Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917)

Being privately educated, after a brief business career, Tylor’s introduction to anthropology came during a trip to North America. In Havana, he met an adventurer named Henry Christie, who was about to leave for Mexico. Tylor accompanied him, spending in 1856 nearly six months in Mexico and other tropical regions of the New World, from which resulted his first book, *Anahuac; or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (1861). In 1871, he published a far more significant work, *Primitive Culture*, the first sentence of which is the oft-quoted definition of culture.

Tylor’s theoretical orientation was evolutionary. Like Morgan, he also thought of the tripartite division of human history into savagery, barbarism, and civilization, although he did not provide a detailed analysis of these stages. Interestingly, he included ‘happiness’ as one of the parameters of his evolutionary sequence: each stage had its own level of happiness. In addition to ethnographic evidence for the study of evolution, Tylor also recognized the importance of archaeological findings. He also introduced several terms in anthropology, such as ‘teknonymy’, ‘local exogamy’, ‘cross-cousin marriage’.
Tylor explored the stages in the evolution of culture through the idea of ‘survivals’. He also used the term ‘social fossils’. The meaning of both these terms was that the contemporary society retained certain elements (‘traits’) that have now lost their purpose, but still continue to survive. It is their study that can illuminate our understanding of the past. Among the many examples that Tylor gave was one of clothing. The items of clothing that were functional earlier, in his time, he thought, were of decorative value; for instance, unused buttons behind the waist of a jacket, or cut-away collars always kept turned down. Another aspect of Tylor’s method was that he believed in the study of school children, for he thought that they, less mature and less educated, would guide us to the thought of primitives. With this as his idea, he carried out a study of school children in London. In the context of religion, he thought that the ancient thoughts and beliefs continued to survive in modern day, although their purpose had been lost, and their systematic study would guide us to the earlier development of religious ideas.

One of the theories for which Tylor is well known is of the origin of religion. He submitted that since primitive man was extremely simple, his thoughts should also be of the same kind, and in these thoughts would rest the ideas about the origin of religion. The first type of religion was ‘belief in the existence of soul’, which Tylor designated as ‘animism’ (anima referring to soul and ism to belief), a term he coined. What is interesting in his theory is how the primitive man discovered the idea of soul.

Primitive man dreamt, in which he saw himself and others doing various errands. Because he did not have an explanation of dreams, this repeated experience confounded him. He, then, encountered a case of death. The ‘dead’ person was interpreted as ‘not getting up from the sleep.’ The primitive man waited for some time for the dead to emerge from sleep, but when it did not happen, he arranged some kind of a temporary funeral, because he thought that some day the ‘sleepy person’ might rise. The twin experiences of dream and death made him think hard, and out of his ingenuity, he arrived at the idea of ‘soul’. The human existence was thus stated to be dual – besides the physical existence was an entity called ‘soul’, which was plastic, malleable, ethereal, indestructible, existed independently of the material world, and could pass and enter through any orifice of the body. When man slept, his ‘soul’ moved out of the body, did many tasks, and then returned. But when it did not, the man was pronounced ‘dead’. Thus, Tylor thought that the first rituals were ‘funeral rituals’, the first worship was of ancestors, and the first memorial places were tombs. The earliest form of religion was animism, which later evolved into polytheism, and finally monotheism. Tylor also believed that fetishism (when deities are controlled through material objects) and totemism (worship of plants, animals, and other inanimate and animate objects which are regarded as ancestors) developed from animism.

Though an evolutionist, Tylor never ignored the role of diffusion in culture change. As societies progressed, they acquired new characteristics, but certain non-functional traits from the past continued, as we noted earlier. They were a proof of the progressive change that had occurred. At the same time, cultures changed as they came in contact with others. In support of diffusion, one of Tylor’s generally cited statements is: ‘Civilization is a plant much often propagated than developed.’
Some commentators think that Tylor’s merit lay more in his contribution to methods. He showed that the ‘future of anthropology’ was dependent upon ‘statistical investigation’, or what was called ‘social arithmetic’. Examining the literature on about 350 different societies, Tylor worked out the correlations, which he called ‘adhesions’, between descent rules and residence patterns. The aim was to show that the association between different facts was not a matter of chance; rather, it required serious, causal explanations of universal validity.

Tylor was a keeper of the Pitt-Rivers Museum. He was the first to teach anthropology – first as reader, then, as professor – at Oxford, beginning in 1884.

**Herbert Spencer (1820-1902)**

Born in Derby, England, on 27 April 1820, Spencer received his education in technical and utilitarian subjects. He started his career in 1837 as a civil engineer for railways. Before taking up the job of an editor of *The Economist*, Spencer had published reasonably well on issues of science and politics. He completed his first major work titled *Social Statics* (a term earlier coined by Auguste Comte but Spencer did not know about it) in 1850. In 1853, he inherited a lot of wealth, because of which he left his job and lived what was known those days the life of a ‘gentleman scholar’. He did not earn a university degree nor did he hold an academic position.

Spencer was identified (and he identified himself) as a sociologist, although he belonged to, as Émile Durkheim noted later, the ‘philosophical stream of sociology’. He was also regarded as the ‘philosopher of universal evolution’, for he applied the tenets of evolution to all aspects of the universe. His work was a considerable advance over that of Auguste Comte, the first sociologist who also coined the term ‘sociology’ in 1838. Many of his ideas – especially the definition of evolution – are still relevant and referred. Spencer also contributed to the concepts of structure and function. In fact, he was the first one to coin the word ‘social structure’. Both these concepts of structure and function were largely derived from the science of biology. By using these concepts, Spencer played a key historic role in the development of the structural-functional method.

Spencer’s thesis began with the submission that in the early history of mankind, religion and science were unified in their efforts to analyze and understand the world. With the passage of time, the two began to separate. Religion came to focus on the unknowable world, whilst science dealt with that part of the world that could be known. But, Spencer believed, this separation of science and religion could not complete, with the result that there existed overlapping and conflict between them in the world of his time. If science was based on rational principles, religion was the source of values and ethics. Although he saw his work as dealing with both the aspects of science and religion (i.e., with intelligence and morals), he was primarily concerned with the ‘knowable world’. Therefore, his work was more scientific than religious. It is important to note because the later work of his predecessor, Comte, who called his approach ‘Positivism’ (i.e., rational and scientific), became more religious than scientific.
Spencer looked for a complete ‘unification of knowledge’, a type of knowledge that cut across separate and distinct branches. His search was for, as he wrote, ‘truths which unify concrete phenomena belonging to all divisions of Nature.’ This search for ‘universal truths’ led him to the idea of evolution. He stated that all phenomena – inorganic, organic, and ‘societal’ (superorganic) – undergo the processes of evolution and devolution, and dissolution. All phenomena evolve whereby their components – Spencer used the word ‘matter’ for that – become much more integrated, and the ‘motion’ (the movement), which makes them unstable, gradually goes away. Phenomena also move towards devolution – here, their internal ‘motion’ increases and their ‘matter’ becomes more and more disintegrated.

After having deduced these principles, Spencer showed their applicability to all phenomena of the universe. He formulated the definition of evolution, which is the starting point in all studies of evolution and change: ‘Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent, heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation.’ For Spencer, evolution was concerned with two processes: differentiation and integration. Matter becomes differentiated (divided and separated) over time. Differentiation requires integration between parts; otherwise they will fall here and there. More the parts differentiate, more the integration between them. Spencer wrote: ‘Integration compensates for the differentiation of parts.’ Given his focus on evolution, he defined sociology as ‘the study of Evolution in its most complex form’.

In his massive three-volume work, *The Principles of Sociology* (1908), Spencer employed his evolutionary theory, and discussed a typology of societies. In this work, he also compared society to an organism: ‘Society is like an organism’. This is popularly known as ‘organic analogy’. Spencer believed that ‘organic analogy’ would really be useful if we were also able to show that the an ‘organism is like a society’. He gave principally two typologies of society: first, simple and compounded societies; and second, militant (or military) and industrial societies. Simple societies constitute single working entities that are not connected with any other entities. Compounded societies emerge from an aggregation of simple societies, and thus, heterogeneity marks them. Militant societies tend to be dominated by the regulative system; they are highly structured for offensive and defensive warfare. Industrial societies are dominated by the sustaining system; their government tends to be democratic and there is voluntary cooperation among people.

Spencer was one of the important pre-Darwinian evolutionary thinkers. He coined the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’, and claimed that in conflicts between societies, the ‘superior’ replaced the ‘inferior’. He demonstrated that the winners were the ‘fittest’. The application of this idea to social conditions is called Social Darwinism, which is also known as Spencerism.
Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881)

A lawyer by profession, accredited with founding professional anthropology in the U.S.A., Morgan was not merely a philosopher of institutions, but a first-hand observer of the lifestyles of American Indians. He settled in Rochester (New York), close to the communities of Iroquois Indians. In a land-grant case, he represented the Iroquois, as a result, one of their groups, Tonawanda Reservation Group, adopted him. He made a detailed study of the Iroquois institutions, the results of which were published as *League of the Ho-de-no-Saunee, or Iroquois* (1851), which is regarded as the first ethnographic study of an Indian community. Later, he carried out first-hand studies of social organization of other groups of Native Americans.

Morgan is best known for creating the study of kinship systems and the idea that kin terms are a key to understand kinship. A vast amount of data on kin terms for his *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871) did not only come from his personal observations, but also from replies to the questions that he had sent to American agents in foreign countries. Morgan in fact was the first anthropologist to use this method.

However, Morgan’s interest did not lie in cultural accounts of kinship, but in how they had evolved. He has provided one of the most elaborate developmental schemes in which he discussed the evolution of a number of institutions in a single frame.

