An Overview of the Anthropological Theories

Nurazzura Mohamad Diah
Head
Department of Sociology & Anthropology
International Islamic University
Malaysia

Dewan Mahboob Hossain
Associate Professor
Department of Accounting & Information Systems
University of Dhaka
Bangladesh

Sohela Mustari
PhD Student
Department of Sociology & Anthropology
International Islamic University
Malaysia

Noor Syafika Ramli
Master in Anthropology
Universiti Kebangsaan
Malaysia

Abstract

Theories are treated as the lifeblood of the disciplines like sociology and anthropology. As a newer discipline that has grown approximately over the last two hundred years, anthropology has proposed different important theories on man and culture. This article presents with an overview of the theories of anthropology developed over the last two hundred years. This can be considered as a general summarized reading of the important anthropological theories like evolutionism, diffusionism, historical particularism, functionalism, culture and personality, structuralism, neo-evolutionism, cultural ecology, cultural materialism, postmodernist and feminist explanations. This article concludes that though each of these theories was criticized by the subsequent theorists, all these theories contributed a lot in the development of anthropology as a discipline.

Keywords: anthropology, theory, anthropological theory

1.0. Introduction

In the academic arena, anthropology is considered as a relatively new discipline as its major development mainly happened in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Though, in France and Germany, this discipline got a momentum in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries in different names (like ethnology, Volkskunde, Volkerkunde etc.), in English, the word 'anthropology' first appeared in the year of 1805 (McGee and Warms, 2012; 6). The word anthropology has a Greek origin. The Greek '*anthropos*' means human and '*logos*' means science and thus, anthropology represents science of human (Barnard, 2000; 1). According to Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride (2011; 2), anthropology is 'the study of humankind in all times and places'. Ahmed (1986; 13) commented that 'the major task of anthropology – the study of man - is to enable us to understand ourselves through understanding other cultures'. Langness (1974; 1) defined anthropology as '.. the scientific study of human beings- that is, of the human creature viewed in the abstract: male, female, all colors and shapes, prehistoric, ancient, and modern. Anthropology, then, most fundamentally viewed, is simply the attempt of human beings to study and hence to understand themselves at all times and all places'.According to Barrett (1996; 3):

"Anthropology usually has been defined as the study of other cultures, employing the technique of participant observation, and collecting qualitative (not quantitative) data".

Over the last two hundred years scholars have established anthropology as a major discipline in the university level and they published thousands of articles all over the world. Though this is a relatively new discipline in the academic arena, at this moment it is well-established with its own uniqueness. Over the years, several branches and subfields of anthropology were introduced. The main four fields of anthropology are: cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, physical anthropology and archaeology (Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride, 2011; 5). Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride (2011; 5) described these four fields as follows:

Table 1: The Four Fields of Anthropology (Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride (2011)

Field	Definition
Physical Anthropology	"The systematic study of humans as biological organisms". (p. 5)
Cultural Anthropology	"The study of customary patterns in human behavior, thought and feelings. It focuses on humans as culture-producing and culture-reproducing creatures." (p. 9)
Linguistic Anthropology	"The study of human languages- looking at their structure, history, and relation to social and cultural contexts". (p. 11)
Archaeology	"….studies human culture through the recovery and analysis of material remains and environmental data". (p. 12)

The scholars have developed several theories of anthropology. With the passage of time, the older theories have undergone through criticisms and thus, many new theories were developed. For every discipline, theories can work as the building blocks. Myrdal (1957; 164) expressed the importance of the theories by saying: "Facts come to mean something only as ascertained and organized in the frame of a theory. Indeed, facts have no existence as part of scientific knowledge outside such a frame". Hendriksen (1970;1) described theory as 'a coherent set of hypothetical, conceptual and pragmatic principles forming the general framework of reference for a field of inquiry'.

