My aim is to examine "what is involved in our knowledge of other cultures?" It may be interesting to approach this question via a consideration of another simpler looking question: "What is involved in my knowledge of another person?"

Human relationships may involve, as Strawson pointed out in *Freedom and Resentment* (1) an objective attitude, and (2) a reactive or participatory attitude. Very often in day-to-day life one adopts deliberately or undeterminedly both those attitudes off and on, as it were. Hence to come to understand another person or more broadly, a people of another culture is to examine their behaviour with the 'proper' required attitude. What the word 'proper' here means is the 'correct' attitude. But to emphasise this notion at this juncture will be merely begging the question. It is necessary therefore to clarify what is generally understood as 'objective' and 'reactive' or 'participatory' as regards attitude. To quote Strawson: "to adopt an objective attitude to another human being, is to see him perhaps as an object of social policy; as a subject of what in a wide range of senses, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps
precautionary account, of; to be managed, or handled, or cured, or trained, perhaps simply to be avoided —. The objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways; it may include repulsion or fear, it may include pity or even love, though not all kinds of love. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be set to feel reciprocally towards each other. If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel or reason with him."

The objective attitude may be more or less partial under the following conditions: (1) Towards a particular action, while retaining the full range of reactive attitude towards every other activity. Such are the cases where statements such as, "he hadn't realised," "he had to", "he didn't mean to" and so on, are employed to express a genuine error, an ignorance of a situation, or a case where the agent had acted the way he did having no other options. (2) One may adopt this partial objective attitude towards an agent who may be passing through what might be sensibly
called quite an abnormal frame of mind — when such an abnormality is a more or less temporary phase of his life. In cases of this kind statements such as "he wasn't his normal self" because of abnormal stress, or acting under abnormal post-hypnotic suggestion, might be true of the agent.

But there are cases where there are compulsions on the objective attitude to extend beyond any particular phase of the agent's life to encompass, as it were, his 'entire' life; and in such cases all our reactive attitudes tend, correspondingly, to be profoundly modified. Here, the agent "is himself" for all purposes since there is more or less a state of permanence as to his mental-state. He may be psychologically abnormal and hence has a "warped" perception, or the agent may be a child. Quoting Strawson again: "seeing someone, then, as warped or deranged or compulsive in behaviour or particularly unfortunate in his formative circumstances — seeing someone so tends, at least to some extent, to set him apart from normal, participant reactive attitudes on the part of one who so sees him, and tends to promote, at least in the civilised, objective attitudes" (p. 9). Thus what emerges from the Strawsonian distinction between the two kinds of attitudes is that the reactive or participatory attitudes are, as it were, consti-
tutive of normal human life. The word "constitutive" is meant not in the strong Kantian sense of the word, but in the sense of being a practically irreducible fact of human life. "The human commitment to participate in ordinary inter-personal relationship is — too thorough-going and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that 'our world might change in a way such that in it there were no longer any such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them: and being involved in interpersonal relationships as we normally understand them precisely is being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question" (p. 11). It is also clear that the reactive attitudes are also radically connected with the notion of morality. The ideas of resentment (or indignation), forgiveness, gratitude and love are basic to morality, at least in so far as the idea of goodwill is basic to it: because the availability of these ideas depends crucially on the possibility of genuine expressions of goodwill and its opposite. However, the notion of morality and its relationship with language is dealt with in the following chapter. So for the purpose of the present argument, it will be confined to merely expressing (the intimacy that exists between the concepts of morality and language or more), definitively, the connection between reactive/objective attitudes and the idea of morality. Take the notion of forgiveness, for instance. To forgive
someone, is on the one hand, that resentment may be the proper attitude to take towards his behaviour to one, while on the other hand, to abandon, deny or repudiate this attitude. And precisely as behaviour towards which resentment is expressive of ill-will, forgiveness is necessarily expressive of goodwill.