With an aim to furnish a complete scheme of institutional progress, Morgan divided all history into three main stages – savagery, barbarism, and civilization – employing these categories from Montesquieu. The first two stages were further segmented into three each, respectively called lower, middle and upper. Morgan defined each of these stages (and sub-stages) with respect to their cultural characteristics (such as technology, subsistence patterns, family and marriage, and political system), and looked for examples of each from contemporary societies. Nut and fruit subsistence characterized lower savagery. The characteristic features of middle and upper savagery were respectively fish subsistence and fire, and bow and arrow. Pottery was the hallmark of lower barbarism. Domestication of animals (in Old World), cultivation of maize, irrigation, adobe and stone architecture (in New World) were the characteristics of middle barbarism. Iron tools came with upper barbarism. Phonetic alphabet and writing were the distinguishing traits of civilization. Morgan also thought that the ‘contemporary primitives’ were ‘remnants’ and ‘vestiges’ of the past.

In the context of family, Morgan recognized five successive forms: (1) the consanguine, based on group marriage within the same generation (this is in fact the marriage of brothers and sisters); (2) the punaluan, which was a form of group marriage but here the brothers were prohibited to marry their sisters; (3) the syndysmian (or pairing), which was a transitional stage between group marriage and monogamy, and here the husband or the wife could terminate marriage at will as often, and as many times, as they wanted; (4) the patriarchal family, found among the Hebrew and the Romans, in which the authority was vested in the male head; and finally (5) the monogamian, based on one man
marring one woman, and the idea of female equality. These stages of family were then related with the broad developmental scheme from savagery to civilization.

Following the premises of the developmental scheme, Morgan also divided kin terms into two main types: the classificatory and the descriptive. Classificatory kin terms are those where the lineal relatives are merged with the collateral, and the same term is used for them; for instance, the use of the same term for father and father’s brother, or mother and mother’s sister. He further divided the classificatory kin terms into two types, depending upon whether the merging was total or partial. A case of complete merging is when the lineal relative is merged with all the collateral – for instance, where the same term is used for father, father’s brothers, and mother’s brothers, or the same term is used for mother, mother’s sisters, and father’s sisters. Partial merging is when the lineal is merged with some collateral while some of them are separated – for instance, the same term is used for mother and mother’s sisters but father’s sister is known by a different term. In comparison to classificatory terms, descriptive kin terms are those where each relative is designated by a different term.

Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877) attracted the notice of Marx and Engels, who accepted its evolutionary sequence as being in harmony with their own philosophy. While Marx laid emphasis on property rather than family, as Morgan had originally done, Engels rehabilitated Morgan’s original concern in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). As a consequence, Morgan’s *Ancient Society* was translated into many European languages. Even today, Marxist sociology and anthropology take avid interest in Morgan’s evolutionism. In the domain of anthropology, Morgan’s evolutionism is read for its historical value, but some of the concepts that he gave are still explored with interest. One of them is his contribution to kin terms. The later scholars who worked on kinship began with Morgan, either supplementing or modifying his scheme.

**Franz Boas (1858-1942)**

A principal figure after E.B. Tylor and L.H. Morgan, Boas is often regarded as the ‘father of American anthropology’. Born in Minden, Westphalia, in a family of merchants, like many other pioneers of anthropology, Boas read physics and geography at Heidelberg and Bonn, and took his doctorate in 1881 from Kiel, his dissertation dealing with the colour of seawater. He moved to the U.S.A. in part to escape growing anti-Semitism in Germany. He worked for the American Museum of Natural History, then taught at Clark University, and in 1899, became professor at Columbia University, where he founded the first Ph.D. programme in anthropology in America. He trained a large number of students, who later became famous and influential anthropologists, such as Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Edward Sapir, Melville Herskovits, Clark Wissler, E.A. Hoebel, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, M.F. Ashley-Montagu, Paul Radin. That is why he was popularly called ‘Papa Franz’. Boas maintained a “patriarch’s control” from 1896 to 1942 (when he died) over anthropology at Columbia. He founded the American Folklore Society in 1888 and the American Anthropological Association in 1900. Boas published half a dozen books and over seven hundred articles.
Lowie in his book *History of Ethnological Theory* (1937) says that Boas ‘must be understood, first of all, as a field worker.’ He is distinguished for conducting the first, fully systematic, fieldwork in Baffin Land among the Inuit, thus laying the foundation of the tradition of participant observation. Later, he studied the Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest, particularly the Kwakiutl. He believed that the means of studying non-western societies lay in participating in the social round of their life.

However, it was not just the search of synchronic data that interested him. He was equally committed to collecting information about the pasts of communities and peoples. Expectedly, in the absence of written documents in pre-literate societies, the investigator had to rely upon the memory of his respondents about their past. Besides this, there was another reason of Boas’s interest in the ‘memory culture’ of people. Boas’s ethnographic texts provided rich material, and various scholars used them for building up their theories. An example that instantly comes to our mind is of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Evolutionism dominated anthropology during Boas’s time. While he was staunchly critical of the comparative method of unilinear evolutionists, and the thesis of independent inventions, he was sympathetic to the idea that evolution had in fact taken place and biological evolution had been scientifically proven. But, for speaking authoritatively about cultural evolution, we should have systematically collected data on the pasts of non-western people by carrying out lengthy field investigations. Boas rejected the practice of ‘arm-chair anthropologists’ and their speculations on customs and languages. Until more complete information was available, one was advised to postpone any sort of generalizations. In the words of Marvin Harris, Boas ‘was guided by a distinctive sense of inductive purity’, which meant that we should think of generalizing only when we had sufficient data about distinct cultures. Because he believed that each culture was a unique product of discrete historical events and circumstances, his approach has come to be known as one of ‘cultural particularism’ and ‘historical particularism’.

Each culture has a distinct history and a distinct configuration of its parts. Thus, each aspect of a culture is meaningful in its context. To substantiate this point, Boas gave a large number of examples. Clans, for instance, arose among the Navaho by the fusion of separate groups, but among the Northwest tribes, they resulted from village fission. In the same vein, masks in some cultures are used as disguises so that the harmful spirits will not recognize the wearer; in some others they are worn to frighten off the spirits (and also, people); whereas in other cultures, they are worn to remember and honour a dead relative. Thus, Boas inspired his students to understand the specific dimensions of each culture before trying to reach a set of generalizations.

For Boas and his students, culture was the major unifying concept of anthropology, like the concept of zero in mathematics. Each element of culture needed to be explained in terms of the other aspects of culture; thus, Boas rejected any biological, racial, or environmental explanations of culture. He believed in the plurality of distinctive cultures in human society, where no universal parameters existed according to which cultures could be characterized as ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’. Boas was a major contributor to the thesis and methodology of cultural relativism.
Finally, Boas encouraged the ‘four-field’ concept of anthropology (comprising physical anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, and cultural anthropology). His fieldwork was ‘encyclopedic’ in nature, because it included collection of materials pertaining to all branches of anthropology. In physical anthropology, he challenged the various uses of the notion of race, rejecting any connection between race, language and culture. With the rise of Hitler in Germany, Boas wrote and lectured against Nazi racist ‘science’ and intolerance. He also exposed the anthropologists who were serving the US government as its spies in Mexico.

**Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876-1960)**

Kroeber was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, on 11 June 1876. His parents were both upper middle class Protestants of German ancestry. Receiving formal education in the German pattern, he went to Columbia College in 1892. When Kroeber was an undergraduate student in English literature, anthropology did not exist as a distinct and unified discipline at Columbia University. But a fact crucial to Kroeber’s career was the appointment in 1896 of Franz Boas, who later became his mentor, to the faculty. Out of sheer curiosity, Kroeber started attending Boas’s language seminar. The turning point in Kroeber’s life came when he worked with the informants from the communities of Eskimo and Chinook. His first publications were on Eskimo folklore and ethnology. A three months’ field trip to the Arapaho in 1899 led to Kroeber’s lifetime engagement with anthropology.

Kroeber began his professional career at the University of California in Berkeley in 1901, from where he retired in 1946 at the age of seventy. During this period, he trained a large number of students and developed one of the best departments and museums of anthropology in the world.

According to Kroeber, 1860 was the beginning of ‘organized anthropology’. Against the background of this fact, Kroeber’s professional activities covered six-tenth of the history of anthropology. However, his interests were highly individualistic, for he was strongly influenced by the discipline of natural history. He was committed to the study of phenomena of all kinds, but each one of them had to be viewed in its context and as a whole. He described himself as a ‘humanist’ and a ‘natural historian’, or ‘natural scientist’. Kroeber’s early interest in language, natural history, and contexts predisposed him to all those aspects that were basic to Boas’s teaching, and since then had become central to American anthropology. Boas advocated an empirical approach, arguing that we should attempt generalizations after we had collected sufficient facts from a first-hand study. Kroeber was attracted to Boas’s stress upon fact over theory and the primary importance of intensive first-hand ethnographic fieldwork. As a consequence, Kroeber spent many years collecting and dealing with original cultural data.

Like Boas, Kroeber also followed a holistic and relativistic view of culture. Each culture is unique, different from all others, and comprehensible only in terms of itself. He rejected biological, ecological, psychological, and geographic explanations of culture.
Cultural facts should be explained in terms of the other cultural facts. One of the well-known statements from Kroeber’s writings is: ‘Culture derives from culture.’ When Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, which offered a psychological (and conjectural) explanation of incest taboo and totemism, was sending welcoming ripples in anthropology, Kroeber found it ‘bafflingly imaginative’, and rejected its explanations as speculative and non-anthropological. In a sense, Kroeber was one of the precursors of ‘culturological explanations’. He was deeply concerned with what he called the ‘nature of culture’ – with the issue of how to characterize cultures and diagnose their distinguishing stylistic features. Because each aspect of culture is meaningful in relationship to the other, Kroeber denounced the classical evolutionists’ approach to study cultural traits in isolation, thus rendering his faith in the holistic approach.

Notwithstanding Boas’s influence on Kroeber, he also differed from his mentor in several crucial respects. Because of his profound interest in history from childhood, he added time depth to the essentially synchronic studies that Boas had promoted. Further, he conceptualized history as super-organic and supra-individual. It was deterministic in the sense that the individual was a product of his culture and history. He also viewed culture as super-organic (beyond the organic realm), super-psychic (beyond the mental state), and super-individual (beyond the individual). Therefore, he adopted an approach that combined the historical aspects with the synchronic.

