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# UNIT 2 SYMBOLISTS AND CULTURALISTS APPROACH

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## Learning Objectives

This unit will help you in learning:

- the perspective of the symbolists (or symbolic anthropologists);
- the perspective of the culturalists; and
- a comparison of both these perspectives.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit introduces the learners to the perspectives of the symbolists and culturalists. The entire discussion of these approaches is author-wise. By symbol is meant an entity that ‘represents’, stands for something else. The ‘culturalists’ believe that culture is ‘uniquely human’ to borrow the words from Malinowski.

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## 2.2 SYMBOLISTS PERSPECTIVE

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### 2.2.1 Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009)

What Ruth Benedict implied by culture was furthered in one sense by the theory of Structuralism forwarded by Claude Lévi-Strauss. He too emphasised upon the psychological dimensions of culture in his *The Savage Mind* (1962) and

*Mythologiques* (1964). However, his focus was on ‘signs’. According to him the atomic elements of culture are signs—words, but also whatever else that, upon being heard or seen or touched or tasted, ‘makes sense’. A minimal analytical unit analogous to culture would comprise of a group of people sharing and mutually understanding the same system of signs. Hence, Lévi-Strauss occupied himself with the analytical reassembly/reconstruction of proper sign systems out of the bits and pieces which the fieldworker collected.

His attempt also involved an establishment of the universal grammar of culture. Myths, marriage rules, etc., were treated as signs. The role of an ethnographer is to decode these signs and unravel the rules by which these are arranged. Binary oppositions are the fundamental properties of myth/culture. It endows these with deeper structural meaning. They reflect dilemmas posed by social and cultural life in the spheres of kinship, myth and reproduction.

### 2.2.2 Clifford Geertz (1926-2006)

A cultural anthropologist of U.S.A., he held that culture is a product of acting social beings trying to make sense of the world in which they find themselves. It is through symbols that people communicate. Symbols operate as vehicles of culture. They are context—specific, i.e., they derive their meaning in the specific contexts in which they occur.

Culture is embodied in public symbols, symbols through which the members of a society communicate their worldview, value-orientations, ethos, and all the rest to one another, to future generations and of course, to anthropologists. Hence, in order to study culture the ethnographer should be able to situate him/her self in the position from which it was constructed. Thus, while Geertz provides an objective view of culture, at the same time he also provides a hermeneutical orientation.

Culture is, thus, like a text, the meaning of which can be interpreted. The text involves the symbolic actions. The cultural texts are not free floating with inexhaustibly reinterpretable meanings, but have a “convention-laden form, more or less tidily self-enclosed, susceptible to plural but not infinite number of plausible interpretations”.

An ethnographer trying to interpret the text will find the logic of the actions context seemingly messy. In this endeavour to unravel the meaning the language of the native interlocutors becomes insightful. This hints at the repository of orientations which are not fixed but flexible. It has been argued by anthropologists that there is hardly any proof of knowing whether the determination of the contexts and the meanings are correct. The resource of the ethnographer lies in his/her ability to interact and talk with the people.

### 2.2.3 Victor Turner (1920-1983)

Turner differed from Geertz’s symbolic anthropology, providing a different approach to studying culture symbols. He stated that symbols are of interest not as vehicles of, and analytic windows onto, “culture” (the integrated ethos and worldview of a society), but they are significant as being *operators in the social process*. This implies that symbols, when put together in certain arrangements in certain contexts (especially rituals), produce essentially *social* transformations. Thus, symbols in curing or initiation or hunting rituals of the people are to be explored for the ways in which they move actors from one status to another, resolve social contradictions, and wed actors to the categories and norms of their society.

Herein, we find the prominence of the traditional structural-functional perspective. Turner also identified or elaborated upon certain *ritual mechanisms*, and some of the concepts he developed have become a part of the vocabulary of ritual analysis—liminality, marginality, antistructure, and so forth.