Quoting Strawson again, to bring out the distinction between the Reactive and Objective attitudes: "the objective attitude is not only something that we naturally tend to fall into — where participant attitude are partially or wholly inhibited by abnormalities or by immaturity. It is also something which is available as a resource in other cases too. We may look with an objective eye on the compulsive behaviour of a very young child, thinking in terms of treatment or training. But we can sometimes look with something like the objective eye on the behaviour of the normal and the mature. We have this resource and sometimes we can use it: as refuge, say, from the strains of involvement; or, as an aid to policy, or simply out of intellectual curiosity. Being human, we cannot, in the normal case, do this for long, or altogether —. But what is above all interesting is the tension there is, in us, between the participant attitude and the objective attitude. One is tempted to say between our
humanity and our intelligence. But to say this would be to distort both notions." For it is obviously absurd to hold that these notions must necessarily be mutually exclusive.

My contention is that my knowledge of another person, in so far as knowledge of a person at all, must at least, in part, be against the background of participant or reactive attitudes. An exclusively objective attitude to another is incompatible with the knowledge of him qua person, for the objective attitude, to put it quite bluntly, turns the other person into a mere object, petrifies him into an object as Sartre might have put it. But if this is true about my knowledge of another person, it is also true to a very large extent about my knowledge of another culture or 'people'. Another people is not just a collection of objects, but consist of persons. My knowledge of another people, as people, therefore, must involve my engagement with them in participatory attitudes.

But let me at this moment, try and say something about the problem of understanding human actions. An attempt is made in the following pages to show that any valid signs of man will involve interpretations at the level of both the 'subjective' and 'objective' meanings. Before plunging into an elaborate argument into this issue,
it would perhaps be enlightening to reveal some of the significant mistakes committed by some of the social scientists as regards their understanding of the central subject of enquiry: Man. Controversies centering around this subject matter is, though enormous in its variety, have at its origin, the rigid and seemingly irreconcilable views of two schools of thought, namely, (1) the Cartesian dualistic metaphysical position which claims that there are only two basic categories of existence - the mental and the physical, and the relationship between these two categories is purely a contingent one. (2) The scientific tradition which rejected the dualistic thesis and tried "to establish a 'natural science' of society and human behaviour which would match the precision and the explanatory scope of physical sciences and possess the same type of logical structure."\(^1\)

Descartes maintained that it was a logical possibility to indulge oneself to think of something mental i.e. of the mind, without implying that this mental entity had anything to do with something physical e.g. the living human body. This claim, naturally and quite obviously had insurmountable difficulties as regards the criteria by

\(^1\) Satya P. Gautam: *On Understanding Human Action*. 
which the 'mental' could be distinguished from the 'physical', and also about the nature of the relationship between the two. Problems arose in the criteria that were proposed for drawing a distinction between the mental and the physical, namely, the dichotomies such as, 'conscious' and 'non-conscious', 'inner' - 'outer', 'unextended' and 'extended' and so on.

It might, of course, be mentioned in passing that in formulating the separateness of mind and body, Descartes was not really speaking of an actual separation, but of a possibility of such, that is, of a disembodied mind. This doctrine had given rise to several difficult problems of epistemology which the scientific tradition made an attempt to avoid by entirely rejecting the dualistic thesis and instead applied the principles involved in the study of the physical world to the study of man. However, this attempt at the rejection of dualism was achieved through a demolition of the conceptual framework applied in every day life for describing and understanding human actions. This position owed its allegiance to a particular view of language, with St. Augustine probably as its chief proponent. According to this view there is an isomorphism between the constellation of words in our language and the objects in the world. Thus words are names of objects, and
acquire meaning only in so far as they refer to objects in the physical world. Hence, the meaning of a word, according to this theory of language, is a kind of object, and its meaningfulness or meaninglessness depends on the presence or the lack of an object of this kind. Taken in conjunction with the Cartesian dualism, and the belief that mental events are 'inner', 'private', 'subjective', this theory implies that concepts such as 'pain', 'anger', and so on are meaningful only by virtue of their reference to something inner which is not accessible by anyone else, besides the one who is experiencing the 'pain', 'anger', 'sorrow' and so on. Thus another person can never know for certain what I think or feel or sense. No one other than the person in question, can ever verify one's inferences about the mental states of another conclusively. The world, as it were, can observe only the physical behaviour, which is external, public, and therefore objective. Such an absurd conclusion led the behavioural scientists to accept a new approach of study — the positivistic inquiry which abandons the distinction between the essence and appearance on the ground that scientists are entitled to deal only with directly observable facts. Those assumptions imply that the concepts and the categories which are indispensable to describe the physical world are enough to describe and explain human actions as well.
What is quite clear from the view of the Cartesian school and that of the Positivists is that either the experiential realm has been denied existence, or it has been declared as private and hence wholly subjective. Consequently, it is not directly accessible to anyone other than the person concerned and there is no criteria to verify such experience claims. The error in ignoring the experiential claims is however, enormous. It does not need much argument to illustrate that to accept as insignificant the experiential capacities of human beings is to really dehumanise them, for it follows that they are incapable of meaningful actions.

