Social Anthropology

Today's session

- Definition and concepts of Anthropology
- The Historical Development of Anthropology
- unique feature of Anthropology
- misconception about Anthropology
- the relationship B/n Anthropology with other discipline
- contributions of Anthropology

Chapter One
Introduction

Definition, scope and subject matter of Anthropology

- ✓ world becoming **a small place with growing interconnections**, and interdependence among peoples and nations across the globe.
- ✓ Global communications, international trade, transfer of technology, rises in international travel, and ease of mobility
- ✓ worldwide spread of consumer culture have brought people and cultures into more **intimate contact than ever** before
- ✓ so that **knowledge about societies and cultures** other than **one's own**, and greater

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- ✓ The discipline of **anthropology is ideally suited to introduce students to a global perspective** and the broad world of humanity.

Defining Anthropology

- Etymological definition: the term Anthropology is a combination of two Greek words ‘Anthropos’ meaning ***mankind or human being*** and ‘logos’ which mean ‘study’ or ‘science’.
- Therefore Anthropology is a **systematic** the study of mankind or humanity.
- Anthropology is the scientific study of human beings as social organisms, interacting with each other in their environment.
- The **study of human nature, human society, and their behavior;**
  - It studies mankind in all aspects

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- Unlike other discipline, Anthropology is the study of people—**their origins, their development, and contemporary variations,** wherever and whenever they have been found.
- **Man has two important characteristics: biological and cultural which are inseparable elements.**

- Anthropology tries to achieve an understanding of culture, society and humanity through detailed studies of community life.

- It seeks to explain how and why people are both similar and different through examination of our biological and cultural past and comparative study

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- Its ultimate goal is to develop an **integrated picture of humankind.**

- anthropology offers **two kinds of insight**.

1. it ***produces knowledge*** *about the actual biological and cultural variations in the world;*

2. *it* ***offers methods and theoretical perspectives*** enabling practitioner to explore, compare, understand and solve these varied expressions of the human condition

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Historical Overview of Anthropology

- Anthropology is fairly recent discipline
- it has important forerunners in the **historiography, geography, travel writing, philosophy** and jurisprudence of earlier times.
- Originated in **four western' countries**: **France, Great Britain, USA and Germany.** Historical speaking it is European discipline
- its root goes back to the medieval Greek(500-1500) (Herodotus), roman and Hebrew philosophers and social thinkers.
- **the historian,Herodotus,** sought to understand other people and cultures by travelling far, and wide and wrote detailed accounts of 'other'peoples, comparing their

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- ✓ Anthropology as an academic discipline was **born during** the 19th century, out of the intellectual atmosphere of Enlightenment.
- ✓ The Enlightenment (1620-1781) or the 'Age of Reason' is a period when Europeans attempted to study human behaviour **systematically.**
- ✓ The major impetus for its growth was the expansion of **western colonial powers** and their consequent desire to better understand the people living under colonial domination.
- ✓ **Anthropologists of the early 1900s emphasized the study of social and cultural differences among human**

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- By the mid-1900, anthropologists attempted to discover universal **human patterns and the common biopsychological** traits that bind all human beings this approach is called **ethnology**.
- Ethnology aims at the comparative understanding and analysis of different human groups across time and space.
- Its emergence as the discipline known today, is associated with **four outstanding scholars**, working in **three countries**,in the early decades of the 20th century: **Franz Boas** in the USA; **Radcliffe-Brown** and **Bronislaw Malinowski** in the UK; and

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- Early Anthropologists were mainly studied small community in technologically simple, traditional and nonindustrial societies.
- in Ethiopia professional anthropologists have been studying culture since 1950.

Scope and subject matter of Anthropology

- The subject matter of anthropology is **very vast and covers all aspects** of human ways of life.
- anthropology studies all aspects of human life with its all aspects of existence, and in its all means of differences (diversity) and similarities (commonality).
- Anthropologists have wide-ranging and frequently highly specialized interests, they all share a common concern in trying to understand both connections *within* societies and connections *between* societies.
- Anthropologists strive for an understanding

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- ✓ Anthropology attempts to answer major questions of human nature and existence.
- o **Some of the questions anthropologists ask includes;**
- ➢ Where did the human specie (Homo Sapiens) originated?
- ➢ Are humans created by God or are they products of millions of years of evolutionary process?
- ➢ Why does humans vary biologically and culturally (skin colour, language, race, religion etc.?
- ➢ How can we explain the variations and similarities of cultures across the world.
- Anthropologists ask, for example, what makes us human?
  - ✓Why do some groups of people tend to be tall, while others tend to be short?
  - ✓ Why do some groups of people practice agriculture, while others hunt for a living?