The main objective of this article is to present with the main theories of anthropology that developed over the stream of time. The discipline of anthropology got a boost from the philosophical movement of the 18th century called the enlightenment. This philosophical movement stressed on the issue of human reasoning and scientific thinking. According to Harris (1968; 1):

"Inspired by the triumphs of the scientific method in the physical and organic domains, nineteenth-century anthropologists believed that sociocultural phenomena were governed by discoverable lawful principles".

Over the years, we can see the development of different schools of thoughts in the discipline of anthropology. Some important schools are the school of evolutionism, the historical particularism, the diffusionism, the culture and personality school, the French structuralism, the cultural ecology and neo-evolutionism, the postmodern school and the feminist anthropology. The remaining sections of this article concentrate on the main themes of these schools.

2.0. Evolutionism

The main protagonists of the theory evolution are Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin. In general, the term evolution represents the process of gradual development. This is the process through which simple things, over the time, become complex. The English naturalist Charles Darwin, in his extraordinary classic titled 'On the Origin of Species' depicted the evolution of the biological organisms existing in the world. This work was published in 1859. This landmark work immensely influenced the then scientific community of that time.

Another scholar Herbert Spencer (also known as an evolutionist and his works had huge influence in the American and the British Sociology) applied this theory to his explanation of the development of the society. According to Munch (1994; 35): "He combined the philosophical utilitarianism of his British compatriots Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill with the organicism and evolutionism blossoming in his own days because of striking success of Darwin's evolutionary theory in biology". Though Spencer's theory had a huge influence during his lifetime, just after his death, these theories faced huge criticisms from the scholars of the new age. But the idea of evolutionism dominated for many years. Other than Darwin and Spencer, scholars like Tylor, Morgan, Bastain, Rrazer and some others are also considered as evolutionists.

The protagonist, Darwin is mainly considered as a naturalist. Herbert Spencer is more renowned as a sociologist. The two evolutionists who were regarded as anthropologists are the British anthropologist E. B. Tylor and the American anthropologist L. H. Morgan. They are considered as the founders of the nineteenth century evolutionism.

E. B. Tylor's famous contribution titled 'Primitive Culture' was published in 1871. He got influenced by the revolutionary philosophical development of the nineteenth century. He was influenced by the works of Charles Darwin also. If we concentrate on the world history of that point of time, we shall find out that in that particular era, English people were mainly concentrating on expanding their political territory through massive colonialism. As a result, many people like the travelers, explorers, businessmen, missionaries and several officials of the Government were visiting the different parts of the world. Tylor took the help of these people in preparing his thoughts and writings. Tylor (1903; 1) gave an innovative all-embracing definition of culture:

"Culture, or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society".

Tylor proposed the idea of unilineal evolution. According to him, a society's evolution is unidirectional and it passes through three different stages one after another: the savagery, the barbarism and the civilization. According to Scupin and DeCorse (2012; 281):

"…..Tylor assumed that hunter gatherers and other non-Western societies were living at a lower level of existence than the 'civilized' societies in Europe".

Tylor also proposed an evolutionary theory of the origin of religion. He defined religion as the belief in spiritual beings (Langness, 1974; 23). Langness (1974) commented that Tylor has shown the different stages of evolution of religion. From a state of non-religious condition, it moves towards the belief in souls and phantoms. Then people started to believe in ghosts-souls. After that they set their beliefs on the spirits. Then they started to believe in individual's guardian spirits and species deities. After that the idea of polytheism came. The last stage in the evolution of religion, according to Tylor, is the belief in the supreme deity (Langness, 1974; 27).

The other important proponent of evolutionism is Lewis Henry Morgan. His most prominent work titled 'Ancient Society' was published in the year of 1877. Langness (1974; 17) mentioned that:

"Morgan was interested in the evolution of a number of specific things. He listed them as follows: Subsistence, Government, Language, the Family, Religion, House Life and Architecture, and Property".