## 2.2.4 Critical Phase —1970 onwards

With the 1970s comes the critical phase of the development of ethnography. It has been a period of expansion, diversification and considerable self-critique. It was beset with criticisms that anthropology had been a 'child of imperialism'. The intellectual movement in this phase was to question the role of anthropology and ethnography and to make it relevant in a changing world. Three lines of enquiry prevailed:

- a) Political – To enquire into the role which anthropology played and has been playing in sustaining the domination.
- b) Moral – To interrogate anthropology's professional values. That the emphasis on cultural relativism had been used to be intolerant towards the growth of cosmopolitan and pluralistic environment and on the rebound been passive to violence and injustice.
- c) Ethical – To enquire into the effect of their inquisitiveness and their role on the people being studied.
- d) Epistemological – To re-examine the entire edifice of anthropological concerns, empirical basis, the impartiality of its claims.

## 2.2.5 Experimental Phase- into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The next significant phase, i.e. the experimental, connotes the reflexive turn of enquiry. The previous phase of critical enquiry immediately paves the way for re-examining and experimenting in the direction of methodological pluralism, and the recognition of the need for various ways and means of cultural analysis instead of a dominant voice. The crucial issue brought to light was the presumed authoritative role of the 'objective' ethnographer and his/her interpretation of the culture. The ethnographer now comes to be viewed as an enculturated being who also becomes a part of the culture site being interpreted rather than a passive and aloof observer. Both the subjects of anthropological research and the anthropologists themselves are considered as 'meaning makers' interacting in an inter-subjective site. Such a position has its ramifications in the interpretations of culture which hence cannot be monolithic or determinate, but rather contextual, reciprocal and open to interpretations and reinterpretations. In this context, mention need to be made of Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1971). Thus, the entire development of the perspectives in anthropological ethnography has been summed by David Pocock as a 'shift from function to meaning'.

The need for the voices and expressions of the 'muted' group of people (of women, of the marginalised), a term popularised by Edarsh Adener, to be brought out to the fore are being rigorously articulated. Ethnography now entails a detailed attention to meaning, thereby to explore the multidimensional multilayered 'culture'/'society'. Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* has brought ethnography and anthropology face to face with the perils and prospects of its practices.

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## 2.3 CULTURALISTS PERSPECTIVE

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Ethnographies, according to Sharon Macdonald, "tend to be the vehicles through which major theoretical contributions are made, or perhaps more accurately, retrospectively attributed, and this is itself an indication of the centrality of the ethnographic monograph to the discipline."

In an appreciation of the culturalist perspective of ethnography we shall begin by recapitulating briefly the concept of culture and then move on to the application of this perspective in ethnography. The concept of 'culture' has been used and interpreted in myriad ways over the years. Each of the interpretations, however

bear relationship with the others. According to Raymond Williams, noted for his contribution to the approach named 'cultural materialism', "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language...because it has come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct systems of thought." The apparently wide range of the definition of culture laden with different ideas (polysemy) within the discipline of anthropology and outside has necessitated an understanding of the concept within anthropology. The centrality of the concept within the discipline and the relation of the usage of the concept by that of the other disciplines and their work on culture makes it imperative for the students of anthropology to be aware of the concept of culture and how anthropologists have used it to understand society through their ethnographic works.

#### Reflection

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) compiled the vast array of definitions by anthropologists on culture and identified six main categories. These are as follows:

- 1) *Descriptive definitions* — Following the famous definition by E.B. Tylor it perceives culture as a comprehensive totality making up the sum total of social life.
- 2) *Historical definitions* — It tends to view culture as a heritage passed over time through generations.
- 3) *Normative definitions* — On the one hand it may refer to standardised beliefs and procedures including mode of life and on the other it may refer only to the values of a society.
- 4) *Psychological definitions* — It draws upon the creative role of human actors and the ways people communicate and construct meanings and fulfil material and emotional needs.
- 5) *Structural definitions* — It looked into the stable and enduring elements of culture/society notably the enduring organised interrelationship between these elements which remain covert underneath the manifest behaviour of people.
- 6) *Genetic definitions* — Here the emphasis is upon human interactions which generate culture and here culture is viewed as a cumulative product of intergenerational transmission.