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In a more **specific term**, anthropology is a science which;

- **Investigates the** strategies for living that are learned and shared by people as members of the human specie.

- **Examine the characteristics** that human beings share as members of one specie (homo sapiens) and the diverse ways that people live in different environments.

- **Analyses the products of social groups** material object (culture) like tools, cloths, houses etc. and non material culture such as languages, practices, beliefs, values, ideas, etc.

Unique features of Anthropology

1. Its Broad scope

- The main distinguishing characteristics of anthropology from other disciplines that study man is its broad scope.
- We say broad because it is interested in all human beings whether dead, living, primitive, civilized etc.
- And also study every social aspect of human society including the family system, marriage, kinship, skin colour, politics, economy, religion, language etc.
- No people, place or time is too **remote to**

2. Its Unique Approach

- Anthropology is **Holistic**: Studying one aspect of culture by relating it to other aspects of life.
- Anthropology is **Relativistic**: it tries to study and explain a certain culture of a group in its own context. It doesn’t make value judgement.
- **comparative Approach**: anthropology is a comparative science that offers a unique, cross-cultural perspective; **comparing** the customs of one society with those of others
- It helps to understand differences and similarities among human beings across time and place.

3.Emphasis on insiders view

- its emphasis on the perspective of an insider, when examining other culture.
- In its approach to culture and society, anthropology has made a distinction between the emic perspective and the etic perspective.
- **Emic perspective** refers to an insider view, which seeks to describe culture or social behaviour in terms of the categories, concepts, and perceptions of the people being studied.
- **Etic perspective** refers to an outsider view, in which anthropologists use their own categories and concepts to describe the

4. The Micro focus

- Anthropology focus on **small-scale society** or community whether in traditional or modern, the focus of study is on small scale social organization, economic and political structure **(having homogenous character)**

5. Its Method of Research

Anthropology is known for using a **qualitative research methods** such as extended field work, **FGD**, **participant observation**, **in-depth interview** and ***key informant interviews.***

Misconceptions about Anthropology

- There are a number of misconception about the discipline of anthropology because of the lack of appropriate awareness of its nature

1. misconception about anthropology is **limited to the study of primitive societies** since most anthropological researches focused on isolated, primitive, small scale societies during the early years of the discipline.

- But nowadays, anthropologists also study the **advanced, complex, industrialized societies.**

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2. Anthropologists are assumed to study only **rural people and rural areas.** But we are interested in urban life as well. In fact there is a sub-field **urban anthropology** (which focuses on small-scale societies in a complex city).

3. It is also wrongly misconceived that anthropology is the **study/analysis of fossil** evidences of the proto-humans like that of ***Lucy/Dinkeneshe***.

4. It is also misconceived that the purpose of anthropology is to study in order **to keep and preserve communities far from development**.

The relation B/n Anthropology and other fields

- Due to its broad interest on humanity, anthropology **cut across with other sciences and humanities i**n terms of subject matter and areas of study,
- Anthropology **encompass many of the subjects** that disciplines like history, sociology, political sciences, economics, linguistics, philosophy and others.

- because of the magnitude of examining all aspects of humanity, anthropology may **borrow theories and data** from such many other disciplines

- Anthropology differs from other social sciences and the humanities by it broad scope, approach (Holistic, relativistic and comparative), unit of analysis (small-scale) and methods (Qualitative research- fieldwork, participant observation, FGD)

Contribution of Anthropology

- anthropology allows us to **comprehend the biological, technological and cultural development of humanity**, over long period of time, and its entire aspects of existence and experiences.
- It provides us a window to look into the human world from a broader perspective.
- the anthropological perspective, with its emphasis on the comparative study of cultures, should lead us to the conclusion that **our culture is just one way of life among many found in the world,**
- it help us to gain a fuller understanding of other cultures and our own

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- Anthropology, in other words, prevents us from taking our own cultural perspective too seriously or considering it as an absolute truth of the human world.
- helps to understand the logic and justification behind group behavior and cultural practices.
- cultural anthropology offers a unique perspective on how local cultural groups are engaging with the **process of globalization.**
- how the local people themselves talk about their life experiences in a time of rapid globalization.

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- ✓ anthropology gives us an insight into different ways and modes of life of human society (social and cultural diversity).
- Anthropology helps us to be more sensitive to and appreciative of cultural diversity and variability. It help us to fight **Ethnocentrism.**
- Anthropology is also used as a tool for development. Paying attention to local conditions is crucial to solve community problems.
- Anthropology recognizes the advantages of consulting local people to design a culturally appropriate and socially sensitive change, and protect local people from harmful policies and