For example, in terms of the evolution of the family, by examining the Hawaiian society, Morgan anticipated that human beings of the past used to live in the 'primitive hoards' where they used to practice unregulated sexual behavior and as a result, people could not identify their own fathers (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 282). After that there came brother-sister marriage and group marriage in a chronological order. Then there came the matriarchal society and the last form of family is the patriarchal one where men took the charge of economy and politics (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012).

Morgan also talked about the development of arts of subsistence. According to him, this development went through five successive stages. In a chronological order, they are (Langness, 1974): Natural subsistence (fruit), Fish subsistence, Farinaceous subsistence (cultivation), Meat and milk subsistence and the last one is unlimited subsistence (through field agriculture).

On the evolution of the social institutions, Morgan speculated that at first there was kinship based societies and then there came the territorial or politically based societies (Langness, 1974).

There is no doubt that in its time, evolutionism got huge appreciation as a school of thought and as a result, we get a good number of thinkers following this school. But later, with the entry of new thinkers in the field of anthropology, this school faced huge criticisms. Firstly, it was established by the critics that the evolutionists like Spencer, Tylor and Morgan did not go for extensive systematic fieldwork rather their works are mostly the results of secondary data and philosophical speculations. Scupin and DeCorse (2012; 283) commented that their evidence is 'second hand, based on accounts of biased Europeans'. These scholars were mainly considered as the 'armchair anthropologists'. Secondly, evolutionism was criticized for its ethnocentric view. It considers the primitive societies as less developed, less intelligent and less sophisticated in comparison to the civilized Europeans.

In fact, the origin of 'race theory'[1] in anthropology can be traced back to this evolutionism school. Race theorists were influenced by evolutionism (Ember, Ember and Peregrine, 2011; 18). Thirdly, this unilineal evolution was also criticized for its simplistic nature. It talks about a one directional single-lined development. All the societies in the world may not follow this unilineal developmental pattern. This is an oversimplification of the realities.

Even after these criticisms, evolutionists can be credited for introducing systematic thinking in the field of anthropology and these thinking helped the next generation anthropologists to get advanced in their endeavors.

3.0. Diffusionism

Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride (2011; 579) defined diffusion as 'the spread of certain ideas, customs, or practices from one culture to another'. Diffusionism as an anthropological school of thought started growing in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (Ember, Ember and Peregrine, 2011; 20). Among the diffusionists, there are mainly two different schools: the British school and the German school.

The British diffusionists like G. E. Smith and W. J. Perry were experts in Egyptology and they proposed that every aspect of the civilization (from technology to religion) actually originated from Egypt and later it got spread in the other parts of the world (Ember, Ember and Peregrine, 2011 : Scupin and DeCorse, 2012). According to Ember, Ember and Peregrine (2011; 20):

"People, they believed, are inherently uninventive and invariably prefer to borrow the inventions of another culture rather than develop ideas for themselves".

In their effort to clarify the fact that why some cultures do not possess any sign of the Egyptian culture, they said that 'some cultures have simply become degenerate' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 20). The ideas of Smith and Perry are no longer considered as valid. This view was also ethnocentric as they treated Egypt as the origin of every culture.

One of the most prominent scholars of German diffusionism was Father Wilhelm Schmidt. Just like the British diffusionists, the German diffusionists also believed that men are in general uninventive and try to borrow from the other cultures. But the German diffusionists did not believe that there is only one origin of culture (like Egypt). They believed that there used to be several cultural centers and cultural diffusion occurred from these different cultural circles. This German view of diffusionism is also known as *Kulturkreise* which means cultural circles.

Another diffusionist school was the American one led by Clark Wissler and Alfred Kroeber. Kroeber believed that diffusion always creates some change in the receiving culture.

