Concept and scope of applied anthropology

Introduction:

Anthropology, the science of man, has two dimensions - academic and applied. Applied anthropology uses the knowledge from the other anthropological specialties to identify and solve practical cross-cultural problems. How can anthropologists, who dazzle in learning the exotic places and people, be useful in the modern world? The modern world which is becoming increasingly interconnected faces difficulties to cope with crucial problems of cultural differences. Anthropology that studies human living in satisfying human life across the world can deal the main problems of cultural differences in a less threatened and more tolerant manner. And this is the concern of applied anthropology.

Now, let us discuss on the practical dimension of this subject, that is, applied anthropology - its concept and scope.

Concept of applied Anthropology:

Daniel G. Brinton (1895) in his paper "The aims of anthropology" first put forward the concept of applied anthropology. According to him "Applied anthropology aims accurately to ascertain what are the criteria of civilization, what individual or social elements have in past contributed most to it, how these can be continued and strengthened and what new forces, if any may be called in to hasten the progress". Again, Erve Chambbers (1987) states that applied anthropology is the field of inquiry concerned with the relationship between anthropological knowledge and the uses of that knowledge in the world beyond anthropology".

Applied anthropology was first used by officials from some of the larger countries of Europe in their colonial administrations. Such officials were generally not anthropologists but their work required them to gain knowledge for the needs and wishes of the native people. In this way, applied anthropology began its career with a questionable reputation. Here, we can see the case of applying anthropology in solving the problem of the Ashanti people in the early twentieth century.

The Golden Stool of Ashanti:
1921, the year of the third Ashanti outbreak may be suggested as the date of birth for applied anthropology. The king of Ashanti, a tribe on the west coast of Africa used to sit on an ordinary stool but rested his arm on another stool. Even though the latter stool was somewhat similar to the first one, it was partially covered with gold and supposed to have descended from the sky. It was regarded as the seat of the collective soul of the Ashanti people, and, consequently, it was treasured as a holy and powerful symbol. Whenever the need arose to summon all the vast power symbolized by the Golden stool, the king would ostensibly sit on it. The golden stool was regarded too sacred to be put on bare ground; so, it was placed on a special cloth which was again spread over an elephant skin.

In 1896, the British came into conflict with the Ashanti. The British officials tried to get possession of the golden stool, thinking that by doing so they could subjugate the turbulent Ashanti. But contrary to their expectations, these attempts were decisively resisted and the stool was concealed. In 1921 some criminals sold the gold decorations of the stool. As consequence, the Ashanti people became furious and demanded to kill the offenders. An outbreak with the British was imminent when Captain Ratray, the Government anthropologist, intervened and allowed the Ashanti to keep the stool and to punish the offenders with banishment. Thus, the significance of the golden stool, and of anthropology, was understood.

British government also got the taste of anthropological knowledge when E.E. Evans-Pritchard was sent for solving the problems of the Nuer's of South Africa in 1936. After his successful work, British government made mandatory rule for its officers to undergo a course of training in socio-cultural anthropology before their posting in tribal areas.

The relation between anthropology and applied anthropology is just like the relation between engineering and physical science. Just as engineering depends for its effectiveness upon physical scientists' understanding of the law of nature, applied anthropology depends for its effectiveness upon anthropologist's understanding on the law of cultural variation and change.

This branch of Anthropology concerns itself with planned cultural change, when it is presumably an application of anthropological knowledge. The term is gaining popularity in the current Anthropology researches in various parts of the world. In India since 1952 the concept of planned change is becoming conscious when the government of India declared their new policy in safeguarding the rights and interests of the schedule castes and scheduled tribes of this subcontinent. This commitment also included a series of elaborate programmes to accelerate the rate of their development so as to bring them at par with the advanced communities as early as possible.
**Scope of applied anthropology:**

Applied anthropology has a wide range of scope. But basically, their goals are 1) to identify needs for change that local people perceive, 2) to work with those people to design culturally appropriated change, and 3) to protect local people from harmful policies including destructive development schemes. (Kottak, 2000)

In the early period, anthropologists worked to help the government for their good administration and for chalking development plans. But the scope is extended. Important frontiers of applied anthropology are discussed here.

**Applied anthropology in good administration:**

British anthropology has often been considered the 'handmaiden' of that country's colonial policy, for it provided useful information in maintaining effective colonial rule. The Americans also took help from anthropology. After a long unfortunate policy which uprooted and exterminated a large number of the native races of North America, anthropology was brought in to rescue not only the dying Red Indian but also the baffled administrator. In 1933, commission officer John Collier took a big forward step by associating anthropologists to start a better Indianist policy. It became one of enlightened administration, based more on anthropological principles.