The main problem as regards the behaviourists' antagonism to mind could be the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of the concepts that are employed in discourse about the mental realm. The behaviourists may be quite right, in rejecting introspection as a method of understanding human actions, but wrong in denying experiences any place whatever in scientific discourse.

The concept of action that has prevailed in sociological literature following Weber, as against the behaviourist's approach in psychology, holds that action is to be distinguished from 'mere' behaviour by the presence of a 'mental' element. The view postulates that the
definitive feature of action, and its meaning, is consciousness of sort of subjective experience in the mind of the actor. "In action is included all human behaviour in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it." The task therefore at hand, is, according to this view, to interpret action with reference to the subjective meaning that the agent "attaches". It looks as though, Weber really makes a distinction between behaviour and subjective meaning. It is not difficult to apprehend that "the description of action in terms of behaviour plus a mental component is a consequence of Cartesian dualism and a fallacious theory of language."\(^2\) Weber accepts that understanding of the meaning of an action is essential for theories on the study of Man, he however, demands that the interpretation of meaning must be supplanted by a causally adequate explanation. In order to provide a causal theory of social action, a sociological theory usually takes recourse to the reduction of human agency to internalisation of values and fails to treat social life as actively constituted through the doings of its members.

It may be considered ironical that both the behaviourists and their opponents, despite their disagreements on the methodology of social sciences share the view that
action derives its meaning from the subjective experience of that agent. As mentioned earlier, the behaviourists confined their interests to observable behaviour, and rejected the inner states which cannot be scientifically observed. The phenomenologists on the other hand have argued that this approach precludes a proper understanding of human behaviour. The solution to this impasse perhaps lies in the recognition that meaning is not the "property" of any inner experience, and that actions can be understood only against the background of the agent's relationship with the social context in which they are performed. It is of course a triviality to emphasise that meaning requires a subject in so far as it is an individual who acts in accordance with his own perceptions, intentions, and so on. However, meaning is not subjective since it transcends individual behaviour. Social reality is constituted by the fact that people not only act but also inter-subjectively understand each other's actions. Someone who greets me with palms pressed together, what in India is usually known as the sign of 'Namaste' get a similar response from me. The fact that the particular action or signal means what it does exists as a social fact independent of any specific individual's understanding of it. One's ability to understand pre-supposes the fact that the agent or the actor has a common frame of reference
with the others in society without which communication would be impossible. Now this common frame of meaning cannot be shown either as a physical object or a mental object. Moreover, the meaning cannot be a private or a subjective reserve since communicability is a pre-requisite for meaning. Hence the condition for a successful communication is that, meaning is available both to the speaker and the hearer.

The fact that one understands another's point of view or the meaning as it were, on hearing the other's verbal expressions of feelings and thoughts seems to imply that experiential-statements are as significant as expressions or statements about overt behaviour. It is of course not the case that one genuinely confronts with problems of this nature in daily life, where one reacts with people as persons and objects as non-persons. In this connection it might not be irrelevant to mention that various disciplines of human knowledge deal with different aspects of human activities and that each of these disciplines formulates its problems in terms of its specific interests, and not a comprehensive study of Man.

The above argument was an exposition of the problems involved in accepting man as either a mental entity or
purely as a physical being. The study of man, therefore, from the point of view of either of dualism or of what might be called physicalism has serious flaws either way.