Like the other schools of thoughts, the diffusionists also faced a lot of criticisms. Firstly, it could not come out of the ethnocentric ideology that some cultures are better than the others. Thus, again, the inherent inferiority of the non-Western people got highlighted by them (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 283). Secondly, they could not give any convincing explanation of the fact why some cultures do not show any sign of the culture origins (like Egypt). Thirdly, though they take diffusion as an inevitable process, anthropologists found that 'societies can adjoin one another without exchanging cultural traits' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 284).

4.0.Historical Particularism

In the development of anthropological theories, another prominent school after evolutionism is the school of historical particularism. The pioneer of this thought is the German born American anthropologist Franz Boas who is also regarded as the father of American anthropology. Over his lifetime, he could create a good number of students and followers who contributed immensely in the field of anthropology in the later periods. Boas' contribution was noteworthy as he logically criticized the ethnocentrism of evolutionism.He was also a serious critique of armchair anthropologists before his time. He highlighted the importance of fieldwork and over his lifetime he made several fieldtrips. He conducted research on the Eskimos living in the Northern Canada and the Kwakiutl Indians in the North-west Coast.

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[1]According to Ember, Ember and Peregrine (2011; 18), race theory 'posited that the reason human cultures differed in their behaviors was because they represented separate subspecies of humans, or 'races''.

Evolutionists tried to prove that some cultures are more developed than the others. For example, civilized society is considered more developed and sophisticated than the savage societies. But when Boas travelled to Baffinland, his views became different by observing those people (Stocking, 1965; 61):

"The more I see their customs, the more I realize that we have no right to look down on them. Where amongst our people would you find such true hospitality? ….. We "highly educated people" are much worse, relatively speaking". [*This is a quote from Boas' Baffinland diaries*].

According to Boas, the societies cannot be categorized as 'savage' or 'civilized'. This approach follows a kind of belittling. Rather than following a 'nomothetic' (considering several cases at a time) approach, he encouraged the anthropologists to follow an 'idiographic' (dealing with particular/ specific cases) approach (Langness, 1974; 57). This is the basis for his thought of 'historical particularism'.

According to him, each culture of each society has its own uniqueness and the society has its own distinctive historical development. That is why he introduced the concept of 'cultural relativism' and invited the anthropologists to disregard the prevailing ethnocentric views (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012).

Boas was a dynamic anthropologist who worked almost in all four subfields of anthropology. He emphasized heavily on the fieldwork method. Though Boas made several fieldtrips in his lifetime, later, he was criticized for not staying in those fields for a prolonged period.

5.0.The Functionalist School

The functionalist school had huge influence on the disciplines like sociology and anthropology. Ember, Ember and Peregrine (2011; 21) mentioned that functionalism 'looks for the part (function) that some aspects of culture or social life plays in maintaining a cultural system'. The base of functionalist theories was the organic theories. By comparing the society with the biological organisms it was said that just like a living body, the society also has different parts that are interrelated and each of these parts has some specific functions to be performed. Langness (1974; 87) mentioned that:

"In somewhat simpler terms: just as an individual human being constitute a finite system with a distinctive structure- each organ performing a particular activity, the function of which is to contribute to the maintenance of a system as a whole …. so a human society constitutes a similar system with its distinctive structure and functions".

In case of the society, these body parts are the several institutions that perform several functions. According to Mclntyre (2002; 106), social institutions represent a 'set of ideas about the way a specific important social need ought to be addressed'. The pioneers of sociology like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim were the main proponents of the structural functionalist school. In anthropology, the main scholars of this school are A R Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Both of them are regarded as the leading ethnographic researchers of all time.