Mexico and some of the Latin American countries followed profitably the example of the United States. And these days, American and British anthropologists were assigned important roles in the efficient management of the development programmes of undeveloped and underdeveloped areas.

It must be mentioned here that long before the British and the Americans thought of it, the Dutch and the French regularly gave training in anthropology to those officers who were responsible for the administration of their colonies.

**Applied anthropology in war:**

The anthropologists had been called upon to fill positions in which they could make positive contributions during World War II, and anthropologists answered the call. Clyde Kluckhohk listed the numerous contributions made by anthropologists in America to the winning of the war. He referred to their work in their professional capacity, in military intelligence and the training of native forces, in the department of state, the office of strategic services, the Board of Economic warfare, the strategic Bombing survey, Military Government, the Selective service organization, the office of Naval Intelligence, the office of war Information, the quartermaster corps, the Federal Bureau of investigation, the war Relocation Authority, the Alean highway project, the Hydrographic office of the chief of Naval operations,
the Foreign Economic Administration, the Federal security Administration, the medical branch of the Army - Airforces, and the chemical warfare Divisions. Anthropologist also tackled problems of securing co-operation from and boosting up the morale of civil populations.

**National character studies:**

Mention may also be made here of the national character studies. It was during the war that Ruth Benedict was asked to compile a report on Japanese collective attitudes. She did it on the basis of documentary evidence and data collected from the Japanese living in America. The impulse behind these is to understand the basic drives within a people's personality.

**The humanistic philosophy:**

Through the anthropological view on culture, the humanistic philosophy is brought out. For example, Malinowski made extensive use of the concept of culture by looking at culture from the functional point of view. What does culture do for man? He showed that it liberates him from slavery to biological determinism by providing him with `artifacts' `agrofacts', `mentifacts' and `artifacts' (i.e. culture). It enables man to satisfy his basic biological drives and engage in other pursuit as well.

Radcliffe-Brown evaluates the function of culture in terms of the contribution it makes, through its institution, to the survival of the society as a whole. Thus, the views of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown are based on pragmatism. They take the instrumental view of culture and man, or man in society, as the end-aim for which this instrument is designed. Thus, their view of culture is not only instrumental but also humanistic. When such a view is taken on culture - the central concept of anthropology, it becomes obvious that anthropology is applied anthropology. One of its prime concerns is with human application.

**Development programmes:**

Applied anthropologists have undertaken the study of human problems involved in the technological changes which are taking place in all developed and developing areas. The race-problem has been solved by the anthropologists by showing conclusively that mental attributes are not related to race; it is only the politicians who have refused to pay heed to what the anthropologist have said. Again, a few are psychotherapists employing the insights on the anthropologist like Gregory Bateson and others on family systems and family therapy. Others are cross-cultural social workers. Still others are actively involved in international development, sometimes working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). They are consultants in dealing with appropriate
technology, fuel wood shortages, agricultural credit, new land
development, feasibility studies for dam, livestock improvement, bilingual
education etc. For the development programmes, the importance
of anthropology have been recognized when projects routinely fail as the
planners ignore the cultural dimensions of development. Anthropologists
fill up the gap of incompatibility between the strategy and the local socio-
cultural pattern of the targeted area and thereafter bring increased equity
which means reduced in poverty and a more even justice in the
distribution of wealth.

**Education and anthropology:**

Educational anthropologists work in classrooms, homes, neighbourhood
and other settings relevant to education. They view children as total
cultural creature whose enculturation and attitudes toward education
belong to a context which includes family and peers. This applied research
leads to policy recommendations.

**Urban life and anthropology:**

Urban anthropologists study city life and urbanization. Applied
anthropologists pay attention to social forms and to urban social units as
they propose, design and implement social policy. They also study value-
attitude systems in order to control demographic trends, food habits and
social change.

**Medical system:**

Applied medical anthropologists pay attention to the disease affecting
different population, socially constructed illness and treatment of illness in
effective and culturally accepted ways. Some focus specially on
epidemiology which examines the spread and distribution of diseases and
the influence of cultural pattern. Holistic medicine in the medical system in
which patients are treated effectively as whole being, using any
combination of methods that proved beneficial, is gaining popularity in
contemporary North America. Relying not on any single therapeutic
approach, but rather using a combination of therapies which include
elements of ritual, magic and modern scientific medications is common
even among urban-educated elite.

**Gerontology:**

Applied anthropologists are involved in gerontology designed programmes
for elderly and their research on ageing in different cultures. They focus on
societal consequences of a rising proportion of older people in the
population particularly in societies where youthfulness is praised.

