves) in a uniform and progressive manner. The societies develop according to one universal order of cultural evolution. It was thought that most societies pass through the same series of stages (savagery through barbarism to civilization), to arrive ultimately at common end. The source of culture change was generally assumed to be embedded within the culture from the beginning, and therefore the ultimate course of development was thought to be internally determined.

Evolution occurred- simple to complex → unilinear sequence of cultural evolution → psychic unity of mankind.



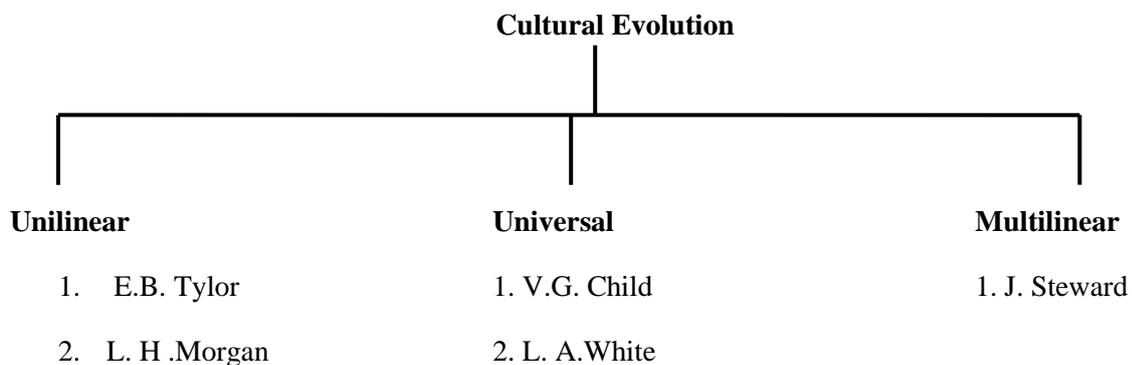
Neo-Evolutionism

Neo- evolutionism emerged in the early twentieth century as a softening of the tenets of unilinear evolutionism. It criticised the unilinear path of cultural evolution. Neo-evolutionary anthropological thought emerged in the 1940s, in the work of the American anthropologists Leslie A. White and Julian H. Steward and Australian archaeologist V. Gordon child.

L. White (1949) opined that energy as the key factors in evolutionary development, with amount of energy available per capita per year determining the overall level of cultural evolution at any given time and space. He created a formula ($C = E \times T$) that measures the degree of cultural development.

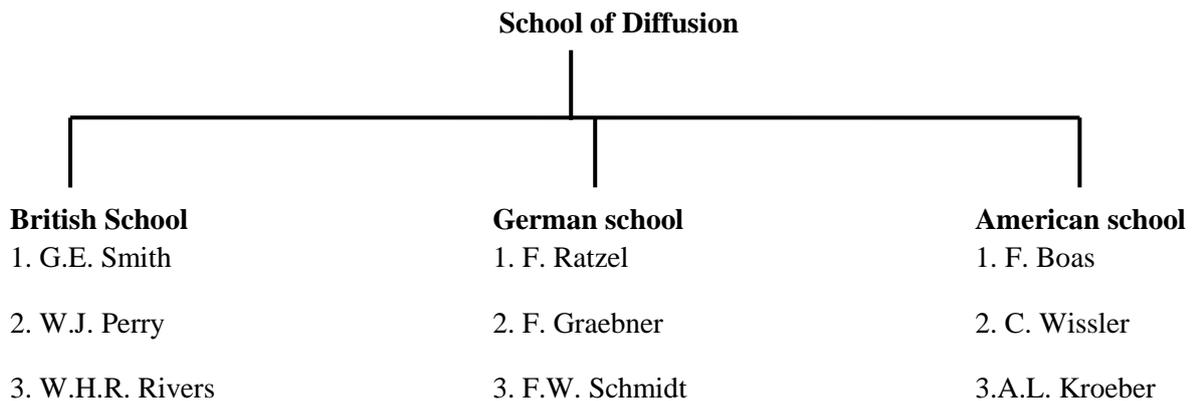
J. Steward focused on the relationship between culture and the natural environment. He argued that different cultures do have similar features in their evolution and these features could be explained as parallel adaptations to similar natural environments. His theory is known as ‘Cultural Ecology’.

V.G. Child He explained evolution of culture in terms of three major events: i) invention of food production, ii) urbanization and iii) industrialization. He presented an overall view of evolutionary process by analyzing the transitions that took place under the impact of these major events and delineated its common factors (Barnard, 2000).



DIFFUSIONISM

Diffusionist school of thought started growing in the late of nineteenth and the early twentieth century to criticize the notion of classical evolutionist that similarities and development in culture occurred due to 'psychic unity of mankind'. They claimed that similarity and development due to migration and diffusion of traits from one place to another. Among the diffusionist, there are three schools of thought: British school, German school and American school.



The British school of diffusionist claimed that Egypt as a source of all culture and later it got spread in the other parts of the world. The German school of thought argued that development of culture takes place not only at a particular place like Egypt, but it occurs at several different places at several times. This means that different cultural traits and cultural complexes originated independently at several places (circles), from where these are imitated or migrated to other places. This school is known as *Kulturkreise*. It suggested the concept of culture circle. The American diffusionist divided America in various culture areas in terms of technology, artistic, and institutional features. Each culture area has a center, from which the cultural traits spread out in other areas (Ember, Ember and Peregrine, 2011).