Kroeber’s approach to the nature of culture was two-fold. Firstly, he characterized culture by means of its contents – the list of traits – which collectively constitute it. Secondly, he sought major styles, philosophies and values. The first concept of culture implied that a society or several societies had an aggregation of cultural elements, the connections between them could be understood in terms of the thesis of diffusion. As people migrated, they carried with them their cultural traits, which came in contact with others, thus producing different blends. In this process, different elements were modified, given a new meaning and style. Kroeber’s historical-diffusionist approach was well exemplified in *The Peoples of Phillipines* (1919) and *The Handbook of the Indians of California* (1925).

Each culture developed in styles – it came to have its own philosophies and values. Then they reached their climaxes or culminations, reaching a stage beyond which they could not develop, leading to the process of their decline. The thesis of ‘cultural climax’, Kroeber thought, helped in understanding the rise and fall of civilizations. He thought that unless newer (and fresher) ideas were introduced in a culture from outside, it would continue to stagnate. Throughout his life he remained committed to the historical approach, thus showing the proximity between history and anthropology.

Kroeber is best known for his *Anthropology*, one of the basic texts in anthropology. First published in 1923, it was written as a modest introductory book because there had not been a summary of the discipline since E.B. Tylor’s *Anthropology* of 1881. For many years, it remained the principal text for introductory courses. Its new edition of 1948 was of 850 pages, giving a basic introduction to nearly all fields of anthropology.
Although Kroeber, like Boas, also believed in anthropology as comprising four branches, he was never a physical anthropologist, and despite his interest in prehistory, he was not a field archaeologist. Also, he did not make any substantial contribution to the study of languages. Therefore, he was predominantly regarded as a cultural anthropologist, whose ideas of culture inspired many studies later.

**Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)**

Born in Epinal (France), Durkheim descended from a long line of rabbis (Jewish teachers) and studied to become a rabbi himself. But, by the time he was in his teens, he came to reject this heritage. From then on, his interest in religion was primarily academic than theological, or of a believer. He was opposed to religious training, arguing in favour of schooling in scientific methods. He also thought that moral principles should guide social life.

Durkheim was trained as a philosopher. His doctoral thesis on the division of labour, which was published in 1893, was a work in philosophy. But he rejected philosophy in favour of ‘scientific sociology’. As such a discipline did not exist at that time, so he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools in Paris. His faith in scientific methods was further reinforced during his visit to Germany where he was exposed to Wilhelm Wundt’s scientific psychology. Thereafter, he published some articles that showed the value of the scientific approach for understanding social issues. This led to his appointment in 1887 in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux. There he offered the first course in social science at a French university.

Durkheim’s singular contribution lay in founding the field of empirical sociology, and distinguishing it from both philosophy and psychology. By comparison to philosophy, he argued that sociology should be oriented towards empirical research. But, Durkheim felt that a ‘philosophical school’ within it threatened sociology. The two scholars of the first half of the nineteenth century, Comte and Herbert Spencer, who described themselves as ‘sociologists’, were chiefly interested in abstract theorizing, in philosophical discourses, than in studying the social world empirically. The outcome of this was that sociology was endangered to become a branch of philosophy. Durkheim wanted to combat this by laying the foundation of empirical sociology.

For accomplishing this endeavour, it was important that the subject matter of sociology should be clearly identified. In his treatise on the methods of sociology, *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895), Durkheim stated that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts. He defined social facts as those ‘ways of acting, feeling and thinking which have the noteworthy property of existing outside the individual consciousness.’ Laws, marriage rules, ways of behaviour and interaction, are examples of social facts. They do not emerge in the individual, but have an exterior existence. In fact, they emerge from collective consciousness. During the process of socialization, the individual imbibes them. They should be distinguished from specific feelings and thoughts that have their genesis in the individual. The latter are called ‘psychic facts’. ‘Social facts are not psychic facts’, is an important statement from
Durkheim’s writings. In this way, Durkheim distinguished sociology from psychology. After defining social facts, he moved on to a description of methods that could be used for their study.

The work that clearly exemplified this, and is now regarded as a masterpiece in sociology, was the study of suicide, a phenomenon that had largely been understood in psychological terms. Durkheim made it explicit in the beginning that he was not investigating the individual cases of suicide, for there would be a myriad of reasons behind them, some of which would be psychological or psychopathological.

Durkheim’s interest was in providing an explanation of suicide rate, the number of suicides committed in a society per one thousand individuals in one year. An increase or decrease in suicide rate is an indication of changing social factors. For him, if suicide is an individual act, suicide rate is a social fact. Each social fact must be explained in relationship with the preceding social fact. Then only would we be able to advance a sociological explanation. Durkheim explained suicide rate in terms of the degree of integration in a society. Both these social facts (suicide rate and the degree of integration) are inversely proportional. In this work on suicide, published in 1897, Durkheim also suggested the methods to increase the degree of integration of the individual with his society, family, and neighbourhood.

Although Durkheim is regarded as a sociologist, his work is of tremendous significance to anthropologists. Durkheim’s approach was of comparing different kinds of societies. Incidentally, he called sociology ‘comparative sociology’. Being a sociologist, he did not confine his work just to the study of complex, urban-industrial societies. In his work of 1912 on religion, he undertook a detailed case study of Australian totemism, and showed that the function of religion was to bind people in a moral community, which he called ‘church’. Although he did not carry out a first-hand fieldwork, he greatly relied upon the ethnographic information that was available.

The use of information from a wide variety of societies is clear from his short work, which he co-authored with his nephew and student, Marcel Mauss, titled *Primitive Classification* (1903), which was concerned with the question of how human mind classified. In this book, the authors reviewed ethnographic evidence from Aboriginal Australia, Zuni and Sioux Indians of North America, and from Taoist China. They concluded that there existed a close relationship between society and the classification of nature. They also noticed continuity between the so-called ‘primitive’ and scientific thinking.

This book clearly shows Durkheim’s interest in a comparison of societies. He was concerned with both ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ societies; thus, in his work exists the possibility of a single science of social anthropology and sociology.
Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942)

Born and educated at Cracow, Poland, Malinowski obtained his doctorate in 1908 in physics and mathematics. He was, however, prevented from continuing further studies because of his illness. His doctor advised him to refrain from intense intellectual work, although he could carry out some light reading. During this time, he read James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, which had a gripping effect on him and he turned to anthropology. Despite their different viewpoints, Malinowski had great admiration for Frazer, who also contributed a foreword to his best-known book, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922).

Malinowski came to England in 1910, and was enrolled as a postgraduate student at the London School of Economics, from where he got his D.Sc. degree in 1916. In 1914, largely through the help of C.G. Seligman, he was awarded a scholarship to undertake field research in New Guinea. In total, Malinowski made three expeditions to New Guinea. The first, from September 1914 to March 1915, was spent mainly with the Mailu of Toulon Island. The second was with the Trobriands from June 1915 to May 1916. The last expedition was once again with the Trobriands, from October 1917 to October 1918. During these more than thirty months’ fieldwork, Malinowski discovered the technique of ‘studying people while participating in their lives as a native’, which is technically known as ‘participant observation’.

In 1927, he was appointed to the first Chair in Anthropology at the University of London. Besides his well-known Trobriand field study, Malinowski also conducted an eight months’ fieldwork (during the summer vacations of 1940 and 1941) with the Zapotec of Oaxaca (Mexico) on their marketing system. He was appointed permanently in 1942 as a professor at Yale University, but died before this appointment became effective.

Alongside A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski is regarded as the founder of functionalism, a method that studied society in its present form, rather in the ways in which it had evolved or diffused from one part of the world to the other. For functionalists, society or culture was an integrated whole of parts, and the aim of the investigator was to describe the nature of the interrelationship of these parts. The investigator tried to discover the contribution that a part made to the whole. He also investigated the question whether the contribution a part made to the whole helped in bringing about integration. Although Malinowski was a functionalist – or, as he sometimes called himself, the founder of the Functional School of Anthropology – he held the pre-functional approaches (namely, evolutionism and diffusionism) useful for analysis provided the relevant data were available. The functionalists were critical of, he thought, the guesswork (speculation and conjectures) in which the nineteenth and the early twentieth century evolutionists and diffusionists extravagantly indulged. In fact, he said that after he was through the writing up of most of the Trobriand data, he would shift his attention to the study of the processes of evolution and diffusion.

During Malinowski’s time, the concept of structure had become considerably popular, primarily because of the work of Radcliffe-Brown, who had actually borrowed this concept from Émile Durkheim. Giving primacy to structure in the analysis of social life
was fine, but what was unacceptable to Malinowski was relegation of the concept of culture to backseat. After Edward Tylor, he was the main British anthropologist to give a central place to culture. For him, culture comprised ‘inherited artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values.’ He also considered social organization as a part of culture. It is here that his concept of culture is different from the one that found acceptance with other anthropologists.

Culture performed, Malinowski thought, an indispensable function of satisfying the biological needs of human beings, seven in number, which he called the ‘basic needs’. Each of these basic needs had a cultural response. For instance, the first need is ‘metabolism’, and the cultural response is ‘food-getting’. Similarly, for the basic need of reproduction, the cultural response is kinship, because it deals with the regulation of sex and marriage. For Malinowski, culture is a ‘need-fulfilling system’. This is the reason why some scholars call his approach ‘bio-cultural functionalism’. The needs are of the individual. Once they are fulfilled, the individual will be able to survive. No other anthropologist of Malinowski’s time gave so much importance to the biological needs and the individual as he did. He also recognized the significance of the mental functions. For instance, he explained magic as combating the anxiety that is built up in human beings because of the uncertainties of life. Since he recognized the individual and the mental aspects of social acts, his functionalism has also earned the title of ‘psychological functionalism’.

During his lifetime, Malinowski was regarded less for his theory and more for his contribution to the method of fieldwork. For many years, the pattern in England was that the students studied under Malinowski for fieldwork, before they shifted to Radcliffe-Brown for training in theory. Posthumously was published his A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays (1944), which presented an outline of his ‘need theory’ that has now aroused the interests of scholars from other disciplines. His writings on the anthropology of war, also published posthumously, have also become popular in recent decades.

**Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955)**

He was a British anthropologist, regarded as the founder of what he has called the ‘structural-functional’ approach, and along with another protagonist, Bronislaw Malinowski, he is considered to have initiated a ‘functional revolution’ in anthropology, the impact of which was felt the world all over. Although he did not write as much as his other contemporaries had done, whatever he wrote had, in the words of Adam Kuper, ‘glacial clarity’, and therefore, it was received well. He chose words ‘like precious stones’, in the words of M.N. Srinivas, and wrote when he thought he had a definite point to make. Besides being known as a teacher of extraordinary profundity and gift of communication, Radcliffe-Brown was instrumental in building up two departments of anthropology, at Cape Town (South Africa) and Sydney (Australia). He occupied the Chair of Social Anthropology at Oxford from 1937 to 1946, and his successor was E.E. Evans-Pritchard.
Alfred Reginald Brown, as he was originally called before he changed his name to Radcliffe-Brown in 1926, incorporating his mother’s name, was born at Sparkbrook, Birmingham, and educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. At college, he studied Mental and Moral Sciences, whence he came in contact with W.H.R. Rivers, a veteran of the Torres Straits expedition, Cambridge’s pioneering venture in anthropological field study, who had shifted his interests from psychology to anthropology. He also came in touch with A.C. Haddon, another reputed anthropologist.

From Rivers and Haddon came the stimulus to field research, and Radcliffe-Brown made a study of the Andaman Islands from 1906 to 1908. The Andamans numbered less than 1,300, already decimated because of the epidemics of measles, influenza, and syphilis, the diseases that came in the wake of the establishment of a penal colony and European settlement. Radcliffe-Brown thought of describing the social organization of the Andamans, as it had existed before the European occupation of the islands, for which he had to rely upon the memories of his respondents. His work on the Andamans was a conventional reconstruction of their cultural history, which was substantially revised before it was published in 1922 as *The Andaman Islanders*, warmly dedicated to his teachers, Rivers and Haddon.

A significant change in his career came around 1910 when he became aware of the works of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, and this influence paved his way towards the structural-functional approach. His second field research, which was in Australia (1910-12), where he worked on the intricacies of kinship and social organization among the Kariera, bore the impact of the French sociologists.

Radcliffe-Brown’s primary concern was to distinguish social anthropology, which he regarded as a branch of ‘comparative sociology’, from ethnology, the kind of interest that James Frazer and several others represented. Ethnologists argued from inadequate evidence, and often, they speculated about the past in the absence of any empirical materials. It was their ‘conjectural history’ and ‘pseudo-historical explanations’ that aroused his wrath. The task of social anthropologists was to study societies ‘here-and-now’, using scientific methods, and rely on ‘authentic history’, if available, to reach acceptable generalizations, the law-like propositions. For him, social anthropology was a ‘natural science of society’ and the procedure to be used for moving from particular to general was to apply the comparative method.

An important contribution that Radcliffe-Brown made was to the understanding of totemism, about which he held two theories. The first was an example of the typical structural-functional theory, while the second anticipated structuralism, developed fully in Claude Lévi-Strauss’ study of totemism in 1962.

Radcliffe-Brown’s first paper on this subject is titled ‘The Sociological Theory of Totemism’, delivered at a conference in Java in 1929. Here, he argues that totems express clan solidarity, an explanation that Durkheim had earlier offered. But he disagrees with Durkheim on the relationship between species and rituals. Durkheim’s argument was that because given species represent social groups, these species are made the objects of
rituals. Radcliffe-Brown’s thesis was just the opposite: because a species is already of ritual importance that is the reason why it is chosen to represent a group.

In his second paper on totemism titled ‘The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology’, which was given as a public lecture in 1951, Radcliffe-Brown was concerned not only with how the Australian Aborigines classify people as members of social groups, but how they classify animals as members of species. In other words, he was concerned with relations between systems of classification, an area that was fully explored later by Lévi-Strauss.

Radcliffe-Brown’s commitment to the issues of theoretical importance earned him a respectable place both in England and the USA. In the United States, he left his mark through the work of Sol Tax and Fred Eggan. His influence was also pronounced in South Africa and Australia. His ideas also reached India through the work of his doctoral student, Srinivas. In fact, at one time, anthropology students came to him for guidance in theory, after having received their training in fieldwork methods under Malinowski. His students (Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Gluckman) continued with his legacy for some years, before they gradually moved away from his structural-functional approach, thus exploring the other theoretical perspectives of value.

**Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908 - )**

Lévi-Strauss is a well-known French anthropologist known for his contribution to the development of structural anthropology, which incidentally also happens to be the title of one of his popular books (1969, published in two volumes). Born on 28 November 1908 in Brussels (Belgium) as the son of an artist, he belongs to an intellectual French Jewish family. Lévi-Strauss studied law and philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. However, he did not pursue the study of law and got through the public service examination in 1931 studying philosophy. After that he taught at a secondary school. In 1935, he accepted the offer to be part of a French cultural mission to Brazil. From 1935 to 1939, he taught sociology at the University of Sao Paulo. During this period, he read the 1920 edition of Robert Lowie’s *Primitive Society*, and decided to conduct his first fieldwork in the Mato Grosso and the Amazon Rainforest. First, he studied Guaycuru and the Bororo; and then, several years later, his fieldwork was with the Nambikwara and Tupi-Kawahib. During the Second World War, he spent most of his time in New York. From 1942 to 1945, he taught at the New School of Social Research. Along with intellectuals like Jacques Maritain, Henri Focillon and Roman Jacobson, he founded the École Libre des Hautes Études, a university-in-exile for French academicians. His friendship with Jacobson, who was one of the exponents of linguistic structuralism, helped him shape his own anthropological structuralism. In the U.S.A., he also came in touch with the anthropology and field notes (and other materials) of Franz Boas.

Lévi-Strauss returned to Paris in 1948. He then submitted ‘two theses’ (one ‘minor’ and a ‘major’) for the award of a doctorate from the Sorbonne. They were respectively titled *The Family and Social Life of the Nambikwara Indians* and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. It was the latter that established him as an important anthropologist, for this
book was reviewed favourably in a number of leading journals. In 1950, he occupied the Chair of the Religious Sciences of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, which he renamed ‘Comparative Religion of Non-literate Peoples’. In 1959, he assumed the Chair of Social Anthropology at the Collège de France. He established the Laboratory for Social Anthropology (for training students) and a journal, *L’Homme*, for publishing their findings.

Lévi-Strauss was elected to the Académie Française in 1973, which is the highest honour accorded to an intellectual in France. The same year, he also received the Erasmus Award. The Meister-Eckhard Prize for philosophy was conferred upon him in 2003. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and has received several honorary doctorates from universities such as Oxford, Harvard, and Columbia.

For Lévi-Strauss, structuralism implies a search for deep, invisible, and innate structures universal to humankind. These unapparent and hidden structures manifest in surface (and conscious) behaviour that varies from one culture to the others. Conscious structures are a ‘misnomer’. Therefore, we have to discover the underlying ‘unconscious’ structures, and how they are transformed into ‘conscious’ structures.

In his work on kinship, Lévi-Strauss proposed what has come to be known as the ‘alliance theory’ (‘alliance’ is a French word for marriage). It was set against the ‘descent theory’, which British anthropologists, particularly A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, had put forth. For Lévi-Strauss, incest taboo is the essence of culture. It leads to the formation of relations between groups that exchange spouses (the ‘wife-givers’ and ‘wife-takers’). Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between two kinds of exchange – restricted and generalized. When two groups exchange their spouses over time, it is called restricted, but when more than two groups are related in a cycle of exchange, it is generalized. The implications of both the exchanges in terms of the formation of groups are different.

Lévi-Strauss’s seminal work on kinship was succeeded by a widely read account based on his Brazilian fieldwork called *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Then came two outstanding contributions to the study of classification: *Totemism* (1962) and *The Savage Mind* (1962). After that he devoted himself to the study of myths. Between 1964 and 1970, four volumes of *Mythologiques* appeared, respectively titled *The Raw and the Cooked*, *From Honey to Ashes*, *The Origin of Table Manners*, and *The Naked Man*. In these volumes, he followed a single myth from the tip of South America and followed all its variations from one group to another up through Central America, and eventually into the Arctic Circle. He thus traced the myth’s spread from one end of the American continent to the other, and offered its structural analysis.

Lévi-Strauss created a stir in anthropology. Some scholars set aside their own line of enquiry for the time being to experiment with his method, whereas the others reacted more critically to his ideas. But nowhere was his impact total and complete – he could not create an ‘academic lineage’. His idea of ‘universal structures’ of human mind has been labeled by some as his ‘cosmic ambition’, generalizing about human society as a whole. While British anthropologists (especially Edmund Leach, Rodney Needham) in
the 1950s and 1960s were impressed with Lévi-Strauss, they were not in agreement with his abstract search for universal patterns. They tended to apply structuralism at a ‘micro’ (or ‘regional’) level. Another example is of the work of Louis Dumont, a student of Marcel Mauss, who in his work *Homo Hierarchicus* (1967) presented a regional-structural understanding of social hierarchy in India. The approach of applying structural methodology at a micro level is known as ‘neo-structuralism’.

**Robert Redfield (1897-1958)**

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Robert Redfield was educated in the University of Chicago school system. He graduated in law in 1921 and practiced it for a brief period. Then, in 1923, he had a chance to visit Mexico, a country that fascinated him so much that he decided to leave the legal practice and undertake work in anthropology. He studied Sicilians and Mexicans in Chicago, and also, carried out excavations at Indian mounds in Ohio. In 1925, he returned to Mexico for a fieldwork in a traditional village, from which resulted his famous work titled *Tepoztlán: A Mexican Village* (1930). This work became the forerunner of a series of important and influential studies. From 1930 onwards, in collaboration with his associates, Redfield undertook sociological investigations in Yucatan and Guatemala. These field studies yielded two path-breaking monographs: first, *Chan Khom*, published in 1934 and written jointly with Alfonso Villa-Rojas; and second, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (1941). In 1948, he returned to Chan Khom for a restudy, and in 1950 appeared his *A Village that Chose Progress*. Incidentally, in 1955, he visited India to begin a fieldwork on the relations of tribal, peasant, and urban cultures, but his work was cut short by a serious illness, forcing him to return to Chicago.