Thus, we have seen that in anthropology the concept of culture has been used broadly which includes the lived experiences and all the multifarious dimensions of social life. Different anthropologists have dealt specifically on some particular dimensions of culture in their ethnographic studies. Clifford and Marcus in *Writing Culture* state "ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes the processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes." The varied ethnographic engagements have played a prominent role in defining and redefining the conceptual tool of culture, cultural theory and methodology. James D. Faubion, a noted American cultural theorist, identifies three distinct methodological phases in cultural anthropology and ethnography, "three currents of methodological formation and reformation." These are –

- a) **Constitutive Current** – It commences with the work of Franz Boas and his students namely, Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, Robert Lowie, Alfred Kroeber among others. It culminates with Lévi-Strauss and thereon goes on to persist as only one of the many other disciplinary alternatives.
- b) **Critical Current** – It commences roughly with the publication of the *Rethinking Anthropology* (Hymes, 1972), and gains momentum with the publication of *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Asad, 1973), *Towards an*

*Anthropology of Women* (Reiter, 1975), *Orientalism* (Edward Said, 1978), *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), and *Women Writing Culture* (Behar and Gordon, 1995).

- c) **Experimental Moment** – It commences with the reflexive turn in the later 1970's and includes much of the most controversial research of the past two decades.

### 2.3.1 Backdrop

The seeds of the development of anthropology were laid at a time when the interest in the study of the other cultures emerged. However, the age of Enlightenment associated with political upheavals and scientific enquiry contributed tremendously to the emergence of the basic approaches that underlie the subsequent development of anthropology as a science. For example, an important work of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), an Italian, was a grand synthesis of ethnography, history of religion, philosophy and natural science. He proposed a universal scheme of social development with four well defined stages which influenced the later evolutionist. In France, the work of Montesquieu (1689-1755) led many others to describe him as a proto-functionalism. He also articulated the technique of viewing one's own culture from the perspective of an outsider to offset the problem of homeblindedness, a technique that critical anthropologists apply today. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744- 1803) defined society as a deep seated, mythical community and that each group of people has its own values, customs, language and 'spirit'. These set the tone for the development in the twentieth century of the doctrine of cultural relativism through the works of Franz Boas and his predecessor Adolf Bastian.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) advocated that knowledge was sensual and mathematical, positive and speculative, objective and subjective, and that both thought and experience were dynamically related and the acquisition of knowledge is a creative process. He impressed on *methodological individualism* which emphasised on individual as the starting point of knowledge. G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) held that the individual is also a part and the result of the process of knowing and the world created through knowing is therefore fundamentally collective. With the emergence of this principle of *methodological collectivism* by Hegel, and on the other hand the contribution of Kant, the stage was set for the various approaches to social and cultural anthropology as well as the other social sciences. Both offered to social sciences the notion of the 'social construction of reality' which thereupon became the bedrock of ethnography and the various principles of studying society and the debates generated thereof. Hegel's work also led to the growth of concepts such as structure, function, solidarity, aggregate, power and system. These epistemological and methodological developments together with the ethnographic museums established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe provide the backdrop to the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline. These occurred amidst the transition and upheaval in Europe.

### 2.3.2 Nineteenth Century Development

In the subsequent period of growth, industrialisation and colonialism in the nineteenth century empirical studies of remote cultures, 'other' cultures nearby, interpreting of travelogues on distant cultures both in Europe, notably Britain, Germany and France, and U.S.A on the other hand saw the emergence of ethnology and fieldwork and an urgent academic necessity to systematically define the concept of culture on both the continents. For E.B Tylor of Britain, L.H. Morgan of the U.S.A and Bronislaw Malinowski who worked both in the U.S.A and Britain but identified with the British tradition, culture was understood as a comprehensive concept and indistinguishable from that of 'society'.

The nineteenth century evolutionists were arm chair anthropologists, however, among them L. H. Morgan had conducted field work among the Iroquois. His book, *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (1851) is considered one of the earliest ethnographic works of native people. In Germany, Adolf Bastian (1826-1905), a trained ethnographer, argued that all humans share certain elementary patterns of thought which can be unravelled through the myths and ceremonial customs. He, thus, had anticipated structuralism that was yet to emerge. Like the later German diffusionists, he also emphasised historical development of cultures. The Russian ethnographer, Nicolai N. Miklukho-Maklai (1846-88) conducted a long and intensive study in New Guinea laying the foundation of ethnographic tradition in Russia.

Apart from devising grand theories of evolution, the contribution of the anthropologists between 1840 and 1880 towards ethnographic development had been in terms of documenting the enormous range of social and cultural variations and devising theories on specific domain as kinship, religion, law, etc.

### **Emergence of National Traditions**

The development of individual national traditions took shape. Germany was moving towards diffusionism. U.S.A and Britain continued to focus on evolutionism with specialised domains of research.

