1. Define anthropology? Discuss the major branches of anthropology.

Ans: Anthropology is the study of various aspects of humans within past and present societies. Social anthropology and cultural anthropology study the norms and values of societies

The field of anthropology is usually broken down into four main branches: cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, linguistic anthropology and archaeology. Each separate branch of this discipline seeks to study some aspect of humanity - whether it's culture, language, or human biology and evolution.

Cultural anthropology is generally seen as the widest and most practiced branch in the field and is focused on studying human culture and its effect on both the individual and the society as a whole. Most cultural anthropologists focus on one specific aspect of culture, such as religion or politics. Biological anthropology differs from cultural anthropology in that it looks at the role that genetics, history and evolution have played in making humans and societies into what they are today.

Whereas both cultural and biological anthropology are at least somewhat concerned with modern man, archaeology is only concerned with history and seeks to understand and reconstruct what life was like in past cultures and societies. Archaeologists can be focused on any area of human history, from the pre-human, stone age to more recent times.

Linguistic anthropology is focused solely on language, from how languages work, grow and evolve to the effect language has had on human history and development.

2. Discuss anthropological fieldwork tradition and its important characteristics.

Ans: Fieldwork is an essential aspect of all areas of anthropology because it is used to gather primary data, in other words fieldwork is how anthropologists collect the information used for their studies. Historically anthropologists tended to focus on the exotic so fieldwork would be carried out in remote and distant locations such as tribal communities, but today it can be done in a huge variety of settings from urban areas, small communities, cultural institutions, primate conservation areas or even in virtual spaces. This article will examine where the concept of fieldwork originated, why is it important and how anthropologists ‘do’ fieldwork.

In the early days of anthropology scholars conducted their research from university libraries, relying on reports from travellers, missionaries and colonial officers instead of going into the field themselves, leading to them being referred to as ‘armchair anthropologists’. Because they did their research from the comfort of home. This way was challenged by Bronisław Malinowski (see 10 Famous Cultural Anthropologists), one of the founding fathers of anthropology, who advocated the importance of actually travelling to live and interact with a community and living with, speaking with and taking part in the everyday lives of the locals. Although anthropologists had been going into the field for quite some time before Malinowski’s ideas, their methods and attitudes to fieldwork were quite different, so the general consensus amongst anthropologists is that Malinowski is responsible not for the creation but promotion of the new ‘intensive personal fieldwork’ methods that “revolutionized the content and practice of anthropology” (Wax, 1972, pp.2-3). Over the years the nature of fieldwork has changed and updated but essentially follows the same core ideals that personal experience is necessary for painting an accurate picture of peoples’ lives.

Through their work in the field anthropologists are able to not only build the essential skills needed to be an effective anthropologist, but to gain an intimate and detailed understanding of the lives of the people they study. This understanding comes from an individual’s experiences of social actions and relations in context, there is no way to gain the same effect from reading reports or hearing the information second hand. It allows the anthropologist to inhabit and convey situations from an ‘insider’s perspective’ and offer the information for anthropological interpretation. So it is extremely important within the academic field, but it can also be a very eye opening process possibly leading outsiders (the anthropologist and their readers) to look at the world in new and unexpected ways.

It can also be important for biological anthropologists and especially archaeologists whose research may not focus on a social group but could require them to enter the field. Primatologists may benefit from travelling to study and better understand a species either in their wild habitat or conservation area, or may conduct research in facilities such as sanctuaries, zoos or museums. This provides an opportunity to study primates in person and could allow for a far greater understanding of the lives and habits of a species. Archaeologists may often go into the field of course to either excavate or study a site (I won’t mention Indiana Jones here, oops) which is obviously integral to the way archaeology works as a subject. Simply having a site excavated by a non-specialist team could lead to artefact damage, loss (or could simply be overlooked) and the archaeologist would not be able to consider the context to which the artefact belonged.

However, fieldwork can never be perfect. The very nature of fieldwork itself leaves it vulnerable to flaws and oversights, whether they are down to the anthropologists themselves, or uncontrollable external conditions. It takes an extraordinary amount of effort to de-familiarise oneself, but is a skill that can provide new perspectives without the limits of one’s own cultural experience and ways of thinking.

Anthropology is the study of how humans have existed throughout time and the accomplishments they have achieved. The study of anthropology examines human cultures from the beginning of human history to the present as well as their social or community interactions. According to the University of Idaho, the five main characteristics of anthropology are culture, holistic approach, field work, multiply theories and purposes of anthropology.

Culture
Anthropologists study the cultures of many societies in man’s history. According to the University of Idaho, culture is the primary component of the study of anthropology. Defined as a group of people and the organisational structure of its society, culture involves a system of symbols that help to organize values for this group. It is also defined as the primary influence on how people in a society act.

Holistic Approach
Anthropology studies the human experience throughout history from four primary perspectives: history, biology, linguistics and culture. Students of anthropology study people all over the world and past as well as contemporary societies. It incorporates the study of related fields: archeology, physical anthropology, linguistics, cultural anthropology and ethnography. The holistic approach of anthropology integrates knowledge from each of these fields.

Field Work