Radcliffe-Brown is recognized as a structural functionalist. His most prominent work was based on the Andaman Islands situated in south eastern Asia. Radcliffe-Brown conducted his ethnographic study among the Andaman Islanders from 1906 to 1908. Before him, a British Government officer E H Man also worked on this people. Radcliffe-Brown's work supplemented the works of Man. Rather than following the evolutionists, Radcliffe-Brown focused on the issue of how the society works. According to him, a society has several institutions like economic, social, political and religious. These institutions ensure solidarity and work for integrating the society as a whole (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012). Radcliffe-Brown concentrated on the social structure and suggested that 'a society is a system of relationships maintaining itself through cybernetic feedback, while institutions are orderly sets of relationships whose function is to maintain the society as a system' (Mahmud, 2008; 81). He was highly interested in kinship and commented on how kinship can promote order and solidarity:

"Radcilffe-Brown suggested that all norms for specific behaviors and obligations among different people in the kinship relationships promote order and stability.Thus, to Radcliffe-Brown, these social institutions serve society's needs" (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 285).

Another famous functionalist Bronislaw Malinowski suggested the existence of functionalism from a psychological perspective.

Ember, Ember and Peregrine (2011; 21) mentioned that according to Malinowski, 'all cultural traits serve the needs of individuals in a society; that is, they satisfy some basic or derived needs of the members of a group'. He did his phenomenal anthropological research on the Trobriand Islanders. He found that these islanders have belief in magic and in case of dealing with high level of uncertainty, uncontrollability and insecurity, they rely on magical techniques in order to ensure some psychological support (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012). Malinowski concluded that 'individual has needs, both physiological and psychological, and cultural institutions, customs and traditions exist to satisfy them' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012).

The functionalist scholars were always criticized because of their lack of attention towards change and historical processes. Their too much emphasis on structure, harmony and stability ignores the need for change in the society.

6.0. Culture and Personality School

Boas' followers Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead were the founders of the Culture and Personality school. This school highlighted that personality patterns are dependent on different socialization practices. Culture is a reflection of the personalities of its members.

In her famous masterpiece titled '*Patterns of Culture*' published in the year of 1934, Ruth Benedict analyzed the Plains and the Pueblo societies (the native American Indian societies). She characterized the Plain people as 'Dionysian' (representing war, violence, use of alcohol and drugs, self-torture) and the Pueblo people as 'Apollonian' (representing gentleness, cooperation, harmony, tranquility, peacefulness) (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 234). Scupin and DeCorse (2012) commented that: "In Benedict's analysis, the culture of a particular society can be studied by studying the personality of its bearers.The patterning and configuration of a particular culture is simply reflected in an individual's personality".

The prolific writer and famous scholar Margaret Mead worked on Samoan and New Guinea people. Her famous work titled '*Coming of Age in Samoa*' published in 1928 was a revolutionary work that concluded that the development of an individual depends on the cultural expectations rather than the biological traits. In her another famous contribution titled '*Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*', she examined three tribes: the Arapesh, the Mundugumor and the Tchambuli. By analyzing the behaviors of different genders in these three tribes, Mead found that gender traits are not biologically but culturally determined. She found that the Arapesh were the mountain dwellers and in their society both men and women possessed the so-called feminine traits like cooperation, sensitivity and passivity. Again, in Mundugumor (the cannibal and head hunter tribe) also both men and women possessed similar characteristics but in this case, both were having the so called masculine characteristics like aggressiveness, insensitiveness, assertiveness and jealousy. Finally, in the Tchambuli, men used to possess female traits like submissiveness, emotion etc. whereas women possess male characteristics like dominance, assertiveness and managerial qualities.

7.0. Structuralism

Another influential school in anthropology is the structuralist school. According to Klages (2006; 31), structuralism is 'a way of thinking that works to find the fundamental basic units or elements of which anything is made'. Barry (1995; 39) mentions that:

"…its essence is the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the larger context of the larger structures they are part of (hence the term 'structuralism')".

In anthropology, the main scholar of structuralism is the famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. He studied on kinship. He suggested that if anyone tries to understand kinship, it cannot be understood by studying a single-unit family consisting of father, mother and their children. Rather, this single-unit family is a unit of a larger kinship system which is generally considered as secondary. Other than the kins like father, mother, son and daughter, there are other kins like grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephew, niece and others. Kinship is to be analyzed in the context of this greater structure. Kinship can only be understood when it will be treated as a part of the larger whole.