During Redfield’s time, two approaches ruled anthropology. The British anthropologists favoured a scientific study, on the pattern of a natural science, with an aim to find out the inter-relationship between different parts of the contemporary human society. This approach was known as functionalism. The American anthropologists, on the other hand, were more interested in understanding the historical dimensions of society. If for British, anthropology was a ‘science of society’, for Americans, it was closer to history. Redfield was perceptively aware of this debate, as is clear from his first published paper ‘Anthropology, a Natural Science?’ (*Social Forces*, IV: 715-21, 1926). His view was that science was not adequate to give a complete knowledge of human beings and their works. Historical perspectives are essential for a holistic understanding.

Moreover, anthropology of Redfield’s time largely focused on the study of ‘small, tribal societies’, which were treated as ‘closed and bounded’ units. It meant that these societies could be studied as wholes, without taking into consideration the forces emerging from the outside world. In contrast, in the Mexican village of Tepoztlán, Redfield found a society that was neither isolated nor was it a part of an urban conglomeration. It was rather something in between. To understand it properly, new concepts and methods of investigation were required. It was against this background that the concepts of ‘folk society’ and ‘folk culture’ emerged. A folk society was small, homogeneous, and tradition-bound, but was not closed to influences and impacts from the outside world. What irked Redfield the most was the idea of confining the subject matter of
anthropology to the so-called ‘isolated’ and ‘closed’ societies. In any case, these societies were fast changing because of their ceaseless contacts with the external world. Anthropology was destined to perish unless it fully incorporated the aspects of dynamism in its perspective.

The dynamic approach led him to compare four communities in one region (Yucatan), which were: a tribal community, a peasant village, a town, and the city of Mérida. His 1941 book The Folk Culture of Yucatan presented the findings of this controlled comparison showing the process of change from tribal to urban life. The concept of ‘folk-urban continuum’ was an outcome of this research, which propelled him to look beyond the community and the region to the world as a whole. He started looking at civilization as an important component of change. Even small communities interacted with civilization; so he viewed the peasant society, for example, as a ‘fragment of civilization’. For analyzing this enduring interaction between communities and civilization, Redfield suggested the concepts of great tradition and little tradition. The former was manifested in the urban and intellectual elite, whereas the latter was represented in the villages and rural communities. Redfield saw these traditions in a process of constant interaction, where elements from one tradition moved into the other and were reinterpreted. A study of dynamic interaction required one to look into history. Because of this, Redfield’s approach is also known as ‘historical-civilizational’, which he ably developed in his The Primitive World and Its Transformations (1953), The Little Community (1955), and Peasant Society and Culture (1956).

One of Redfield’s interests lay in defining as clearly as possible the distinguishing characteristics of the discipline of anthropology. In one of his articles titled ‘Anthropology: Unity and Diversity’, he emphasized the point that anthropology stood at the point that separated historical and scientific inquiry. It was both scientific and historical. The subdivisions of anthropology, viz. archaeology, anthropological linguistics, physical anthropology, and social anthropology, were all interested, ‘in people in general, rather than their own people in particular.’ Throughout his career, Redfield emphasized a diversity of anthropological method and the unity that lay in a common way of looking at society and culture.

S.C. Roy (1871-1942)

Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy was born on 4 November 1871 in a village called Karapara (of Khulna district), now in Bangladesh. His father was a member of the Bengal Judicial Service. As a part of the requirement of his service, he was posted from one place to another, taking his family with him wherever he went. It was in Purulia that Sarat Ray came in contact with tribespersons for the first time.

Roy completed his post-graduation in English in 1893 from General Assembly Institute (now known as the Scottish Church College). Two years later, he got his law degree from Rippon College, now Surendranath College. Then, he worked as Headmaster of Mymensingh High School, and later as Principal of G.E.L. Mission High School (Ranchi). He learnt about the plight of tribesmen during his stay at Ranchi. He then left
teaching in 1897 to start legal practice at Alipur (Calcutta). On medical advice, he shifted his practice to Ranchi, where the climate suited him utmost. He continued to practice as a lawyer for the following thirty-five years.

During his legal career, he used to visit the interiors of Chotanagpur on commission from the court. These visits permitted him to have a closer look at tribes, their oppression and hardship. The government authorities also had an apathetic attitude towards tribes.

Moreover, the tribes were ignorant of the laws and legal procedures that they could have used for serving and safeguarding their interests. The legal specialists had no knowledge of the customs and practices of tribes in accordance with which they divided their property, resolved their disputes, elected their leaders, and formed their institutions.

Against this background, it was essential to do the detailed studies of tribal communities so that they got justice and their interests were not harmed. Focusing upon the Munda, Roy wrote his first monograph (the first by any Indian writer on an Indian tribe) titled Munda and Their Country (1912). In short time, this work gained popularity. The then Lieutenant- Governor of Bihar, Sir Edward Gait, advanced financial assistance to Roy to carry out a piece of research on the Oraons. In 1915 was published his The Oraon of Chota Nagpur. He then published other monographs titled The Birhor: A Little Known Jungle Tribe of Chota Nagpur (1925), Oraon Religion and Customs (1928), The Hill Bhuiya of Orissa (1935), and The Kharias (with R.C. Roy, 1937). All this earned him the distinction of the ‘doyen of Indian anthropology.’ J.H. Hutton called him the ‘father of Indian ethnology.’

Roy was one of the foundation members of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, its first Honorary General Secretary, and a member of its council from 1915 to the end of his life. He was awarded a Kaiser-i-Hind Silver Medal in 1913. He regularly contributed to the journal of this society. He also donated his personal collection of material artifacts from tribal societies to the Anthropology and Prehistoric Gallery of Patna Museum. He delivered Readership Lectures in anthropology (in 1919 and 1920) at Patna University. The title of Rai Bahadur was conferred upon him in 1919. In 1921, he founded the first anthropology journal in India called Man in India, which has continued with its uninterrupted publication till date. The same year, he was also elected an Honorary Member of the Folklore Society of London. In 1933, he gave up his legal practice to devote him completely to anthropological studies.

In addition to cultural anthropology, which was Roy’s first commitment, he also contributed to physical anthropology, prehistory and folklore. He also conducted anthropometric work for his tribal studies, seeking the help of P.C. Mahalanobis for the analysis of data. Roy thought that several issues of cultural studies and migration of people could be solved by exploring prehistoric sites and taking into account the evidences thus obtained. He explored forty-six prehistoric sites in Ranchi district. One of his significant contributions to prehistory was the digging up of Asura sites. The Asura are regarded as the pre-Munda inhabitants of Chotanagpur. Roy’s conclusion was that the Asura belonged to the same age as that of the people of the Indus Valley. However, his
conclusion received criticisms from archaeologists who saw no connection between the Asura sites in Chotanagpur and the pre-Munda Asura tribe of Ranchi.

Although Roy’s monographs were on tribes, he did not leave out the study of complex civilization through Indological literature. The classical texts provided a wealth of data on Indian society. For Roy, anthropology was not a study of the ‘oddities’, as was held in many quarters. Rather, it was the study of the entire humankind. He also carried out detailed studies of caste, race and religion in India.

Throughout his life, Roy made a strong plea for the study of folklore. He noted that the study of folk mind – as it expressed itself in customs, rites, beliefs, tales, and arts and crafts – was not ‘mere pastime.’ It should be pursued for the light it threw on ‘the early intellectual evolution of human societies or what [might] be appropriately called the prehistory of human mind.’ He quoted James Frazer who had said that the study of folklore yielded the ‘fossils of mind’, which illustrated an ‘early stage in the progress of thought from its low beginnings.’ Like the other intellectuals of his time, Roy was also inclined towards evolutionism.

For Roy, anthropology was just not a theoretical branch of knowledge. Rather, it should be put to use to solve human problems. In one of his articles, he wrote: ‘The cardinal lessons of anthropology may be very usefully applied to certain crying problems of our national life. The study of men of different races and religions, of customs and manners of one another may help in promoting mutual amity, and knitting ever more closely the bonds of unity between them, and thus eventually help to banish much of the communal animosity which is the bane of Indian national life at the present day.’ Roy saw the role of anthropology as fostering national integration.

During his time, he was well known for his applied orientations. The government sought his advice in matters of tribes. There are many cases when his timely intervention helped in ending a situation of dispute.

M.N. Srinivas (1916-1999)

After doing a B.A. (Honours) in social philosophy from Mysore in 1936, Srinivas read sociology for an M.A. degree from Bombay. In addition, he also worked for a degree in law. For his master’s, he submitted a dissertation on marriage and family among the Kannada castes of Mysore (Karnataka), which was published in 1942, bearing the title *Marriage and Family in Mysore*, and was favourably reviewed in journals including *Nature*.

For a doctorate, Srinivas studied under the renowned sociologist of that time, G.S. Ghurye, who, though not a serious fieldworker himself, believed in the ‘indissoluble link between social anthropology and the fieldwork tradition.’ Ghurye advised his students, who came to Bombay from different parts of the country, to return to their respective regions for fieldwork. In this way, he succeeded in building up a large amount of literature in English on a variety of communities all across the country. He advised
Srinivas to pursue a study of the Coorgs of Mysore. Based on a lengthy, first-hand fieldwork, Srinivas submitted a two-volume work of nine hundred pages on Coorgs to Bombay University for a doctorate in sociology. He earned another doctorate in 1947, this time in social anthropology from Oxford University, reworking the empirical data he had collected for his first doctorate on the Coorgs from the perspective of the structural-functional approach of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who also happened to be his first supervisor. After Radcliffe-Brown’s retirement, E.E. Evans-Pritchard supervised Srinivas’s doctoral work. Back home, Srinivas helped in setting up two departments of sociology, at Baroda (Gujarat) and Delhi.