### **Turn of the Century Development**

This phase was marked by the Torres Strait Expedition, 1898, organised by Cambridge University, which had far reaching consequences to the development of ethnography. It marked the transition from armchair anthropology to that of the collection of primary empirical data. This expedition under the stewardship of A.C. Haddon was to cover almost all the aspects of native life ranging from ethnography, psychology, linguistics, physical anthropology and musicology. W. H. R. Rivers and C.G. Seligman, two of the members of the team, moved on to develop different areas of study and perspectives on culture and society. Rivers' genealogical method attained renown for collecting data on kinship organisation. His later work, on the *Todas of India* (1906) highlighted the different institutions of the Toda of the Nilgiri Hills.

## **2.3.3 Twentieth Century Development**

### **Diffusionism**

This paradigm continued its sway in Germany and with Franz Boas moving over to U.S.A it also moved with him. The significant contribution of the diffusionist school, especially the German school, lies in drawing attention to the possibilities of cultural contact and migration and their role as vehicles of transmission not only of culture traits but also of culture complexes across regions. Based on comparative ethnographic data, the diffusionist also explicated the role of environment in shaping cultures. Environment comprises local conditions including local technological development, cultural contexts and the geographical environment. W. H. R. Rivers conducted a series of empirical studies of the Melanesians and sought to explain the prevalence of different burial rites by way of migration. The focus of the study of culture had been more on temporal concerns than on spatial.

### **2.3.4 Cultural Anthropology and Its Concerns**

Culture in its holistic sense became the focal concern of American anthropologists. While the earlier scholars considered it in all its dimensions with focus on certain aspect the latter, focused on specific aspects of culture against the backdrop of its other dimensions.

The **American School of Diffusion** had placed cultural anthropology on firm footing under the patronage of Franz Boas and his students as R. H. Lowie, Alfred L.

Kroeber, Clark Wissler, etc. The major contributions of this school are the following:

- Understanding of cultural holism as the coherence of cultures subsisting in an effectively timeless ‘ethnographic present’.
- It includes the study of the role of physical and sociological phenomena in shaping particular cultures, i.e. the local contexts and the meanings therein.
- Forwarding the notion of historical particularism, the Boasians held that cultures were spatially distinct, more importantly plural and need to be explained in its particular historical contexts. The history of people, the influence of the regions they have passed in its process of migration and the culture contact requires to be considered in the analysis of the present cultures.
- The methodological kit includes the following
  - Empiricism and to understand each culture “as it is”. Emphasis is on understanding what it is – “here and now”, in the words of Radcliffe-Brown.
  - Adopt an emic approach of culture and for which collaboration with local participants of culture known as native ethnographers may be resorted to.
  - Treat culture as fluid and dynamic. Boas argued that the dialectics of individual and the social environment (each influencing the other) tend to lead to modification. The difference of opinion and of mode of action in societies can cause far reaching changes. Thus, all culture forms appear in a constant state of flux.
- Cultural boundaries are highly permeable and hence overlapping and multiple.
- Robert Lowie’s statement that culture is a thing of “shreds and patches” points to culture as the cumulative product of history and adaptation. With people trying to make sense of the disparate elements of culture, different kinds of configurations come into being. Interestingly, this idea finds expression in the notion of ‘social construction of reality’.

Thus, they sought to explain particular culture holism through adaptation and historical processes.

### 2.3.5 Culture Personality School

Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead were the two stalwarts of this school in American Anthropology. Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) conducted her ethnographic field studies among some of the American Indian tribes namely Zuni and used the field studies of other scholars to forward her idea of culture and the relationship between personality and culture. Her *Patterns of Culture* (1934) is based on large scale comparisons where she articulates culture as both logically and causally prior to individual personalities with the latter largely being in conformance to the given cultural imperatives.

Benedict urged that there are schemas (or patterns) which reside in the psychic processes and structures and which would organise human perception. It is in the collective (or inter-subjective level) that patterns of culture gets organised and recognised. There is selectivity in these; in that a culture could not accommodate every perception, every feeling and that every culture had its experiential canon. These selectively organised patterns/schemas enable people to perceive, feel and organise their experiences of the world around them. Accordingly, a culture comes to develop its patterns (or configurations) and culture, thus, becomes an organised functional whole.