Man as an explanation-seeking creature is also a 'language wielding', 'symbol-creating', and therefore 'meaning-generating' creature. It is in language that all explanations are necessarily embodied. Now as the purpose of the chapter is about "Understanding human Action", let us make an attempt at illustrating the difference between an action and a non-action. In the analysis of actions the central problem is whether or not it is possible to state the criteria by which a line could be drawn between them. Various philosophers had answered in various ways the question that Wittgenstein had posed: "What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" The underlying assumptions in most of these answers has been that the question demanded an explication of the relationship between bodily movements and actions. Though there is a wide disagreement on the question of assimilation of the concept of action under the concept of movement (a sequence of events) or behaviour, a major theme of recent writing in analytical philosophy is that 'movements' can, under specific circumstances — usually where they can be linked with conventions
or intentions, rules or motives, etc. — be counted or be re-described as a movement, or as a sequence of movements, (except perhaps those actions which have the character of refraining). The implication of this is that there are two alternative ways of describing the same conduct — one in which an action is described as a mere happening and the other in which it is seen as a doing.

It may be argued that these two alternative modes of describing actions, as the proper unit of reference for analysis of action has to be the agent himself, who is lost sight of in the mode of description in which action is seen as a movement. The view which regards actions to be a subset of events, or holds that there is no difference between action and behaviour, cannot be very illuminating, for any characterisation of action merely in terms of changes in the physical realm fails to draw a distinction between what human beings do, what happens to them, and what they undergo. It may be pointed out that even if doing (i.e. an action and undergoing were exhaustive categories, they are not mutually exclusive; the person committing a crime may also be feeling guilty; and the man who had been robbed may have resisted his assailant). The propounders of the assimilation of the concept of action within the concept of event or the concept of
behaviour, do not quite fully appreciate the reflective character of the awareness that human beings have of their capacity to intervene (or not to) in the world with a view to bringing about certain consequences. Actions and events are unlike in the sense that actions involve the idea of self-awareness and therefore articulation in language by the agent, whereas events do not. Human beings are language-using creatures and therefore are capable of self-reference; a capacity lacking in objects and animals despite Kafka in 'The Metamorphosis' and fairy-tales to the contrary. It is only human actions in which language is used by the agents involved in actions, though of course, animal behaviour and physical events can be discussed, described, and explained in language — but language is not involved in their occurring. Language is used not only in talking about actions but also for engaging in action itself, e.g. in planning an action, in the process of its being executed, and finally in assessing and evaluating it.

To illustrate that actions are different from events, it must be argued that action is not identical with its corresponding event or events, since the same action may involve different events and also the same events may be involved in the performance of different actions. The thought of every action being identical with some event
is erroneous for it is a category mistake to think of
events as intentional or unintentional. It does not make
sense to speak of an event as intentional or unintentional
for unless 'X' was already characterised as an action it
would be irrelevant to ask whether 'X' is intentional or
unintentional. Having now exposed the differences between
an Action and an Event, let us see how human actions are
to be understood in more concrete terms:

(1) First as mentioned earlier in the proceedings, man
being 'language-using' creatures, it is in language that
all explanations are reposed.

(2) Secondly, the concepts in terms of which man seeks
explanation of himself and other fellow-human beings are
primarily concepts such as: thought, motive, intention,
wish, desire and variants of those concepts e.g. hope,
aspiration, ideal and so on. Here we need to make a clear
distinction between the notion of a 'cause' and the notion
of a 'reason'. This distinction is perhaps, fairly familiar
in philosophy but unfortunately is not given the importance
it deserves by social scientists. To take up the first
notion, i.e. of 'cause' one can ask: "What is it for two
events to be causally related?" The answer would be that,
they must temporally and spatially be related to one another
in a particular way: let us take an example, when I switch
on the electric fan, the blades start to revolve. When the current is switched off, it finally stops revolving. Hence there is a temporal connection between the fan revolving and my putting on the switch. Again when the radio is switched on one hears the news being broadcast. The sounds coming from the radio are temporally related to things happening in the broadcasting room of say, Akashvani Bhavan, Delhi. In spite of the distance between Delhi and Shillong, it is still possible to trace (what I might question beggingly be allowed to call) a spatio-temporal causal route between the two events or sets of events.