Srinivas is well known for the distinction he made between the ‘book-view’ (or, the ‘textual view’) and the ‘field-view’ (or, the ‘contextual view’) of society. The book-view is abstracted from texts, particularly the classical, whereas the first-hand, observational, study yields the field-view. Historians’ expertise lies in systematically presenting the book-view of society, whilst anthropologists and sociologists specialize in the field-view. Srinivas summarily rejected any argument postulating the superiority of one view over the other, for each view is correct and shows the specialization of two different, yet related, disciplines. In their studies, anthropologists are expected to juxtapose both the views of society.

An important interest that Srinivas had was in the relationship between sociology and social anthropology. He was extremely critical of sociology which bore resemblance to social philosophy, on one hand, and social work, on the other. He was always concerned with the kind of sociology that was going to become popular in Indian universities in future. He refused to make a distinction between sociology and social anthropology in the Indian context. On the contrary, he argued that we should do away with this distinction, and include them under the rubric of ‘comparative sociology’.

Srinivas is internationally known for his concept of Sanskritization, the process of upward ritual mobility in caste system. He used this concept for the first time in his Oxford thesis, which was published with a foreword from Radcliffe-Brown under the title *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952). This work has also shown the importance of the concepts of solidarity, spread, and different levels of Hinduism. By Sanskritization, he meant the process whereby a lower caste, or tribal group, emulates the customs and practices of the upper, twice-born caste. A system, which theoretically was believed to be immutable, was always dynamic, allowing people from lower social categories to move up. Sanskritization also facilitated the integration of tribes in caste system. Srinivas was well aware of the fact that Sanskritization was not the only process of upward mobility in India; there were other processes as well. In his writings, he noted that Sanskritization was a group process; it took a couple of generations for its completion; and it did not help the ‘untouchables’ even when they had the prerequisites (such as control over land) on the basis of which they could have claimed a higher status.

Srinivas also conducted a first-hand study of a village in Mysore called Rampura. He had earlier argued that Indian village was never ‘isolated’; it had long-term, persisting, and perennial relations with the outside world. The Rampura study yielded another popular
concept from him called the ‘dominant caste’. He defined dominant caste in terms of five characteristics: (1) numerical preponderance; (2) control over economic resources; (3) control over political power; (4) high ritual status; and (5) the first to take advantage of the Western education system. He also thought that the dominant caste had a tradition of agriculture and wielded the traditional instruments of violence to keep their position intact. This concept proved to be of great help in understanding local power structure and its relationship with economy.

As the processed notes on this village were destroyed in a fire at Stanford, Srinivas wrote a detailed account of this village from his memory, thereby contributing to what has come to be known as the method of ‘memory ethnography’. This book was aptly titled *The Remembered Village* (1976). In 1963, Srinivas delivered the Tagore Lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, in which along with Sanskritization, he also discussed the role of the processes of Westernization and Secularization in Indian society. In addition, he has made seminal contribution to the issues of methodology, the analysis of disputes, status of women, national integration, caste and politics, and caste in contemporary India.

**Dhirendra Nath Majumdar (1903-1960)**

After obtaining his master’s degree in anthropology, with a double first, from Calcutta University in 1924, Majumdar was awarded the coveted Premchand Roychand Scholarship. His turned down his nomination for a sub-deputy collectorship to undertake an anthropological fieldwork in Chotanagpur (now a part of Jharkhand) to study the Ho tribe, for which he was inspired by Rai Bahadur S.C. Roy, the ‘father of Indian ethnological tradition’.

In 1928, he joined Lucknow University, where he remained till his death, in the department of economics and sociology as a lecturer in primitive economics. Later, he read for his doctor’s degree at Cambridge, writing a dissertation on culture contact and acculturation among the Ho, under the supervision of T.C. Hodson, in 1935. During his period of stay in England, he attended the famous seminars of Bronislaw Malinowski, which made a lasting impact on his approach to the study of culture. He also received advanced training in physical anthropology at Cambridge, under the guidance of G.M. Morant and R.R. Gates. He took training in serological techniques at Galton Laboratory in London, an interest that lasted till his death.

Majumdar was the President of the Anthropology and Archaeology Section of the Indian Science Congress session held at Lahore in 1939. He was elected a Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences in 1941. The same year, the decennial census was being conducted in the country, and the government invited Majumdar to carry out an anthropometric and serological survey of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). Later, he conducted similar surveys in Bengal and Gujarat. Wherever he went for his survey, he made ethnographic notes on the castes and tribes of that region.
In 1946, Majumdar became a reader in anthropology in the Department of Economics and Sociology at the University of Lucknow. Four years later, a Department of Anthropology was created in the same university, and he was made its Head. He believed in a broad-based, integrated training in anthropology. Thus, the courses he drafted for both undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in anthropology included physical anthropology, prehistory, and social anthropology. He worked hard to build one of the best departments in anthropology. In 1945, Majumdar founded the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society at Lucknow, and two years later, he started a quarterly journal in anthropology, *The Eastern Anthropologist*. He guided a large number of students, and some of them (such as L.P. Vidyarthi, T.N. Madan, N. Subba Reddy, Brij Raj Chauhan, Gopala Sarana, R.S. Khare, T.N. Pandey) have achieved international fame. He organized and supervised several research projects; the first of these was started in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology of Cornell University.

Majumdar excelled in ethnographic accounts. He was a field worker of exceptional quality, who used to carry out long field studies in a community either alone or with his students. All these studies used to be in vernacular. For his *Himalayan Polyandry*, published posthumously, he spent nearly twenty-two summers (almost five years) with the Khasas. He wrote full-length ethnographic accounts of the Ho (Bihar) and the Khasas (Uttar Pradesh). He also studied the Korwa and the Tharu (both of Uttar Pradesh), the Gond (Bastar), and the Bhil (Gujarat), and wrote on them. He had sympathy for the functional approach, which he used for collecting and interpreting data. But his functionalism was not only concerned with order and stability, for he always dealt with the aspects of culture change. He showed, as did Malinowski, that a culture continued to be an integrated whole even when it was being transformed. His doctoral thesis was concerned with the impact of modern civilization on tribal people.

In addition to tribal studies, for which he is well known, Majumdar also made a significant contribution to rural studies. He wrote a detailed account of a village in his *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village* (1958), a book the impact of which can be noted in some modern village studies (such as Gloria Goodwin Raheja’s *The Poison in the Gift*). Majumdar is also reputed for a survey of the industrial city of Kanpur (1960), which was in fact the first urban study by an Indian anthropologist.

Majumdar believed that anthropological findings should be put to use, to the task of national development. He was a member of the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission. In its meetings, he always placed emphasis on the role of anthropology (and sociology) in directed and planned changes. By studying the local communities, the anthropologists (and sociologists) would come to know the problems and pressing needs of the people, and therefore, would help in formulating culturally suitable programmes of development. They would also conduct evaluative studies to know objectively the impact of development programmes.

He also carried out several anthropometric and serological surveys in Uttar Pradesh, and showed that castes close to each other in hierarchy were also close to each other in biometric variations. He also wrote a textbook on archaeology with one of his students.
(Gopala Sarana). In other words, he was one of the few anthropologists of his generation who truly subscribed to the definition of anthropology as the study of human beings in time and space.

**Irawati Karve (1905-1970)**

India’s first woman anthropologist, Karve, was a sociologist in Deccan College (Pune). Before that she had worked as Registrar at the S.N.D.T. Women’s University in Bombay. She belonged to the tradition of general anthropology, since she contributed to kinship studies, anthropometry, blood group analysis, and study of fossil and archaeological remains. She also collected and analyzed folk songs, and translated poems that women had written. In addition, she wrote books and articles in Marathi, her native tongue, some of which have also been translated into English. Her book titled *Yugant*, based on the epic of Mahabharat, received the award of the best book in Marathi from Sahitya Academy.

After studying philosophy at Fergusson College, Karve worked for a post-graduate degree under the Bombay sociologist, G.S. Ghurye. For her dissertation, she chose to work on the ethnology of her own caste, the Chitpavan Brahmin, in which she combined physical anthropological measurements with evidences from Indology about caste origin. In 1930, she earned a doctorate from Germany, under the supervision of Eugene Fischer, which was a study of normal asymmetry of human skull. This study was of great significance at that time because many of the arguments about racism depended upon such studies. Karve’s study showed that there were no racial differences in symmetries.

Scholars divide Karve’s work, which touched upon the four sub-specializations of anthropology, into the following categories: (1) Physical anthropological and archaeological studies that included anthropometric and serological investigations of communities, and the excavations she carried out at pre-historic sites, some of which were with her colleague, H.D. Sankalia; (2) Social and linguistic anthropological investigations of caste, studying their kinship, folk songs, oral traditions, etc; (3) Survey works carried out to cover the activities of weekly markets, urban populations, people replaced by development projects, problems of pastoral groups, etc; (4) Popular articles on a variety of issues, such as of women, race, region, and language.

In her study of variation among populations, she advocated the approach that each endogamous group should be treated as a unit, because of marriage the genetic structure of the group is maintained overtime. As one of the main principles defining a caste is endogamy, it can be taken up for social and biological studies. Before her, it was believed that the caste and its further divisions, i.e. sub-castes, have the same genetic stock because of their common origin. In other words, the belief was that the relation that existed between species and sub-species also existed between caste and its sub-castes. Karve’s socio-biological investigations led her to conclude that the sub-castes might have different ethnic or racial origin, but they came to occupy the same position because of pursuing the same occupation, or sharing the same region. Historically, therefore, different biological groups come to be classified together because of their occupational and regional affinity. To comprehend this, Karve proposed the concept of ‘caste-cluster’,
which is a larger entity, and it comprises smaller units, each endogamous, that could be termed ‘castes’. She was not in favour of the term ‘sub-caste’ because it was confusing and ill defined, and proposed a necessary biogenetic relationship with the larger entity that might not be true.

With this as her main hypothesis, she carried out anthropometric studies of various castes and tribes of Maharashtra. These findings led her to two well-received books: *Kinship Organization in India* (1953) and *Hindu Society: An Interpretation* (1961). Later, she advised her students to carry forward their research works on the same line, as a result of which Deccan College collected a wide range of data on a variety of biological features of caste groups. Karve also took active interest in understanding the biological variation of extinct populations and the nature of prehistoric movements in India. She, therefore, collaborated with the department of archaeology of Deccan College in the excavation at Langhnaj, a Mesolithic site. She carried out a detailed study of the human skeletal remains recovered from there.