In her work, she forwarded the theory that links individuals to the general cultural frame in which they participate. A culture can be understood as an individual

personality, and each person within a culture can be understood in relation to the pattern, traits, or types which characterise their particular culture.

### 2.3.6 Materialistic School

Its theoretical tone was set by the linking of natural environment with culture and placing this relationship on a scale of evolution. Leslie White and Julian Steward became the doyens of Neo-evolutionism in the 1950s. Steward's school of Cultural Ecology promoted the idea of multilineal evolution. He took this model to explain the peasant societies. Roy Rappaport's *Pigs for the Ancestors* (based on his ethnographic work among the Tsembaga Maring of the New Guinean Highlands) was an attempt to explain a complex ritual involving warfare and mass slaughter of domesticated pigs in terms of their worldview and surroundings and how this ritual is an adaptation of their view of their surroundings. Other variations of this perspective has been Marvin Harris's Cultural Materialism.

The debate over the applicability of the substantive and formalist understanding of pre-capitalist societies finds exposition in Raymond Firth's (formalist) study of the economy of the Maori and Tikopia (1929, 1939) where the applicability of classical economic theory cross-culturally was expounded, while in Karl Polyani's *The Great Transformation* (1957) that view was denounced and formalist theory was stated to have applicability only in capitalist society. By the 1970s one view held both the perspectives to be complementary.

Other concerns and area studies came to be defined and studied by the American Anthropologists, such as peasant studies notably by Robert Redfield. His concepts of great tradition and little tradition along with that of peasants added a new dimension leading to the opening up of the study of vast areas of cultures across the world. However, anthropological research was not yet prepared to move to other areas of study, such as migration, ethnicity, urbanisation, etc., that were being rigorously pursued by the Chicago school.

James Faubion, an American cultural anthropologists sums up the contributions of the American anthropologists of the Constitutive period including Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz into three broad hallmarks or properties.

- a) A shift from a talk of culture to cultures. This involves the consideration of the *presumption* of the property of boundedness as a tool of methodological convenience to enable ethnographic study and writing. At the same time it is accepted that the boundaries of culture are permeable and fuzzy.
- b) The presumption of the property of integration of culture.
- c) The presumption of systematicity. Where cultures are studied as a totality the emphasis has been on the interpretive context served by each part for the every other and the totality that comprises them. Where instead of the whole culture only parts of it are studied it is done so with the confidence that each cultural part would provide insights to the whole. The quest has been, thus, for the representative analytical foci of culture. The confidence of ascertaining the representativeness of the culture parts lies in participant observation.

### 2.3.7 Social Anthropology

While the American anthropologists under the scholarship of Franz Boas focused on culture as a synergistic totality that comprised material, behavioural and symbolic dimensions, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown emphasised society as the focus of study comprising structures, institutions and social aggregates. This witnessed the growth of a region based sub-disciplinary divide- Social anthropology in Britain and Cultural anthropology (as one of the four branches of Anthropology) in U.S.A.



The institutionalisation of this specialisation became complete and crystallised in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Radcliffe-Brown contributed to the structural functional approach geared at explaining the integrative dimension of society with every part contributing to sustain the whole. Cultural anthropologist, at that time, on the other hand, mostly dealt with 'adaptation' with the environment as the central methodological tool of explanation.

### 2.3.8 Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942)

Bronislaw Malinowski is generally said to be the pioneer of social anthropology in Britain. According to him, the core of anthropology was 'Ethnography'. His work on the Trobriand Islanders is considered to mark the beginning of British Social Anthropology. Herein he lays down the concept of culture, the functionalist perspective and the methodological rigour of ethnography particularly of participant observation.

His approach is:

- Cultures are to be studied in their ethnographic present. The social practices have significance in the present.
- It is the role of the ethnographer to explain the significance through direct observation instead of engaging in historical explanation.
- Each cultural component performs functions which are reflections of the basic biological and psychological needs.
- Social practices are to be analysed in their social context 'as wholes'.
- Central to ethnography is the grasping of the native's point of view, i.e. to see the society as the natives see them. It is important to gather concrete statistical documentation of the field followed by an insightful understanding of the imponderabilia of actual life—emotional responses and subtleties of daily life.
- It is only through participant and intensive observation over a long period of time that the insider's view could be grappled and the holistic quality of culture can be explored.