Secondly, there is a brute matter-of-factness about causal connections. What is meant by this is as follows: causal connections are either there or not there. It does not make sense to say of a causal connection that it ought to be there or ought not to be there, that it is right for it to be there or not right for it to be there, that it is proper or improper, that it is justified or unjustified, that it is good or bad. Of course, occasionally we do talk about a cause being good or bad, proper or improper e.g. women's liberation movement is a 'bad cause' or workers' unity is a 'good cause'. But here quite obviously, the word 'cause' is used in the sense quite different from
the sense in which it is used to describe an event which is related to another as its effect. Fire is the cause of burning; but is it a good cause or a bad cause, a proper or an improper one, a right or wrong one? These questions do not simply arise. There is of course a host of other things that is important to remind oneself of when one is contemplating the concept of a cause. But for my purpose this might do to go on with.

While the concept of cause is wielded in the explanation of natural events, the idea of reason is employed specifically in the explanation of human action. Supposing we are seeking an explanation of the following action; 'X is lying in bed even at 10 in the morning although he is normally up by 5'. A preliminary shot at answering the explanation-seeking question "why is X doing this?" maybe to say "X is depressed". Now depression, although undoubtedly it is a temporal notion, is not an event, not even a mental one, in the way in which the cause of the sounds coming from my radio is an event or a series of events. The word 'depression' here is not used in the same sense as the lowering of X's blood pressure, nor the slowing down of his bodily metabolism. Things may happen even though he is not depressed.
Is depression then the sudden, sinking feeling one gets? Again the same answer applies. One response at this point may be to say: "to say that X is depressed is not an explanation indeed of X's action of lying down at 10 in the morning, it is rather an alternative description of X's action". This however, introduces us to an area of philosophy where a controversy persists — namely, the controversy surrounding the distinction between "explanation" and "description". Now to bring out the distinction between the notion of an explanation and a notion of a description, let us take an example of, perhaps a simpler case. Take for instance, the life-style of a monk. Peter Winch seems to be correct in so far as he holds that the behaviour of the monk cannot be understood as being meaningful, without our knowledge of the rules for his behaviour, which stems from his religious conceptions. However, if we accept this as a sufficient explanation of the monk's behaviour, it is certainly not a kind of explanation which goes beyond the form of life, or what we may call 'institutionalised ideology' of his behaviour. It certainly does not allow for the possibility of any objective theory of motivation. The tendency to consider these two forms of explanation as mutually incompatible arises from the belief that they constitute rival forms of explanation of the same phenomena. The answer seems to lie in the distinction between a conceptual question and a causal one.
An example of this confusion is best illustrated by considering the case of psycho-analysis in connection with the problem of accounting for what has been called "analytic experience". As M. Miri in the Philosophy of Psycho-analysis puts it: "however apart from the conceptual question a purely causal question, corresponding to the physiologist's question about experience can be asked. Such a question would have the form: what is it that is causally responsible for producing analytic experience? Let me explain the difference by means of an example: suppose it is the case that the intake of bhang produces a state of mind which can only be described as 'warmth and affection for everybody'. Now this state of mind would be recognisable as one of warmth and affection independently of our knowledge that the person in question had taken bhang; and this, even if we accept a causal analysis of the emotion of warmth and affection. Its recognisability is a question of whether or not certain concepts can be brought to bear upon it. Now, I would like to say that psychoanalytic technique is part of the causal conditions which bring about analytic experience. The question of the comprehensibility of analytic experience is independent — or at least partly so — of what it is that brings it about; and this even if we accept a causal analysis of some of the concepts (e.g. resistance) the applicability of which makes analytic experience recognisable as such."
It is obvious that our distinction between the causal condition of analytic experience and our conceptual account is a logical one. The account of how the drug alkaloid, T.H.C. entering the blood stream — finally affects the micro chemical process in the brain, by itself, is a complete account (we could extend the causal chain to include such phenomena as distortion in perceptual judgements, and other secondary physiological effects).

The level of sophistication of the causal schema is quite unlimited, but the distinction which we want to draw here is that, in the case of psychoanalysis, this could never exhaust our conceptual account of the experience. The condition of the intelligibility of the analytic experience, in this case the emotion of "warmth and affection" is independent of our causal account. Its (the emotion of warmth and affection) recognisability is "a question of whether or not certain concepts can be brought to bear upon it." On the other hand, our causal explanation is an investigation of the condition which brings about the so called "analytic experience".

