

Development anthropology: Introduction

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Session: 1**

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Outline:

- Definition of anthropology
- Features of Anthropology
- Sub-fields of Anthropology

What is Anthropology?

- Etymologically, the term ‘anthropology’ is derived from two Greek words. These are:
 - ✓ *anthropos* meaning - “human being/mankind”
 - ✓ *logos* meaning - “reason/study/science”
- Thus, **anthropology** can be defined as: “the study of human beings”.
- Such a broad definition, however, is not exclusive to the science of anthropology.
- Rather, many other disciplines in humanities & social sciences are claimed to be interested in “the study of human beings”.

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- What then is unique about anthropology?
- What are its main characteristic features?

The Scope of Anthropology

- **Anthropology is broader in scope** than any other social science discipline.
- Its broad scope is a defining character of anthropology
- Anthropology touches **all aspects** of human condition.
- It is the study of human kind in all times & all places.
- It strives to comprehend the entire human experience.

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- This is also evident in the sorts of questions that interest an anthropologist: For example, anthropologists asks:
- **Is there such a thing as human nature and if so, what is it like?**
- **How and why do human groups differ, both biologically and culturally?**
- **Why have human cultures changed so much in the last 10,000 years?**
- **How are people who live in industrialized urbanized nations different from “traditional” or “indigenous” people?**
- **We want to know why many Canadians and Italians like beef, which religious Hindu’s refuse to eat.**

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In short:

- a. Anthropology is **transcultural**; looks all human groups, large and small; distant and near.
- Every part of the world containing human populations is of interest to anthropological **study-Whether living or dead, Asian or African or European**
- b. Anthropology **spans all of human history**, the ancient and the modern. We must know the past to understand the present.

Anthropology is holistic

- Seeks to demonstrate how aspects of cultures are linked, how they **affect one another**; seeks to understand all aspects of human behavior. It is a multifaceted approach to the study of human behavior.
- Considers cultures, **history, language & biology** essential to a complete understanding of society.

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- Anthropology seeks to understand human beings as ***a whole organism*** who adapt to their environment through a complex interaction of **biology & culture**.
- For example: When describing a group of people, anthropologists may discuss:
 - the history of the area in which they live,
 - the physical environment,
 - the organization of family life,
 - the general features of their language,
 - their political and economic systems,
 - their religion,
 - their diet, or
 - their styles of art and dress.

Anthropology is Relativistic

- Anthropology tries to study and explain a certain belief, practice or institution of a group of people in **its own context**.
- Cultural relativism is the idea that each ***culture is unique & distinctive***; that ***no one culture is superior***.
- E.g. Body-piercing in Lower Omo Valley
- Cultural relativism is also in opposition to the concept of cultural universal.

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- A doctrine of **universal human rights**, which emphasizes the rights of the **individual over those of the community**, would condemn such 'harmful' traditional practices.
- Those supporting ***universal human rights*** say community-supported genital mutilation & sarranged marriages, which are found in many parts of the world, are violations of the rights of the individual.
- Generally, today there is an ongoing debate between supporters of a **universal morality** & supporters of **moral relativism**.

Anthropology is comparative

- Anthropologists can utilize the comparative approach to compare & contrast cultures, which identifies fundamental similarities of cultural patterns as well as differences.
- Why certain variations over in certain circumstances but not in others? why certain features tend to occur together, etc.
- Anthropology is also interested in comparisons across time to analyze **culture change**.

Emphasis on “insiders’ view”

- Anthropological studies- often explore how members, of a particular culture, explain their action; or
- How they give meaning to their behaviour or cultural practices,
- The goal is to create better understanding among people.

Method of Research

- ***Extended fieldwork*** is the hallmark of anthropological research.
- Use of mixed research methodology (qualitative & quantitative approaches).
- In socio-cultural anthropology, for example, extended fieldwork is carried out through:
 - ✓ In-depth interview,
 - ✓ Observation/participant observation,
 - ✓ Focus group discussion/interview, ...

Sub-fields of anthropology

- Areas of specialization in anthropology:
 1. Physical/Biological Anthropology
 2. Archaeological Anthropology
 3. Linguistic Anthropology
 4. Socio-Cultural Anthropology
 5. **Applied Anthropology (?)**

Physical/Biological Anthropology

- Physical anthropology is the study humans from a biological perspective.
- It seeks to understand human behavior from a biological stand point.
- In other words, biological anthropologists attempt to understand human behavior from a biological perspective; especially by focusing upon human **evolutionary history** & **biological variation** among human populations.

Biological...

- Physical anthropology has three broad specialities: Paleoanthropology, Primatology and Anthropometry

1. Paleoanthropology:

- ❖ *Investigates both the emergence and subsequent evolution of human beings*
- ❖ *Reconstructs human evolution through examination of fossil remains*

Paleoanthropology



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Paleoanthropologists excavating at the Drimolen site, South Africa.

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2. Primatology:

- The study of biology & behavior of primates-
- In particular, Primatologists study animals that are believed to have close resemblance with human beings.
- E.g. Chimpanzees, Gibbons, ...
- Primatologists also observe primates in their natural habitat to ascertain similarities &/or differences between primates and human.

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3. Anthropometry:

- ❖ The study of ***human variation*** among different populations ***in time & space***.
- ❖ It investigate ***how & why human populations*** differ in biological or physical characteristics
- ✓ Physical variations are explained in terms of blood types, skin colors, facial shape (e.g. Cephalic index)... etc.
- ❖ Anthropometry also investigates the influence of environment on the human body as it grows and mature.

- Studies the life ways of people in the past by excavating & analyzing the physical remains they left behind.
- Archaeologists try to **reconstruct history** from the remains of human cultures
- In doing so, archaeologists manage to reconstruct ***past patterns of behaviors***.
- **How do archaeologists differ from and/or relate with historians?**

Archaeological....

- Modern archaeology is subdivided into two fields:
 1. Prehistoric archeology:
 - The study of ancient pre-literate cultures—those that never kept written records of their activities, customs & beliefs.
 2. Historic archaeology:
 - An inquiry about people of the past who lived in literate society. The growing field of Historic Archaeology supplements such written materials (through excavations of houses, stores, plantations, factories, & other historic structures).

Linguistic Anthropology

- Anthropological Linguistics is concerned with the complex relations between language & other aspects of human behavior & thought.
- ❖ Historical Linguistics
 - ✓ Study of ***how languages change over time*** and how they are related
- ❖ Descriptive or Structural Linguistics
 - ✓ Look at the ***description of the language, the way sentences formed and how verbs are conjugated.***
- ❖ Sociolinguistics
 - ✓ Study ***how language is used in social context***

Socio-cultural anthropology

- **Cultural anthropology-** is the *study of contemporary & historically recent human societies* & cultures of living human beings.
- The main focus of cultural anthropology is **culture**, learned behaviors & symbols that allow people to live in groups.
- Cultural anthropologists believe that the *study of other cultures help them better understand their own cultures*.
- To do research & collect information about particular cultures, cultural anthropologists conduct **fieldwork**.
- A written report of fieldwork— of how a single human population live—is called **an ethnography**