A large part of Karve’s research work dealt with socio-economic surveys carried out in different parts of Maharashtra. One of her first surveys was on the Bhils of west Khandesh. From a survey of four villages around Poona, she concluded that caste exercised a stronghold on social relations. Another survey was conducted in a small sugar town of Satara. Contrary to what urban anthropologists would like to say, she found that the educated people of the town were opting to practice agriculture because with new cash crops (like sugar and cotton), farming had become far more profitable than letting the land leased out. One of her surveys on markets in Nasik was quite detailed about the practice of informal economy.

To sum up: Karve not only conformed to the four-fold division of anthropology, but contributed to each one of them. She urged upon the cultural and physical anthropologists to work together. For sociological and anthropometric investigations, they must begin with sub-castes as the smallest social units. Karve put forth the theory about the fission and fusion of castes. She combined all kinds of evidences – mythical, archaeological, historical, and fieldwork-based – to understand the dynamics of Indian society. She also edited the gazetteer volume, *Maharashtra, Land and its People*.

**S.C. Dube (1922-1996)**

After earning a degree in political science, Dube got his first teaching appointment in Hislop College, which was affiliated to Nagpur University. At this university, he also earned a doctoral degree for the study of a tribal community of Madhya Pradesh called the Kamar. Form Nagpur, he moved to Lucknow, where he taught anthropology courses with towering intellectuals such as Radhakamal Mukherjee, D.P. Mukerji, and D.N. Majumdar. He then moved to Osmania University in Hyderabad, where the teaching of anthropology within the department of sociology had started with the involvement of Christoph von Führer-Haimendorf, an eminent anthropologist.
Dube’s movement from Lucknow to Hyderabad also marked his transition from anthropology to sociology and from tribal to village studies. There, he organized an interdisciplinary team to study an Indian village called Shamirpet in the Telangana region. While he was a visiting lecturer to the School of Oriental and African Studies in the early 1950s, he wrote up the data on this village in the form of a monograph titled *Indian Village*, which was published by Routledge and Kegan Paul. It was one of the three path-breaking books published on rural India in 1955: the other two were M.N. Srinivas’s edited volume *India’s Villages* and McKim Marriott’s *Village India*.

Later, Dube carried out another piece of team research, popularly known as the Cornell-India Project, in the villages of Rankhandi and Jhaberan in western Uttar Pradesh. In 1958 resulted his *India’s Changing Villages*, which analyzed the impact of the Community Development Programme on village communities. He also joined the Anthropological Survey of India (Nagpur station) after his return from Cornell. In 1957, he joined the University of Sagar (in Madhya Pradesh) as its first professor of anthropology. After spending three years at Sagar, Dube joined the Central Institute for Research and Training in Community Development at Mussoorie. Because of Dube’s efforts, it became the National Institute of Community Development (NICD), and he became its Principal. Later, it was moved to Hyderabad. In the four years that Dube spent there, he succeeded in mobilizing several young students to do field-based studies in villages and study the processes of social and cultural change in them. Dube became the director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Simla. He was also the founding director of the G.B. Pant Institute of Social Research in Allahabad. During 1978-82, he also participated in a United Nations University project titled ‘Socio-cultural Development Alternatives in a Changing World’, which led to his famous book *Modernization and Development: The Search for Alternative Paradigms* (1988).

One of Dube’s famous works is on the Kamars, which was originally published in 1951, but has recently been reprinted. Dube’s interest in tribes started crystallizing when he came in contact with the two communities of Chattisgarh (namely Kamar and Bhunjia). These tribespersons had been periodically approaching his father with petitions or in connection with court cases that he was hearing. After the job was over, these men retreated to their abodes in forests rather than spending the night in a town or a multi-caste village. Their ‘shy smiles and openness’ profoundly touched Dube, who persuaded them to sing, to narrate the stories of their lives, and to talk about their problems, predicaments, and fortitudes. These contacts with tribes planted in him the seeds of anthropology. Later, he decided to carry out a field study of the Kamar, and traveled to their habitations from January to June 1945, and later in April 1946.

The outcome of these indefatigable efforts, some of which involved strenuous physical labour, such as traveling by bullock cart or walking miles on foot, was a total account of the Kamar, which is now a Primitive Tribe of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. The picture that Dube painted here was of the Kamar of 1945-46, and of the direction in which they were changing. With each year, their awareness of the exterior societies was increasing. They knew of Mahatma Gandhi, whom they regarded as the ‘king of the
kings’, a man endowed with supreme magical powers that he used to struggle against the British regime.

They knew of the judicial and administrative institutions imposed on them with the advent of the colonial rule. Although they had their own repertoire of beliefs and practices, the local level Hinduism was initiating noticeable modifications in their life. Furthermore, their interaction with other tribes and castes that had settled in their neighbourhood was fast intensifying, culminating in several irrevocable changes.

The strength of Dube’s work lay in the approach he proposed for tribal welfare. He did not lend support to the policy of isolating tribes from the wider world so that they could preserve their pristine culture and determine their own affairs. He was equally opposed to the theory of assimilating tribesmen with the Hindu civilization. These two approaches held the fort in the late 1940s. Dube favoured an approach where tribes could maintain their identity and be the proud builders of their culture. Along side, they should be integrated with the mainstream of Indian society.

In fact, this idea of integrating tribes with the wider mass of India garnered the maximum support from anthropologists and the state, and is still avowedly followed. Dube was one of the architects of this approach and will always be remembered for this.

Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1972)

For graduation (with honours), Bose read geology and joined a master’s in the same subject, but soon left college (in 1921) in response to the non-cooperation movement that the nationalists had launched against the British. In 1923, he returned to Calcutta University to do post-graduation in anthropology, and as a part of his course, he carried out fieldwork with a tribal community (known as the Ho) of Bihar.

After his formal study was over, he received a research fellowship in anthropology from Calcutta University to conduct a field study of the Juangs of Pal Lahara (Orissa). These shifting cultivators spoke a dialect belonging to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family, but to the outsiders they spoke a dialect of Oriya, the language spoken in Orissa. By speaking Oriya, Bose was able to establish rapport with them and collected facts of their social life and material culture. However, he quickly realized that because of speaking Oriya, distance existed between him and the people. He learnt the mother tongue of Juangs from one of their elders and conducted the rest of the field enquiry in the vernacular.

In his introduction to the English translation of Bose’s Bengali work, Hindu Samajer Garan, André Béteille writes that Bose was an ‘indefatigable fieldworker’. It was a ‘way of life’ for him. In disciplines like anthropology and geography, Bose said, students should be trained in the field, in addition to receiving training in the classroom and laboratory. However his fieldwork should be distinguished from the one that Malinowski popularized. Perhaps, it was Boas’s influence on him that his fieldwork included anthropological, archaeological, and geographical investigations.
Here, Béteille’s distinction between intensive and extensive fieldwork is relevant. Malinowski’s method was one of intensive fieldwork because it insisted a lengthy stay in a small society and preparing an ethnographic account of the people based on one’s field experiences. By comparison, Bose carried out several spells of fieldwork with the Juangs, punctuated with the writing up of field accounts. For Bose, the time spent in the field (fieldwork) and the time spent away from it (deskwork) was not clearly separated. Often, in the midst of writing, he used to rush to the field for making some more investigations. His fieldwork was of the extensive type.

In his comparative study of tribes, Bose was able to show that the influence of Aryan (or Brahminical) civilization was greater on Mudas and Oraons than among the Juangs and Savaras. It is through the influence of Aryan civilization that the tribal communities increasingly became a part of the wider world. The aspects of the processes that later came to be known as Hinduization and Sanskritization were explored in Bose’s popular article titled ‘The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption’. Here, he showed that marginal communities (such as tribes) were able to become a part of the wider society (i.e., the multi-caste Hindu society) by adopting an occupation and supplying regular services to other castes. It did not imply giving up their traditional customs and practices. Over a period of time, the tribal community was absorbed in the multi-caste Hindu system, retaining its deities and lore along with what they adopted from the Hindus.

Bose thought in terms of two modes of social organization in India that have co-existed from time immemorial. They may be called the ‘Brahminical’ and ‘tribal’. The former had a ‘superior technological base’ than the latter, because of which it was larger in scale and more complex in organization. Tribal communities were attracted to the Brahminical system because of its superior technology and the fact that it had greater stability and security. The caste system was able to ensure food supply even in times of great scarcity. By contrast, the tribal system was far more precarious. The other factor that attracted tribes to the Hindu system was that they were permitted to subscribe to their customs and practices even when they had the status of a caste.

For Bose, in order to understand Hindu society, we must take into account its level of technology and the pattern of its economic relations. But, Bose clarified, this did not mean any kind of technological or economic determinism. What he meant was that when we analyzed society, we should not lose sight of the facts of technology and economy.

In 1966, Bose delivered a number of lectures on national integration at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (Simla). He was deeply concerned about the upsurge of sub-nationalist movements in India. He sought their cause in the unequal distribution of economic gains among communities of the same and different states. People tried to consolidate their position by reinforcing their identity, drawing sharp boundaries around them. To counteract, a suggestion he gave was the devolution of political power to people, thus subscribing to the idea of self-governance.

Bose had the distinction of working closely with Mahatma Gandhi, the experiences of which he narrated in his book, *My Days with Gandhi* (1953). Gandhi advised Bose to see
him at work. One should not base one’s understanding of a man on his writings alone. This piece of advice had profound impact on Bose; it was anthropological, an example of the fieldwork-oriented approach.

**Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi (1931-1985)**

Vidyarthi was born on 28 February 1931 in village Bariyarpur of Patna district (Bihar). He read anthropology at Lucknow (for his post-graduation) and Chicago (for his doctorate). As an academic, he was associated with the Department of Anthropology at Ranchi University. He is reputed to have founded the ‘Ranchi School of Anthropology’ with its own set of concepts and concerns.