Now having discussed at a fairly superficial level the distinction that exists between 'description' and 'explanation', let us refer once more to the earlier example
of: "X lying in bed" because of depression. Supposing his 'being depressed' is a description of X's action in question, then it is quite justified to further ask an explanation-seeking question: "Why is X depressed?" The answer may be something like: "because X has not written a word in the past one year", "X thinks President Zia of Pakistan is a threat to India". Here, it is not clear that the temporal connection between say X's feeling that President Zia is a threat to India and his (X's) being depressed is of the same kind as that between e.g., my putting the light switch on — and the light going on (the latter being a causal connection). For one thing, it is not certain that thoughts can be described as events at all, even mental ones. Of course I can perform certain particular acts of thought which must, in some sense, be events, e.g. I may at this moment be performing the act of thought that Sociology and Social Anthropology are really one and the same academic discipline; and this is an event in a fairly straightforward sense. However, one crucial point emerges here. The thought that Sociology and Social Anthropology are one and the same academic discipline is not identical with the performance of this act of thought; for I can certainly count as thinking that Sociology and Social Anthropology etc. at time 't', although at that time I may not be performing any acts of thought at all (which will be the case, if I am, say, asleep at the time).
But even if thoughts are treated as events, their relationship to action in whose explanation they may be invoked, is not of the brute matter of fact kind which holds between a cause and an effect. Take again, the explanation of X's depression. Of each of these, what we might now call reasons, we might say, 'but X ought not to be depressed for a reason like this' — and this, even if one accepts the reason in question as giving an explanation. Sometimes one might even say: 'X ought to be ashamed of himself for being depressed for a reason like this'. However, purely causal relations, of course, cannot be made the subject of such evaluation.

But 'depression' may not be a good example of human action. It is not, as it were, something that man does; it is much more like something that happens to him. Let us take an example of an action, which is much more of an action. Suppose X is standing in a queue on election day. The correct answer to the question: 'why is X standing in the queue?' maybe, 'X is waiting for his turn to cast his vote'. This will be an explanation in terms of X's intention to vote. The latter may be further explained in terms say, of X's motive of love or admiration for a particular candidate, or for democracy as such, or his hope that his vote will make a difference, and so on.
Here once again, it is not clear that the intention and the action are related temporally in the same way as a cause is related to its effect or effects, for it is not at all clear that intentions are events of any sort. And more importantly, it is always possible to ask of an intention or of a motive or of a wish, or a hope whether it is proper or improper, right or wrong, good or bad and so on.

An important point that perhaps emerges is that a human action can always be made the subject of an evaluative judgement, and that this is logically connected with the kind of explanation that is typically given of human action.

Now what intentions can a person have? The question may sound strange, but for the social sciences it is an extremely important question to ask. But before an attempt is made to answer this question let us dwell a little longer on the notion of 'intention'. And what is said about intentions would also generally apply to things like, motives, wishes, hopes and so on. It is possible for me to act intentionally, and yet to be unaware of my intention, either at time of the action or even afterwards. For instance, X behaves in a certain, particular way towards a girl. The obvious explanation of this may be to say that
he is flirting with the girl, i.e. that X's action is in
some sense, the expression of his flirtatious intention
towards the girl. But X might vehemently and quite since-
rely deny any such intention. The important point in this
is that although one may not be aware of the intention
of a particular action of one's it is also the case that
given the appropriate circumstances it must be possible,
for one to become aware of it or acknowledge it. That is
so, follows perhaps, from the fact that as mentioned before,
man is a self-explaining, self-understanding creature. If
an action of mine is to be correctly understood in terms
of a particular intention of mine, then I must be capable
of understanding it in terms of the very same intention,
for otherwise it follow that it is impossible for me to
understand my own action. And the least that it must be
possible for me to do in order to be capable of understand-
ing my own action, is that I acknowledge or own up the
intention behind the action.