He also worked on myths. Tyson (2006; 209) commented that: "The existence of structural similarities among seemingly different myths of different cultures was one of Levi-Strauss's particular areas of interest". He analyzed the common features/themes of the different versions of the myths and classified them in groups. He named these bundles as 'mythems'.

From these, he found that human mind fundamentally thinks through binary oppositions. Hegel's prominent issues of thesis, antithesis and synthesis are present here. He found that myths deal with the binary oppositions, i.e., thesis and antithesis and finally looks for reconciliation through synthesis.

According to him, the structure of savage mind was similar to the civilized mind. He was interested in the universal model of mind and looked for this universal structure for everything. Thus, his thinking was 'synchronic' in nature rather than 'diachronic'. Lévi-Strauss was criticized because of focusing on human mind only. According to many scholars, his theories are difficult to understand. Specially, the postmodernists do not believe in this universality.

8.0. Cultural Ecology and Neo-Evolutionism

After the Second World War, the highly criticized issue of evolutionism again got a momentum by some new anthropologists. This school of thought is termed as neo-evolutionism. The main theorist in neo-evolutionism was Leslie White. He tried to highlight the factors like energy use and technology as the main causes of culturalevolution and change.According to him, the cultural change depends on the per capita use of energy in a year. If this per capita energy use increases, change happens. For example, in the hunter and gatherers society, people only used human energy and could not use any other energy. In the agricultural society, people could use their own energy plus the energy of animals and plants. As a result, cultural change happened. In the modern industrialized societies, people are using diverse sources of energy. As a result, there was a huge transformation in culture. The more complex the use of technology, the more complex becomes the cultural development.

It is to be mentioned here that Leslie White did not mention about any particular case or culture when describing this evolution. That is why this view is not ethnocentric and can be associated with the society in general. That is why, some often call this theory in the name of 'general evolution'.

Another important theoretical development was termed as the 'cultural ecology'. It is also called as ecological anthropology. Its main proponent was Julian Steward.

Steward classified evolutionism suggested by different scholars at different times into three categories. The first one is the unilineal evolution that is suggested by Tylor and Morgan. The second one is the neo-evolutionism suggested by Leslie White. Steward termed it as universal evolution as Leslie White, in his theory, did not focus on any particular/individual culture and used the term culture in a broad sense (Ember, Ember and Peregrine, 2011; 22). According to Ember, Ember and Peregrine (2011; 22), Steward 'classified himself as a multilineal evolutionist: one who deals with the evolution of particular cultures and only with demonstrated sequences of parallel culture change in different areas'.

Steward mentioned that 'a social system is determined by its environmental resources' (Mahmud, 2008; 83). According to Mahmud (2008; 83), the main idea of cultural ecology is 'to determine whether cultural adaptation toward the natural environment initiate social transformations of evolutionary change'. Steward emphasized the 'interrelation among the natural conditions in the environment – rainfall, temperature, soils – and technology, social organization, and attitudes within a particular sociocultural system' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 286-287).

9.0.Cultural Materialism and Marxist Anthropology

Cultural materialism was proposed by Marvin Harris who refined the ideas of Leslie White and Julian Steward (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 288). Mahmud (2008; 83) commented that:

"It seeks to explain the organizational aspects of politics and economy and the ideological and symbolic aspects of society as a result of the combination of variables relating to the basic biological needs of a society".

According to the cultural materialists, the socio-cultural systems can be divided into:

a. Infrastructure: '….the technology and practices used for expanding or limiting the production of basic resources such as food, clothing and shelter (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 288).
b. Structure: It constitutes the domestic and the political economy. The domestic economy includes family structure, domestic division of labor, age and gender roles and the political economy includes political organizations, class, castes, police and military (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 288).
c. Superstructure: It includes philosophy, art, music, religion, ideas, literature, sports, games, science and values (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 288).

