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**A Case for Anthropology\***

Another end which I believe that anthropology can further, is that of a better understanding between nations and races. Nor do I refer merely to the very obvious need of a mutual understanding between Britons and Indians. Misunderstandings exist no less between different racial and social elements within India and are in just as much need of liquidation. It is a commonplace that to know all is to understand all, and clearly a knowledge of the characteristics and genius of an alien race as determined by their composition, their history and their environment is likely to make it easier to allow for points of difference and to appreciate by standards that are other than our own. The increasing ease and rapidity of communication is causing the world to shrink with a speed which is very disconcerting and unless we can learn to put up with, as neighbours, peoples and nations that were merely names to the bulk of our forefathers we shall find it an uncomfortable place to live in. Change is proceeding at a pace that rapidly increases as it goes along, *vires acquirit eundo*, and although in India it has been extraordinary slow in the past, it is already very much faster and may become extremely fast in the near future. The geographer Ptolemy writing nearly two

thousand years ago referred to the Nagas and placed them on his maps approximately where they are to-day, but though the name remains, he would no longer recognise their country as the realm of the naked, though this change has been taking place only in the last few years, and may not yet be regarded as complete. But nearly everywhere in rural India the last 20 years has witnessed a tremendous change in the standard of living and a very rapid introduction of new ideas and new practices. *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*, 'times change, and we to fit them', may still be true, but for a great many of us the change is becoming too rapid to be at all comfortable, and there is real danger that the more backward may be entirely destroyed by failure to adapt themselves to the changed environment. What the anthropologist seeks to do is to control their contacts with a more sophisticated civilisation in order that they may have a reasonable chance of adapting themselves to a changed environment and escape that complete destruction by disease and vice that contact with civilisation has brought to so many people of comparatively primitive economic culture. The object is not to chain the individual to his existing environment, but by giving him the opportunity to adapt himself to changes at his own rate to enable him to control his environment by the development of his own culture. The attempt to 'civilize' has generally meant an attempt to make in a hurry a perfectly good savage into an unsatisfactory or useless imitation of an inferior Bengali or an inferior European, unsuited to the surroundings in which he finds himself and able only to subsist as a parasite on society if he can be found what Nagas describe as a 'sitting-eating job'. It is against this process in any of its many forms that anthropologists seek to take precautions, and it may be claimed that at least in Africa they have effected something, and I am one of those who think that it is still not too late in parts of India and

Burma, and that we can do no greater harm to people who have a culture of their own already adapted to their environment, than to filch it from them, before they have any means of appraising comparative values, by the substitution of another, unsuited to the environment and disguised under the insidious pretext of 'uplift', which so often merely substitutes new tabus for old, while leaving the attitude of mind, the outlook on life completely untouched. The only case I know of in which the mere museum-of-exhibits policy could be justified is that of the Andamanese, who are probably so far removed from the conditions of modern life and from any qualifications for sharing it, that it is to be doubted whether adaptation is at all possible, without completing the destruction of what is left of them in the process. Fifty years of contact with the penal settlement in Port Blair has already reduced their numbers from over three thousand to a mere 450. A strict isolation is probably their only chance of survival, and they really ought to be preserved from extinction if only as scientific specimens of a type of human being elsewhere long vanished from the face of the earth.

Finally, anthropology like any other science is worth pursuit for the sake of knowledge alone. Great advances have been made in those sciences which give us knowledge of our environment. Geologists can tell us the composition and history of the earth and astronomers penetrate yearly further into space. Great advances have likewise been made in the sciences such as chemistry and physics which give us control over material substances and physical forces – but the merest beginning has been made in those sciences which give us knowledge of ourselves, a knowledge without which we can never hope to control the destiny of our race. The science of anthropology is the first step towards the acquisition of such knowledge.

\*Excerpted from Presidential Address delivered by J. H. Hutton at the 22nd Indian Science Congress, 1935, Calcutta.