HISTORICAL PARTICULARISM

After Evolutionism, there were developed another school of thought i.e. Historical Particularism. The pioneer of this school of thought is American anthropologist Franz Boas and his followers. Historical Particularism claims that each society has its own unique historical development and must be understood based on its own historical context. He saw intrinsic value in the plurality of cultural practices in the world and was deeply skeptical of any attempt, political or academic, to undermine this diversity. They disputed the idea of one evolutionary path. They argued that the same cultural result, for example, totemism, could not have single explanation, because there were many path to totemism. Their position was one of historical Particularism. He introduced the concept of 'Cultural Relativism' and invited the anthropologists to disregard the prevailing ethnocentric views (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012).

FUNCTIONALISM

Functionalism postponed the search for human origin (through evolution or diffusion) and instead focused on the role of culture traits and practices in contemporary society. The main strand of functionalism is Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski did pioneering field work among the Trobriand Islands. Malinowski was a functionalist in two senses. In the first, rooted in his ethnography, he believed that all customs and institutions in society were integrated and interrelated, so that if one changed, other would change as well. Each, then, was a function of the others.

The second strand of Malinowski's functionalism is known as needs functionalism. Malinowski believes that human had a set of universal biological needs and that customs developed to fulfill those needs (Barnard, 2000).

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

The term structural functionalism is connected with A. R. Radcliffe Brown and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, S.F. Nadel, E.R. Leach, R. Firth and M. Fortes , another prominent British anthropologists. R. H. Lowie, M. Kluckhohn, and G.P. Murdock are the American school of structural functionalism. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's book 'The Nuer (1940)' , an ethnographic study that laid out very clearly the structural principles that organized Nuer society in Sudan. According to structural functionalism, customs (social practices) function to preserve the social structure. Radcliffe Brown conducted his ethnographic study among the Trobriand Islanders. In Radcliffe Brown's view the function of any practice is what it does to maintain the system of which it is a part. That system has a structure whose parts work or function to maintain the whole.

CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

In the 1920's a psychological approach to study culture moved into the forefront of the American anthropology with the founding of the culture and personality school. Two of Boas's students, R. Benedict and M. Mead, developed an approach to culture that has been called configurationalism and they are founder of the culture personality school. It highlighted that personality patterns are dependent on different socialization practices. Culture is a reflection of the personalities of its members. The basic and modal personality approach is developed by A. Kardiner, R. Linton and Cora-DuBois.

CULTURAL MATERIALISM

In proposing cultural materialism as a theoretical paradigm, Marvin Harris adapted multilayered models of determinism associated with White and Steward. For Harris (1979/2001) all societies had an infrastructure, corresponding to Steward's culture core, consisting of technology, economics, and

demography—the systems of production and reproduction without which societies could not survive. Growing out of infrastructure was structure—social relations, forms of kinship and descent, patterns of distribution and consumption. The third layer was superstructure: religion, ideology, plays— aspects of culture furthest away from the meat and bones that enable cultures to survive. Harris’s key belief, shared with White, Steward, and Karl Marx, was that in the final analysis infrastructure determines structure and superstructure.

SYMBOLISM AND INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH

Victor Turner is associated with the Symbolic approach. His monograph *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (1957/1996) illustrates the interest in conflict and its resolution previously mentioned as characteristic of the Manchester school. *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) is a collection of essays about symbols and rituals among the Nbembu of Zambia, where Turner did his major field work. In ‘The Forest of Symbols’ Turner examines how symbols and rituals are used to redress, regulate, anticipate, and avoid conflict. He also examines a hierarchy of meanings of symbols, from their social meanings and functions to their internalization within individuals.

Related to symbolic anthropology, and also associated with the University of Chicago (and later with Princeton University), is interpretive anthropology, whose main advocate is Clifford Geertz. Geertz defines culture as ideas based on cultural learning and symbols. During enculturation, individuals internalize a previously established system of meanings and symbols. They use this cultural system to define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments. Interpretive anthropology (Geertz 1973, 1983) approaches cultures as texts whose forms and, especially, meanings must be deciphered in particular cultural and historical contexts.

STRUCTURALISM

In anthropology structuralism mainly is associated with Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist. Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism evolved over time, from his early interest in the structures of kinship and marriage systems to his later interest in the structure of the human mind. Structuralism rests on Lévi-Strauss’s belief that human minds have certain universal characteristics which originate in common features of the *Homo sapiens* brain. These common mental structures lead people everywhere to think similarly regardless of their society or cultural background. Among these universal mental characteristics are the needs to classify: to impose order on aspects of nature, on people’s relation to nature, and on relations between people. According to Lévi-Strauss, a universal aspect of classification is opposition, or contrast. Although many phenomena are continuous rather than discrete, the mind, because of its need to impose order, treats them as being more different than they are. One of the most common means of classifying is by using binary opposition. Good and evil,

white and black, old and young, high and low are oppositions that, according to Lévi-Strauss, reflect the universal human need to convert differences of degree into differences of kind.

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