The structure and superstructure is dependent on the infrastructure and any change in the infrastructure will create change in structure and superstructure. Marvin Harris explained this relationship through his article titled 'The Cultural Ecology of India's Secret Cattle' that was published in the year of 1966. McGee and Warms (2012; 261) commented:

"…Hindu prohibition on killing cattle should be understood in relation to the role that cattle play in the production of food crops, fuel and fertilizer. He [*Marvin Harris*] convincingly demonstrates the material and ecological importance of cattle to Indian society and argued that this, rather than Hindu religious doctrine, is the ultimate basis of the ban on killing and eating cattle … the sacredness of cattle is the result of their productive importance".

Karl Marx also highlighted the issue of materialism. It is said that Marx was influenced by the evolutionist Lewis Henry Morgan's works. Marx has also shown a kind of social evolution. He said that society has evolved through different stages like the tribal, the Asiatic, the feudal and lastly the capitalist stage (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 288).

According to Roseberry (1997; 27): "The starting point of Marx's materialism was the social, conceived as material. Individuals within the social collectivity were seen as acting upon nature and entering into definite relations with each other as they did so, in providing for themselves". Anthropological theories also got influenced by the thoughts of Karl Marx. Marxist anthropology came up as a theoretical perspective. Marx's theory is also representing a form of materialism as 'it emphasizes how the systems of producing material goods shape all of society' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 288).

10.0.   Symbolic and Interpretative Anthropology and the Effect of Postmodernism

Symbolic anthropology criticized the materialist views of analyzing the culture that focuses on 'material phenomena' and highlighted that culture is a mental phenomena and thus cannot be 'molded like mathematics or logic' (McGee and Warms, 2012; 438). Thus, According to McGee and Warms (2012; 489) the symbolic anthropology deals with the 'interpretation of symbolic actions'.

On the other hand another philosophical and sociological trend that had huge effect on the anthropological theories is postmodernism. Postmodernism, often referred to as the 'linguistic turn' in the field of philosophy and social sciences, mainly concentrates on language and power (McGee and Warms, 2012; 489):

"…the postmodernists held that languages were systems of signs and symbols that took their meaning from relationships with one another rather than relationship with the empirical world. The empirical world itself is ineffable, beyond our direct understanding".

According to Mahmud (2008; 88), 'postmodernists question the validity of external imposed order as well as linear analysis'. By taking an anti-positivist approach, the postmodernists disagree with the ultimate faith on science. They believe on individuality and diversity and thus maintain that truth is not universal. Truth is created. Scupin and DeCorse (2012; 293) commented that:

"…the postmodernists complain that the ethnographers assume they have a thoroughly scientific and objective view of reality, whereas the native view is highly subjective, based on traditional worldview and cosmology".

One of the famous contributors of symbolic anthropology is Clifford Geertz who tried to establish 'culture as an organized collection of symbolic systems' and said that 'symbols were means of transmitting meanings' (McGee and Warms, 2012; 438).

Thus, James Clifford commented that ethnography is actually not a 'representation of the wholeness of culture' and emphasized on the 'incompleteness of ethnographic expression' (Barnard, 2000; 170). Clifford argues that 'an ethnography should consist of many voices from the native population, rather than just those of the ethnographer and a few of his or her informants' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 293). That is why, these days, in many cases anthropologists do not claim that their viewpoints are objective (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 293).

One of the famous contributors of symbolic anthropology is Clifford Geertz who tried to establish 'culture as an organized collection of symbolic systems' and said that 'symbols were means of transmitting meanings' (McGee and Warms, 2012; 438).

Thus, according to Geertz, the anthropologists should use the method of 'thick description':

"Geertz assumed that important symbols and actions had many layers of meaning and their power derived from this fact. In thick description, the anthropologist attempts to analyze each layer of meaning. Geertz compared doing thick description to peeling an onion. There is a layer after layer but no reward at the center. The onion is its layers; similarly, culture is its meanings" (McGee and Warms, 2012; 439).