We are now in a position to realise, seemingly, at
least part of the importance of the question: "What inten-
tions can one have?" For if there are intentions, which for
one reason or another, it is impossible for one to have,
then, in explaining one's action these intentions cannot be
invoked. And there are frequently, intentions which it may
be impossible for one to have. Thus, given that I am totally ignorant of the language of experimental physics — it is impossible for me to intend to carry out an experiment in Physics. And my handling with the equipments in the Physics laboratory cannot be explained in terms of any intention to conduct an experiment in Physics. My inability to conduct an experiment in Physics springs from the following logical fact that for one to have an intention is also for one to describe or envisage the situation in which the intention can be seen as having been fulfilled. Thus, I cannot intend to conduct an experiment in Physics, because I cannot envisage (i.e. articulate, describe) the situation which will count as the fulfilment of this intention. Hence for the same reason, someone who is completely unfamiliar with concepts such as 'people's representative', 'majority rule', 'polling', and so on cannot possibly intend to vote. Of course he may indeed go through all the motions associated with polling but he cannot really count as having voted. As far as he is concerned, he has merely marked a paper and inserted it in a box. Another important point in respect of both these examples is that either of them is at all possible only within the framework of a particular on-going, as it were, institution — a way of life. Thus an experiment in Physics is possible only against the background of what we might call, the 'institution of
scientific enquiry or investigation', or that is, the way of life of scientific enquiry. It is this that determines, or contains the criteria for what is to count as an experiment at all, and for distinguishing between a proper one and an improper one, a vigorous one and shoddy one, and so on. And for me to conduct an experiment in physics is for me to partake in the way of life of scientific enquiry, to know my way about in the conceptual framework of what we call science. The up-shot of all this may be put as follows: I cannot have an intention which is such that I am incapable of envisaging (articulating) etc. the situation which will constitute its fulfilment. And frequently my capacity to have an intention depends on my ability to participate in a certain more or less complex form of life. Thus, frequently, to understand an action of mine is to place it in the context of such a 'form of life'.

What I have said about intentions may, with some, not very crucial modification be applied equally to concepts such as motives, hopes, aspirations, wishes etc. What motives, wishes, aspirations, hopes etc. a person can have depends on his capacity to envisage the situations which would count as their fulfilment, and frequently the latter capacity can be experienced only within the framework of a certain way of life.
I have so far used words such as 'institution', 'form of life', 'way of life' in a very loose and general way. An attempt is made further on about the distinction between an 'institution' and a 'culture' which might help one to understand human actions in as near as authentically possible.

3. Meanwhile let us see the importance of what has been said for the social scientist generally, and in particular those engaged in research in the North Eastern part of our country. It seems quite clear that most social scientists are not able to take the suggestion seriously that explanations of actions within a given context i.e. 'a way of life' or 'a form of life', may not be available in a different context. For example, is the Naga head hunter doing the same sort of thing as the Mafia killer in Chicago or New York? Are the polyandrous women of Tibet no different from the film actresses of Hollywood or Bombay? Is the naked Sadhu on the banks of the Ganga engaged in an activity similar to that of the nudists on an American or a European beach? In each of these cases the answer is "no". The Sociologists and the Anthropologists will of course accept this answer indeed; but they do not very often realise the profound implication of this acceptance. For the implication is no less than this: the explanation of the native's action
must at least be available to the native himself, or it must be such that given the framework of his thought, it is possible for the natives to see it as an authentic explanation of his action; for otherwise, it will follow that it may be impossible for the native to understand his own actions. And this, is an absurd conclusion. The native can understand his action only in terms of his intentions or hopes or wishes or aspirations that it is possible for him to have; and it is possible for him to have only those intentions etc. which he can envisage or articulate the fulfilment of; and he can do this last only within the framework of concepts which define the boundaries of sense and non-sense for him, the framework of activities it is impossible for him meaningfully to engage in. To understand a native's action is, therefore, to know one's way about in this framework.

4. It is important at this point to make a further distinction between what may be called an institution and a culture. An institution is a network of practices and a set of norms of propriety within a culture (e.g. family, marriage, war etc.); and a culture is the system of symbols and meanings which gives all institutions encompassed by it their proper significance in relation to each other and in relation to the whole. As an anthropologist puts it: "culture
constitutes a body of definitions, premises, statements, postulates, presumptions, propositions and perceptions about the nature of the Universe, and man's place in it — where norms tell the actor how to play the scene, culture tells the actor how the scene is set and what it all means. Where norms tell the actor how to behave in the presence of ghosts, gods and human beings, culture tells the actors what ghosts, gods and human beings are and what they are all about... .