In his famous ethnographic work on the Trobriand Islanders Malinowski analysed various aspects of their economy, social control, family, kinship, ritual, mythology, etc., and went on to develop his theory of functionalism and theories in the fields of the aspects studied.

### 2.3.9 A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955)

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown put forth the concept of social structure and urged the ethnographer to explore and analyse the enduring elements of society from concrete manifestations and the relationship between these parts. Radcliffe-Brown differentiated social structure from the adaptational and the cultural laying priority of analysis on social structure.

He advocated intensive field studies to be conducted by trained anthropologists on single cultures in a scientific manner. He hoped that once this exercise is accomplished comparative analysis would generate laws. He conducted ethnographic studies on the Andaman Islanders, Australian tribes and African tribes.

### 2.3.10 Edward E. Evans-Pritchard

Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer (1940)* was based on a structural-functionalist model. But it also furthered the structuralist agenda. Evans-Pritchard elucidates another dimension to the study of structure — the relations (between enduring elements)

in their specific contexts. Here, we find Evans-Pritchard trying to interpret relations against the backdrop of the changing contexts and thus hinting upon changing interpretations of apparently similar relations. The inter-subjectivity and contextuality of meaning construction comes to the fore. At the same time, something as dynamic as meaning construction in relation to the different contexts is given a structural objectivity by Evans-Pritchard. With this, language once again consolidates its position of methodological prominence in ethnography. This contribution finds its imprints in the later phases of development of the discipline.

The period from 1940 to 1960 is regarded as the period of consensus or 'routine'. However, expansion was witnessed in fieldwork conducted in newer areas of Africa particularly South Africa, Indian sub-continent and continuity with the Pacific interests. This led to the widening of the scope of theoretical frameworks. Structural Functionalism continued to dominate the scene in British Anthropology.

### 2.3.11 Edmund R. Leach

Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954) goes on to deconstruct the static element so long presumed to be an empirical reality of social structure. Leach shows that within a broad structural framework there might be shifts from one pattern to another and again back. Another notable contribution was the concept of social organisation given by Raymond Firth (1954) which not only seeks to differentiate between structural and organisational change but also the relationship between the two levels with organisational change leading to structural change.

Other contributions towards the broadening of perspectives can be found in the works of Max Gluckman and Victor Turner. While Gluckman brings in the individual presence through rich detailing, Turner in his *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (1957) went on to show how solidarity is constructed and maintained in the first place over and above the conflicts and contradictions that constitute the normal state of affairs. At one level of critical evaluation it once again appears to hinge on the notion of traditional stability of the pre-literate societies/cultures.

The contributions of these perspectives have given a solid footing to the discipline, yet it cannot be denied that the ramifications of these perspectives will not be subjected to criticisms in the changing future. In fact, these were thoroughly questioned in the later phases along with the role of anthropology and ethnography of this period. The crucial attack was on the assumption of the ethnographer being at a vantage point to perceive reality as it occurs.

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## 2.4 SUMMARY

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One of the major distinctions in social anthropology is between 'society' and 'culture', and it has also led to the emergence of two, distinct as well as inter-related, specialisation in anthropology, namely 'social anthropology' and 'cultural anthropology'. Although today, these two are not distinguished the way they were done in the past, the approaches which emerged in each one of them have had an important implication for the later growth of the discipline. Functionalism, or structural-functionalism, or structural functional approach, as this perspective was called by different scholars, was a product of the British social anthropological approach, which owed its indebtedness to Emile Durkheim. The symbolic approach emerged in the context of the American cultural anthropology, from where it moved on to the British tradition.

This lesson has given a succinct view of the symbolic approach as well as the approach which is called 'culturalist'. Both these perspectives are closely interlinked, and at certain level it becomes difficult to separate one from the other, for the central point is that 'culture is a symbolic system'. Human beings are the only ones in the

animal kingdom of which they are a part, that create, transmit, and cognize symbols and communicate through them. Although the symbolic approach was predominantly used in the study of religious systems, its application for understanding other dimensions of human life was not left behind. Since human beings are 'symboling beings', every sphere of their life is rooted in symbols and their meanings.

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### **Sample Questions**

- 1) Discuss the symbolists perspective of Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner and Greetz.
- 2) Discuss the culturalists perspective of Bronislaw Malinowski and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard.
- 3) Discuss cultural anthropology and its concerns.