**Business and anthropology:**
The key aspects of business anthropology include ethnography and observation as ways of gathering data, cross-cultural expertise and focus on cultural diversity. Labour - employer relations have been studied to minimize tensions which generally exist between various classes. Manager, executives and workers in a business setting may be observed as different social categories in a common social system. Micro-enculturation is the process by which people learn particular roles in their limited social system.

Human rights and anthropology:

Many anthropologists are promoting advocacy anthropology, the use of anthropological knowledge to further human rights. Not all of the universal human rights exist in any society even though most people will probably agree these rights to be part of any society. Anthropologists try to bring about mutual understanding for a worldwide pluralistic metaculture, a global system emphasizing fundamental human rights with a sense of political and global responsibility.

**Anthropology of future:**

One of the important and exciting trends in world anthropology is the scientific concern for the study of future. The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) founded a commission on futurology headed by B.K.Roy Burman.

**Applied anthropology in India:**

In India, applied anthropology has an immense role. The policy of internal reconstruction on social and economic fronts requires the contribution of anthropologists. The importance of the knowledge of anthropology for smooth running of administration was realized in 1807 when the Board of Directors of the East India Company made a formal decision to use it in administration. Francis Buchnon was appointed to undertake an ethnographic survey of Bengal. Since then Risley, Dalton, Grierson, Gurdon and many others had been deputed to prepare handbooks, gazetteers, monographs, etc. on tribes and castes of India. They were also used in the early period of census survey. In the post independence, anthropologists confirmed by research Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s *panch-sheel* i.e., five fundamental principles for the tribal upliftment. Anthropologists like Mazumdar, Dube, Chattopadyay, Vidyarthi etc. highlighted the various problems of the *Adivasis* and *Harijans* and suggested ways and means to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions. Thus, Anthropologists are helpful to frame policies for the welfare of tribes and castes. The rewriting of reports on tribes and castes is a task which only anthropologist can do well with the scientific training and skill. Anthropologist can also be helpful in undertaking the study of generalized value-attitude systems. This knowledge could go a long way in evolving
the best modes of checking the alarming population growth which threatens to upset all our planning and development schemes.

Apart from tribal and backward sections, applied anthropologists have also set out for pace in other areas. B.C. Agrawal and his band of young and devoted anthropologists have conducted a pioneering work for The Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad to develop social research plan of programme production for telecasting. Satellite Television Experiment (SITE) was one of the largest and advanced experiments conducted on human communication and in this experiment anthropologists contributed depth, qualitative and descriptive knowledge for understanding the process of communication. This group is still involved with various programmes of Satellite Communication. (Nadeem Hasnain, 1991)

Humanity suffers from many crises of survival and anthropologists cannot remain unnoticed of such crises. The International Union of Anthropological ad Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) in response to these crises has established a number of commissions such as Commissions on urban anthropology, on urgent anthropological research, on women, on food and food problems and commissions on the challenges of development. In India also, such practical concerns of relevant anthropology, urgent anthropology, etc. will have to face major challenges of Indian society.

**Uniqueness of applied anthropology:**

Ethnography has become one of the most valuable research tools of applied anthropology. Alongwith, anthropologists study in comparative cross-cultural perspective. Holism gives perfection to this branch of anthropology.

Applied anthropologists take the role of ‘clinical' or 'engineering' in development works. Clinical anthropologists provide the client who may be an administrator or a citizen group the decision making tools, including reagent information concerning the probable consequences of alternative possible choices. On the other hand, the engineering anthropologists are involved in formulating specific recommendations for his clients. Anthropologists such as Raymond Firth was more like a doctor who advises rather than like an engineer who builds whereas the anthropologists such as Nadel prefer social engineering as the proper approach of applied anthropology.

**Conclusion:**

Applied anthropology that refers to the application of anthropological knowledge to identify, assess, and solve social problems has a wide scope. Its use in reforming the primitive societies is quiet clear. On the other hand, its importance in economic and political fields has been
proved. Anthropologists have been of constant help in solving tribal problems in India after independence. But, anthropological interest is not confined to exotic primitive and pre-historic societies only. It is applicable in bringing solutions of universal problems. Anthropologists such as Nadel, Franz Boas, etc. led anthropological application in modern life. Boas showed how anthropologists could make themselves really useful by undertaking the study of hereditary factors in crime, the significance of race and the role of education in human society. Besides, Boas had devoted a good deal of his own efforts to the study of growth, and the influences of environmental variation to hereditary factors. Today, anthropologists can render important help in evaluating different national and international plans. For example, anthropological studies can be helpful in evaluating and suggesting the success of family planning, cooperative movements and community planning etc. Besides this, anthropology can also help in solving problems of labour, adult and child criminology and in other social problems like those of increasing population, industry and rural life. In brief, this therapeutic science of human relations provides the viewpoint which is helpful in the investigation of relations, unity and progress in every aspect of human relations.