

Avenues of Anthropological Research

Anthropology originated in European countries due to their colonial needs to study about the environment, resources, society, culture and people of the countries under their regime. It got a boost after the publication of Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution in his seminal book 'Origin of Species' in 1859. After this, Anthropology developed as an academic discipline in the 19th century. The term Anthropology is derived from the combination of two Greek words: anthropos and logos. The English synonym of the word 'anthropos' is humankind, while 'logos' means study or science. Thus literally, Anthropology is the holistic study of humankind. It is interdisciplinary in nature and correlates all aspects of human life across time and space. Initially, anthropological studies were started with non-western societies of rural and remote areas. Later, its scope is extended to the studies of all sorts of rural, urban, developed, undeveloped and developing societies and their problems.

Anthropology is broadly divided into four main branches namely socio-cultural anthropology, physical or biological anthropology, archaeological anthropology and linguistic anthropology. Social or cultural anthropology, popularly known as socio-cultural anthropology, is further sub-divided into many specialized fields of study which shares knowledge from different facets of social sciences, such as, medical anthropology, urban anthropology, rural anthropology, economic anthropology, political anthropology, development anthropology, anthropology of art, anthropology of religion, legal anthropology, psychological anthropology, demographic anthropology, ecological anthropology, ethnomusicology and ethnomuseology, etc.

Physical or biological anthropology is further divided into three primary sub-branches; paleo-anthropology, primatology and anthropometry. Apart from these, many other sub-fields under biological anthropology serve to solve various practical problems. One of these is population genetics; the study of biological inheritance plays a vital role in human evaluation and distribution. Another critically associated sub-field is forensic anthropology, which is related with the identification of human skeletal remains for medical purposes and criminal investigations for legal purposes. Determination of sex, stature, age at death, ancestral background of the deceased person, etc., is done to identify crash victims, homicide victims, war casualties and skeletal remains.

Archaeological Anthropology is subdivided into prehistoric archaeology, ethno-archaeology, historical archaeology and classical archaeology. Several other specialized areas of study and research are associated with archaeological anthropology, such as, industrial archaeology, underwater archaeology or marine archaeology, cognitive archaeology, experimental archaeology, biblical archaeology and cultural resource management.

Linguistic anthropology or ethnolinguistics is the study of language as a cultural resource and speech as a cultural practice. The sub-branches of linguistic anthropology include sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and structural linguistics.

After 1870s, in the nineteenth and succeeding twentieth century, many increasing anthropological studies, especially ethnographical studies, resulted in the development of museums having anthropological collections including huge number of paleo-anthropological, ethnoarchaeological and ethnographical artifacts. Museum Anthropology and Ethnomuseology developed as a professional stream in Anthropology.

Later, two major approaches for anthropological studies were subsequently developed, namely Applied Anthropology and Action Anthropology. Applied Anthropology, also seen as the fifth major branch of anthropology, provides the solution to human problems. Action Anthropology includes experiments and the application of solutions for human needs and problems while continuing research. Applied anthropologist now work in quite many areas of relevance, such as urban problems, education, mass medicine, agriculture, poverty, development, business, crime, etc.

Business Anthropology is a budding field of applied anthropology addressing the needs and solutions

for business related problems. Before the 1980s, it was also known as industrial anthropology, denoting business related research and application. Business anthropological research is vital in providing ground solutions to corporates, especially multinationals, in developing culturally appropriate products or services and ways of doing business with suppliers, business partners and customers. It also helps to develop smooth working relationships among employees representing different age groups, ethnic groups, and gender. It includes studies on consumer behaviour, product design, marketplace, marketing strategy, public-corporate relationship, etc. Business anthropology is developing as a subfield of applied anthropology and taught in graduate and post-graduate programmes or degrees in higher educational institutions.

Anthropological studies and their applied aspects can play a significant role in better managing natural or man-made disaster situations. Disaster causes damage or loss to a community's major socio-cultural elements and physical systems, resulting in individual and group stress. The major anthropological approaches to disaster management are behavioral response approach and social change approach. The behavioral response approach includes studies and applied aspects related to the adjustment of individuals, groups, and organizations to the stress of disaster warning, impact, and immediate consequences. The social change approach includes the development of a culturally appropriate environment as per the former lifestyle in the post-migration situation to better cope with the disaster situation.

Sport Anthropology is a recently developed branch of anthropology. In this branch, nutrition is mainly determined according to the body composition of different players, and clothes, shoes, and other accessories are determined according to the BMI of the player. Sports Authority of India (SAI) and many sports product brands have employed many anthropologists as scientists for research and development for fulfilling the needs of sports personals and increasing their efficiency. Tribal tourism, ethnic tourism and eco-tourism have also attracted anthropologists as professionals.

Anthropological studies are holistic, relativistic, comparative, emphasizes on insider's view or emic perspective through empirical field based study. Anthropology has developed far from primitive, rural or ethnic studies of homogeneous societies. Now, anthropology is also providing solutions for rural as well as urban, industrial and developmental problems. Anthropological studies and their applied aspect can play a vital role in solving modern-day problems and sustainable development while preserving cultural heritage and generating mass awareness. The current issue of this journal (IJRA Vol.8, no.2) includes research and review articles from the physical, medical, developmental, socio-cultural, archaeological, rural and urban fields of Anthropology.

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