

Anthropology beyond Books: A Survey on the Importance of Anthropology

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Abstract

The research article is an outcome of a survey undertaken among the 100 students of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Out of which 44 were males and 56 were females. The research was carried out in an academic session from July 2012 to July 2013. The core objective of the research is to understand the views of students towards the importance of anthropology and its application in the human welfare and planning the societal development. The challenging findings include that out of all the sciences which study various aspects of humankind, anthropology comes nearest to being total study of man. Anthropology studies man's past, present and also gives an insight of our near future as of how we are constructing our society and what are the cultural norms will eventually decide the future of mankind. The unique feature of anthropology is its holistic approach of viewing human being at its broadest context possible, as biological as well as cultural being. The research gives the knowledge of the status of anthropology in the minds of students of the discipline and how they perceive what they study.

Keywords: Anthropology; Holistic approach; Mankind; Societies; Population; Human; Similarities

Introduction

Anthropology as we know is derived from the root-words "Anthropos" meaning man, and "logos" meaning studies. This etymological meaning is a sufficiently accurate definition of the scope of the subject. It seeks to understand the whole paronoma of human behavior and experience. There are lots of areas of study under the subject title "anthropology" but the one field that forms the most intriguing part of anthropological studies is to understand who we are and what frames our culture in which we live and how we interact with other human cultures which happens to be different from ours. Anthropology not only deals with various aspects of culture, but it also explores the variety of other dimensions to which human beings are closely associated. Anthropology includes four main sub-disciplines or sub-fields and they are physical or biological anthropology, socio-cultural anthropology, archaeological anthropology and linguistic anthropology [1]. The subject encompasses almost everything related to human beings within any context. The study is very vast and practically any area where there is a sign of human invasion is of interest to an anthropologist. In the earlier days anthropology was more or less understood as the study of primitive and simple societies living in exotic and typical areas of the world. But today its application in complex and modern societies is well established and anthropologists work in alliance with governmental and non-governmental organizations for planning of policies that fit the requirements of the general mass. Some of the evolving areas under anthropology which have gained a good reputation in human studies in recent decades are as follows.

Physical anthropology

Physical anthropology which is now popularly called as biological anthropology which analyses the physical and biological facets of humankind from comparative, ecological and evolutionary vistas. In earlier periods observation on skeleton and living population of man and his near relatives was application of relatively simple statistical analyses. But today the study of physical anthropology has become immensely diverse. It has come a long way from the study of primates with the help of fossils and skull findings. Primate classification on the basis of fossil evidence is vital to know hominid tree and to know our

occurrence on this planet. Other concerns like evolution of the human species and extinction and the mutation of related species [2]. Methods of study used by physical anthropologist are highly scientific and allow comparative analysis. Other sub-disciplines of physical anthropology include the forensic anthropology which deals with crime scene investigation and finding the cause and time of death. A well trained forensic anthropologist can tell the cause of death even by looking at the skeletal remains. Archaeological anthropology is also a part of physical anthropology which deals with the origin and development of human species and its material manifestation in the form of material culture. Archaeology is clearly devoted to diachronic studies i.e., it deals with the ancient societies and cultures. It tries to reconstruct the cultural forms of the past and to trace their growth and development in time.

Socio-cultural anthropology

Social Anthropology is the study of humankind in terms of who we are and what our social and cultural existence means. Both the diversity amongst people and the common responses to the challenges of being human are in continuous focus. This means that what one regards as commonplace and that which is seen as extraordinary are turned around: Social Anthropology makes the strange familiar and the familiar strange by investigating the reasons for behavior and shared meanings of all people, including ourselves [3]. Social Anthropology builds on the natural curiosity we all have about what it means to be human. It tries to overcome our stereotypes about other people who appear strange to us, by studying the way they experience and perceive life from their own perspectives. As it a study of all the aspects of

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human culture it also includes the study of cultural traits like language which forms a separate sub-discipline of linguistic anthropology which studies all the aspects of language which includes its origin, expansion and evolution [4].

Applied anthropology

Applied or practice in anthropology refers to the application of the anthropological data, perspectives, theory and methods to identify and solve contemporary social problems. In most general sense, applied anthropology includes any use of the knowledge and/or technique of the four sub-fields to identify, assess and solve practical problems. It many applications, and this is why, more and more anthropologists from the four sub-fields now work in such "applied" areas as public health, family planning and economic development [5]. The study conducted among the students gave a vibrant account of anthropology and what it means according to their own understanding and definitions. The study revealed the experience and out of the context approach of students which they gained through their academic training and life experiences. Majority of the students gave some out of the text answers which were based on real life experiences and analyses which they have done on the basis of their anthropological knowledge.

Material and Methods

The current research article is an outcome of a survey conducted among the 100 students of anthropology of both post-graduate and undergraduate courses in Amity University; Noida, Uttar Pradesh. Among the 100 students 44 were males and rest 56 were females. Out of the total students 70 were of undergraduate course and rest 30 were enrolled in postgraduate course. Most of the postgraduate students had studied anthropology before joining the current course. The survey is conducted by employing a well documented questionnaire which included both quantitative and qualitative questioning. The questionnaire is designed in such a way so that the core objectives of the research can be achieved with ease and competency.

Result and Conclusion

The study among the students gave a complete description of anthropology as a subject and it has been found that the students were well informed and interested in the subject which made them choose anthropology out of various popular other disciplines. Most of the students were not having any anthropological or social sciences background in their families and in their friend circle. It was just zeal to study human society which made them closer to the subject. However, still others have joined the course randomly without any prior knowledge and interest as they find it an important subject for civil services examinations. But with the course of time they felt interested in the subject. Students were constantly involved in anthropological studies and they frequently visited fields for practical application of their knowledge. Out of the total students who were studied 65 were interested in social anthropology while rest 35 was having an interest in physical anthropology. Out of these 35 students 15 students were interested in archaeological anthropology and 20 students showed interest in medical and forensic anthropology. Students personally felt that they can contribute well to the society by studying anthropology as a subject, as it focuses on every aspect of humankind. And almost all students were satisfied with the course structure and subject as a whole. Students defined anthropology very compassionately including all its branches and sub branches and they felt they can easily be employed in a variety of fields as the subject is quite diverse and covers a lot of area. One more fact about employment is that the subject is related to so many subjects and this holistic approach provides a good competency for employment.

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