It should now be clear that to understand a native's action is to place it in the framework of the native's system of meanings... his bounds of sense and non-sense.... what is meant by the latter is this culture and not merely a particular institution within it or even a particular set of norms within it. Thus to understand the action of a Naga head hunter it is not sufficient that one is able to see it as part of the Naga institution of war, but it must also be possible for one to see it as meaningful against the background of his total culture... the native's metaphysics, as it were. This is so because the fullest articulation of the Head hunter's hopes and aspirations is not possible except against the backdrop of their metaphysics, or that

is the entire comprehensive world view of the natives.... In short, their philosophy. Similarly, of course, as mentioned earlier, would the Mafia gangsters. It is not comprehensive enough, not sufficient enough, that the Mafia killers intentions, hopes, and aspirations are articulated in terms of the framework of the institution of gangsterism. Their full articulation is possible only against the background of total American culture or, if you like, civilization. Also physics. It is important, one feels, to note this; because of the social scientists' fondness for the study of institutions as though they are independent, autonomous generators of meaning.

5. Another point that needs to be mentioned is about the alleged inhumanity or — a word more frequently used — "barbarism" or "savagery" of head hunting. Even without being a moral relativist, it is generally accepted that killing is bad; and this is recognised in every human society. And this is not because of a universal human decision, but because of the full awareness or knowledge that killing is bad. But it seems, in almost all societies some kinds of killing are regarded as justifiable. The task before the anthropologist or the philosopher is first to see whether the justification of a given kind of killing in a given culture is consistent with the fundamental presuppositions
of that culture, and that to see whether it is also consistent with our knowledge that killing is, generally, bad.

About head hunting as barbaric practice, perhaps the following may be said: the barbarism of the practice is not inherent in the practice itself; but rather emanates from how a particular act of head hunting has been done or is perceived to have been done. It depends as Wittgenstein says in his Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough, on the spirit of the practice: what he says in effect: when I speak of the inner nature of the practice, I mean all those circumstances in which it is carried out that are not included in the account of the festival, because they consist not so much in particular actions that characterise it, but rather in what we might call the spirit of the practice: which would be described by, for example, describing the sort of people that take part, their way of behaviour at other times, that is, their character, and the other kinds of games they play. And we should then see that what is sinister lies in the character of these people themselves.

6. The 'system of meanings' which is culture is embodied primarily in language... and if we widen the meaning of language a little to include things such as symbols... one might even say with some plausibility that all meanings are
deposited in language. But whether the latter is really true or not, it should at least be clear that if a culture is a system of meanings at all, its language must be an inseparably significant part of it, and that its vital concepts must be embodied in its language. But sometimes this is denied... it is indeed often remarked that the native's language is very often only an inadequate and confused embodiment of his concepts, that it needs a better language for these concepts to be clearly and adequately exposed. But for the moment, the linguistic aspect of the cultural studies we have engaged in, will be kept in abeyance. The matter will be discussed in detail in the last chapter of this thesis in connection with the issue on 'Linguistic Relativism' under the chapter heading 'Language and the understanding of other cultures'.

In conclusion, a word about what it really means to have understood a culture. First, understanding a culture is always a matter of degree... just as most understanding of meaning is a matter of degree... ranging from the extremely superficial to the most profound. For an example, take the notion of love and how it admits of progressive refinement and depth. Take again the difference between Gandhi's grasp of Indian culture in all its comprehensive wholeness and that of V.S. Naipaul's who seems to give only a visual account of the matter,
Secondly, it will be wrong to draw the conclusion from the account offered, that it will be necessarily wrong for someone belonging to a particular culture to make evaluative judgements about activities in another. Human 'self-understanding' is after all an irrepressible factor which underlies any possible knowledge of man in the social sciences. However, it must be mentioned that this 'self-understanding' is not a mere methodological devise. Rather it determines the form of our understanding in the human sciences, and it is precisely this that because of which human sciences could not be really value-free. The terms of adequacy and comprehension are not given to us through the 'independent observation' of perceivable phenomena, that is, of things outside us. There could not be any independent observation in the sense of facts 'uncontaminated' by the human significance of our data.

This, however, does not mean that the social scientist, must not, or is incapable of shedding his prejudices, likes or dislikes and so on, in characterising his findings. The only point that needs to be clearly emphasised is that, before making an evaluation, they must understand —not as just mentioned, in a value-neutral sense, but understanding in a sense of resisting the will to see only what one is inclined to see.