Clifford Geertz highlighted the issue of interpretivism. He conducted his fieldwork in Java, Bali and Morocco. In his classic, titled 'Works and Lives' published in 1988, by examining the works of the great anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, Levi-Strauss and Ruth Benedict, Geertz, like the postmodernists,argued that anthropology is just a kind writing. According to Barnard (2000; 165):

"This is a major postmodernist challenge to the discipline, and one which is commonplace in the work of both American and French writers."

From these discussions it can be understood that postmodernists mainly highlighted the methodological issues related to anthropological research. That is why, these days, in many cases, anthropologists are asked to conduct 'collaborative fieldwork, with teams of ethnographers and informants working together to understand a society' (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 293).

11.0.   *Feminist Anthropology*

Feminism is no more a new issue in the sociological, anthropological and literary research. The main issues highlighted by the feminists can be traced in the comments of Klages (2006; 91):

"Feminists since the Middle Ages have been asking whether gender is biological or cultural, whether it is innate or natural or God-given, or whether it is socially constructed and therefore mutable."

The feminist anthropologists were concerned with 'documenting women's lives in their roles in societies around the world', focusing on gender inequality and complexity and variety of gender roles, making 'cross-cultural analysis to explain differences in the roles and power of different gender groups', and analyzing 'the range of variation of experiences of gender, particularly within current industrialized society' (McGee and Warms, 2012; 396-397).

Ortner (1974) argued that in the society, women are considered as related to nature and men are considered as related to culture. Because of women's painful bodily/physical experience, reproductive power and nurturing nature, they are treated as near to culture. She commented that women are naturally productive because they have the capacity to carry babies. Men do not have this natural productivity. That is why they try to take part in artificial productivity. They put their efforts in the public spheres and create artificially. So, they are treated as closer to culture. The task of culture is to mold the nature. As culture gets more importance in comparison to nature, men also get more importance in the society.

Another American feminist Marjorie Shostak wrote about the Kung San in the Africa. Her famous book titled "Nisa: The Life and Words of a! Kung Woman" was published from the Harvard University Press. The book was about a woman named Nisa in the Kung San tribe. Shostak interviewed this woman on the several issues of her life and this woman revealed many stories related to her parents, brothers, her hunting experience, her sexual experience, marriage, pregnancy etc. that are exciting in nature. This life story of Nisa was supplemented by taking interviews of many other women to understand the lifestyles of these women in the tribe. Shostak carefully mentioned that Nisa is not a typical example of the females in this society as she has a unique life experience (Scupin and DeCorse, 2012; 293). Thus the postmodern emphasis on diversity and individuality was followed by Shostak.

12.0.   *Conclusion*

If the different schools of thoughts discussed in this article are analyzed, it becomes conspicuous that though all these thoughts have gone through severe criticisms by the subsequent schools, each of these has huge contribution in the development of anthropological thoughts. Though anthropology as a discipline started with the works of the armchair anthropologists, over the years it has developed its unique all-embracing research methodology called ethnography which is extensive and rigorous in nature. Anthropologists of the different parts of the world have shown keen interest in studying different islanders and tribes. They studied diverse topics like social institution, gender, race, social and cultural change, economy, politics, religion, kinship, myths etc.

In this way, the scope of anthropology was broadened over time. Anthropologists were also influenced by the philosophical developments of their times. Thus they were influenced by evolutionism, structural-functionalism, structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, feminism and postmodernism. The ethnographic methodologies have also undergone different changes. From the tradition of short field trips by Boas, anthropologists started to conduct extensive prolonged field studies. From a one-person observer method, postmodernists suggested for multiple observer methods. Each of these changes created new controversies and opened new avenues and dimensions for anthropological research.

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