Vidyarthi was a leader of world anthropology. Since the mid-fifties, after his return from the United States, he worked tremendously hard for the cause of anthropology. Because of his hard work, anthropology acquired a respectable place both in academic and bureaucratic world. He was elected as the President of the Tenth International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) and the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES). He was the Founder-President of the Indian Anthropological Association. The University of Chicago conferred upon him the Distinguished Service Award. Some of his well known books are: *Sacred Complex of Hindu Gaya* (1961), *The Maler* (1963), *Ghaghra: A Tribal Village of Chotanagpur* (1966), *Rise of Social Anthropology in India* (1976), and *The Tribal Culture of India* (with B.K.Rai, 1976).

Vidyarthi made many important (and long lasting) contributions to anthropology. One of them pertained to the history of Indian anthropology. Working upon the earlier attempts to periodize the development of anthropology in India, Vidyarthi thought of the three phases, namely formative (1774-1919), constructive (1920-1949), and analytical (1950-onwards). Anthropological researches in the beginning were organized and developed under the British influence, but after India’s independence, these researches flourished under the American impact, and inter-disciplinary works also increased. In spite of varied influences, Indian anthropology has retained its ‘Indian-ness’; it has listened to ‘England, America and to itself’, Vidyarthi said, the outcome of which is a synthetic approach to the study of society.

Although anthropology is predominantly concerned with ‘pre-literate’ societies, it does not miss out the fact that India is essentially a ‘literate’ civilization. One of Vidyarthi’s strengths was that he studied both the ‘literate’ as well as the ‘pre-literate’ dimensions of Indian society. He made a seminal contribution to the concept of ‘sacred complex’, where he closely examined the worth of Robert Redfield’s and Milton Singer’s ideas. In his book on Hindu Gaya, for which data were collected from 1948 to 1956, he offered a battery of three concepts for the analysis of ‘sacred centres’, namely, ‘sacred geography’ (the sacred site), ‘sacred performance’ (the rituals), and ‘sacred specialists’ (the priests, the performers of rituals). His study revealed that each sacred complex showed a level of continuity, compromise and continuation between great and little traditions. The sacred specialists perform the function of transmitting the elements of great tradition to the
village folk. The sacred complex provided, Vidyarthi observed, a meeting place for different kinds of people, belonging to varied traditions and social backgrounds. Here, he furthered Bernard Cohn and McKim Marriott’s conclusion that pilgrimage contributed to national unity. He also observed that with the passage of time, the sacred complex would undergo urbanization. Those centres that came to be associated with supernatural feats and miraculous cures would urbanize faster than the others.

In this work, Vidyarthi dispelled the belief that the sacred specialists were a happy and satisfied lot, wanting to continue with their lore from one generation to the next. His study showed that they were seriously concerned about their future. Most of them were finding it difficult to make both ends meet since their clients did not pay them enough. There was a lot of competition at the sacred centres. The specialists did not want their sons to enter the priestly occupation. Later studies that Chris Fuller, David Pocock, and Jonathan Parry carried out in other sacred centres confirmed Vidyarthi’s observations.

The other concept Vidyarthi developed was of ‘nature-man-spirit complex’. It was a methodological devise to study those tribal communities that were largely cut off from the great tradition. In his study of the Sauria-Paharia tribe (also known as the Maler) of Rajmahal Hill (Chotanagpur, Jharkhanda), Vidyarthi gave this concept, where ‘nature’ referred to the interaction between the people and their habitat. By ‘man’, he meant the social institutions of people, such as kinship, marriage, polity, etc. Under the head of ‘spirit’, Vidyarthi classified the aspects of religion and supernaturalism. The three components (nature, man and spirit) are interrelated. Therefore, after giving a description of each one of them in the case of society under study, we should examine their connections and interrelations, for this would give us a holistic picture of that society. This understanding is imperative for initiating any developmental programmes in a society.

Vidyarthi also made an important contribution to urban and industrial anthropology. His study showed that the advent of British marked the beginning of industrial-urbanization. This phase accompanied the exploitation of mineral resources, establishment of mineral-based industries, investment of foreign capital, employment of foreign technocrats, and broadening of the technical base. This guided the emergence of a number of mining and industrial centres in hills and forests.

Vidyarthi also initiated the study of industrial complexes of Chotanagpur. His book titled *Socio-cultural Implications of Industrialization in India: A Case Study of Tribal Bihar* (1970) was a study of Hatia industrial complex. It critically examined the changes that followed the emergence of factories in an undeveloped area. In another work known as *Bhartiya Nagar* (1966), he reviewed the historical growth of urban centres in India, discussing the growth of Gaya and Ranchi as two examples.

Vidyarthi had the rare distinction of being the chairperson of several committees that the government of India set up at different points of time to chalk out the strategies for the progress and uplift of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward Classes. He
critically evaluated the rehabilitation scheme for the Birhor. He was widely known as an ‘action anthropologist’.

**Verrier Elwin (1902-1964)**

Harry Verrier Holman Elwin was born in Dover on 29 August 1902 to an Anglo-Saxon family. He graduated in 1924 from Oxford in literature. In 1927, he left for India along with four of his other colleagues to work with the Christa Seva Sangh, a missionary organization, located at Poona. Elwin wrote that he “he did not want to be a ‘missionary’ in the ordinary sense of the word, but [he] was greatly interested in the monastic life.” In January 1928, he met Mahatma Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram, and this event brought about profound changes in his life.

Elwin was looking for a community of people to work with, to help it through schools and hospitals, when a Congressman, Jamnalal Bajaj suggested that he spent time with the Gonds of Central India. Bajaj thought that the national workers as well as missionaries had neglected tribes. Following Bajaj’s advice, Elwin went to the market town of Betul (in Madhya Pradesh), up on the Satpura forest range.

This was the beginning of the anthropological career of Elwin, who has authored two-dozen books on tribal societies of India settled in different parts. Not only did he write ethnographic accounts, he also collected the folk literature (songs, riddles, myths, stories) of tribes and published extensively. Portraying the local social life in sensitive terms, he unhesitatingly provided a treasure of information about those aspects of life that had remained untouched in the earlier ethnographic works, for instance, the sexual and private life of people. Many people were sharply critical of Elwin’s *The Muria and Their Ghotul* (1947), since it was a closely observed account of the bi-sex dormitory (called *ghotul*) of the Murias of Bastar. Some labeled this work as ‘sensuous’ and ‘shocking’. However, others felt that Elwin had filled the gap in our knowledge about the neglected dimensions of social life.

Elwin thought that for conducting anthropological studies, we need people from a humanist background. We have to understand human feelings, sentiments, and meanings, and also, think in terms of bringing about change in human condition. From the beginning, Elwin was attracted to A.C. Haddon’s commitment to the practical application of anthropology. Haddon’s anthropology, he thought, was rightly called ‘philanthropology’. One of the chapters in Elwin’s 1964 book titled *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* was called ‘Philanthropology’, and a book of his selected writings that Nari Rustomji edited in 1989 bore the title *Verrier Elwin: Philanthropologist*. Elwin wrote: ‘The essence and art of anthropology is love. Without it, nothing is fertile, nothing is true.’ He did not see any contradiction between and opting for a scientific approach to the study of people and an ‘intense affectionate interest in them’, in ‘desiring their progress and welfare and in regarding them as human beings rather than as laboratory specimens.’

These ideas found their first expression in Elwin’s *The Baiga* (1939). After offering an extensive account of their institutions and the round of their social life, he dealt in detail
with their poverty-stricken existence. He located the cause of their exploitation and oppression to the undesirable entry of the ‘outsiders to their territory’. These outsiders were moneylenders, liquor-venders, usurpers of land, religious reformers, and government officials, whose sole aim was to establish their supremacy over tribespersons. Elwin described these contacts as ‘debasing’ culminating in their ‘economic exploitation’ and ‘cultural destruction’.

Against this background, Elwin advocated a policy of ‘temporary isolation’ for the Baiga. He proposed the idea of a ‘national park’, where the tribes could live on their own, without the intervention of ‘outsider-exploiters.’ His suggestion was that the entry of outsiders to tribal areas must be curbed, and allowed only when the government felt that their presence was absolutely essential in the interest of the local people. Temporary isolation would give tremendous respite to tribes. They would be able to determine their existence, and their culture would blossom. Although the policy of ‘isolationism’, as it came to be known, was espoused for the Baiga, later in his book titled *Loss of Nerve*, published somewhere between 1941 and 1942, he extended it for all those tribes whose existence was jeopardized because of harmful extraneous contacts. While putting forth this policy, Elwin drew upon the insights of his predecessors, who had firmly argued in favour of leaving the tribes alone and letting them determine their own affairs.

However, social workers severely criticized Elwin and other anthropologists (who favoured the isolation of tribes) for creating a ‘zoo or museum’ of tribal people so that they could study them in their pristine forms. The social workers wanted tribes to be ‘assimilated’ with the rest of the outside world, which in fact was of the Hindus.

Elwin rejected the criticisms of social workers and their myopic vision of anthropology. He also showed that the idea of assimilating one culture with the other was, to say the least, utopian. Moreover, Elwin was not proposing the ‘permanent isolation’ of tribes. He suggested temporary isolation so that tribespersons are relieved of the yoke of exploitation, and in the mean time, some culturally appropriate strategies could be devised for their uplift. But, the debate between Elwin and social workers was intense. The latter gathered more public support because of the need to bring in diverse sections together for the success of the national movement.

In the late 1940s, Elwin moved to the northeastern part of India for study. There, especially in the NEFA (North-Eastern Frontier Agency, now Arunachal Pradesh), he noticed that the backwardness of people was chiefly because of their isolation, which needed to be broken down for their progress. He wrote in his *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957): ‘We would like them to be able to move freely about their own hills and have easy access to the greater India of which at present they know little. We want to bring them into contact with the best people and the finest products of modern India.’ And, thus was born the policy of integrating tribes with the mainstream of Indian society, which has continued till today as the guiding people of our approach to tribal societies.
Elwin became an Indian national in 1954. He occupied several important positions, including the chief of the Anthropological Survey of India and the Advisor for Tribal Affairs to the NEFA.