
UNIT 3 RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITH ALLIED DISCIPLINES

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Suggested Reading

Sample Questions



Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit, you would be able to describe the:

- relation between social anthropology and the various allied sciences; and
- ability of social anthropology to interpret the biological and social factors to depict man's culture and behaviour in totality.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Social anthropology is that branch of anthropology which deals with human culture and society emphasising cultural and social phenomena including inter personal and inter group relations especially of non literate people. All social sciences study human behaviour, but the content, approach and the context of sociology and social anthropology are very different from other disciplines. Apart from studying the internal characteristics of the society, social anthropology also studies the external characteristics of the population and rate and stage of its progress. The problems of the society are explained using these factors. Secondly, it also studies institutions like – political, economic, social, legal, stratification, etc. It studies the features that these institutions share and the features that are different. Their degree of specialisation and level of autonomy are also studied. Durkheim, one of the pioneers of social anthropology called social anthropology as the study of social institutions. Thirdly, social anthropology is the study of social relationships. By social relationship we mean the interactions between individuals. Interactions between individuals are mediated by norms and values of the society and are intended to achieve goals.

3.2 RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITH OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES

The social and cultural anthropologists include a broad range of approaches derived from the social sciences like Sociology, Psychology, History, Economics, Political Science, Social Work, Cultural Studies, Literature, Public Health, Policy and Governance Studies, Management, etc. Social anthropology is, thus, able to relate all of these disciplines in its quest for an understanding of human behaviour, and draws upon all of them to interpret the way in which all biological and social factors enter to depict man's culture and behaviour in totality.

3.2.1 Social Anthropology and Sociology

Social anthropology usually has been defined as the study of other cultures, employing the technique of participant observation and collecting qualitative data. Social anthropology is similar to but not identical with sociology, at least in terms of how each discipline has developed since the last century. Social anthropology has focused on pre-industrial societies, sociology on industrial societies; anthropologists conducted their research in other cultures, employed the technique of participant observation (collecting qualitative data), and advocated comparative (especially cross-cultural) analysis; sociologists did research in their own societies, used questionnaires (collecting quantitative data), and rarely attempted to test their generalisations cross-culturally. Of course, there have been many exceptions to these patterns with the result that sociologists have sometimes resembled anthropologists in their labours, and vice versa (Barrett, 2009).

However, another way of examining the relationship between these two disciplines is by finding out the important differences. The first major difference is that while sociology is by definition concerned with the investigation and understanding of social relations and with other data only so far as they further this understanding, social anthropologists although they share the concern with sociologists, are interested also in other matters, such as people's beliefs and values, even where these cannot be shown to be directly connected with social behaviour. Social anthropologists are interested in their ideas and beliefs as well as in their social relationships and in recent years many social anthropologists have studied other people's belief systems not simply from a sociological point of view but also as being worthy of investigation in their own right.

The second important difference between social anthropology and sociology is simply that social anthropologists have mostly worked in communities which are both less familiar and technologically less developed, while sociologists chiefly studied types of social organisation characteristic of more complex, western –type societies. The distinction is by no means a hard and fast one; it implies difference in field rather than in fundamental theory, but it has important implications. It is in the study of small-scale systems of this kind, where person to person relationships are all important that the methods of social anthropology have been elaborated, and its main contributions to sociological knowledge have been in this field.

Finally, the fact that social anthropologists have mostly worked in unfamiliar cultures has imposed on them a problem of translation which is much less acute for sociologists, though it certainly exists for them too. Sociologists usually speak the same language (more or less) as the people they study and they share with them at least some of their basic concepts and categories. But for the social anthropologist the most difficult

part of his/her task is usually to understand the language and ways of thought of the people he studies, which may be and probably are very different from his own. This is why, in anthropological fieldwork, a sound knowledge of the language of the community being studied is indispensable for a people's categories of thought and the forms of their language are inextricably bound together. Thus questions about meanings and about the interpretation of concepts and symbols usually demand a larger part of the attention of social anthropologists than of sociologists. Never the less, sociology is social anthropologists' closest companion discipline and the two subjects share a great many of their theoretical problems and interests. Social anthropologists are sociologists as well, but they are at once something less, because their actual field of investigation has on the whole been more restricted and something more, because although they are concerned with social relationships, they are concerned with other aspects of culture as well. However, the top scholars in both social anthropology and sociology spend very little time in worrying whether what they are doing is sociology or social anthropology.

3.2.2 Social Anthropology and Psychology

The study of mind and human behaviour is called Psychology. Psychologists investigate a diverse range of topics through their theories and research. These topics include the relationship between the brain, behaviour and subjective experience; human development; the influence of other people on the individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviour; psychological disorders and their treatment; the impact of culture on the individual's behaviour and subjective experience; differences between people in terms of their personality and intelligence; and people's ability to acquire, organise, remember and use knowledge to guide their behaviour.

Thus for the psychologists the focus of study is upon all aspects of human behaviour: and its personal, social and cultural dimensions which will never be complete without having the knowledge of social anthropology. Therefore, for understanding the social processes and meanings in the world around us one has to study social anthropology. Both **Social Psychology and Social Anthropology** deals with the manifold relations between individuals on the one hand and groups, communities, societies and cultures on the other hand.

According to Barrett (2009:135) British social anthropology has historically been quite opposed to psychology. Another way of stating this is to say that social anthropology has been anti-reductionist, which means opposed to reducing the explanation of social life to other disciplinary levels such as psychology. This perspective can be traced back to Durkheim, who declared that any time a psychological explanation is provided for a social phenomenon we may be certain that it is wrong. American cultural anthropology has been much more receptive to psychology, especially the focus on the individual. Boas was interested in the relationship between the individual and society, and eventually there was the culture and personality school, with its emphasis on modal personality. In more recent years a distinct approach called psychological anthropology has emerged, with a focus on attitudes and values, and child-rearing practices and adolescence (Bourguignon 1979).

The only line of difference is that social anthropology examines the group, psychology the individual. Social anthropologists specialise in social structure or culture psychologists in the personality system, and in mental process such as cognition, perception, and learning, and emotions and motives. Social anthropologists take personality system as constant and look for variation in the social structure as the

basis of their investigations whereas, psychologists accept the social structure as constant and look for variations in the personality system as the basis of their analysis.

Barrett (2009) in his work has stated that for both psychologists and anthropologists the only real entity is the individual human being. Social anthropologists abstract and generalise at the level of the social system whereas psychologists also abstract and generalise, but in their case at the level of the personality system. Finally, the work of some social anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists, occupies a common ground, reflecting shared interests in integrating social structure and personality.

3.2.3 Social Anthropology and History

Historians are chiefly interested in the past, whether remote or recent, their study is to find out what happened and why it happened. On the whole, they are more interested in particular sequences of past events and their conditions, than they are in the general patterns, principles or laws which these events may exhibit. In both of these respects their concern is little from that of social anthropologist. For social anthropologists are centrally (though not exclusively) interested in understanding the present condition of the culture or community which they are studying. But although the disciplines are different, social anthropology has a very close relationship with history in two important ways. First an anthropologist who aims to achieve a complete understanding as possible of the present condition of the society he is studying can hardly fail to ask how it came to be as it is. That is not withstanding that his central interest is in the present, not in the past for its own sake, but often the past may be directly relevant in explaining the present. A difficulty has been that many of the societies which social anthropologists have studied have no histories, in the sense of documented and verifiable accounts of the past or at least they had none before the often very recent impact of western culture. In such societies, the past sometimes is thought of as differing from the present only in respect of the individuals who occupy the different statuses which are institutionalised in the society.

But history may be important to social anthropologists in another sense, that is, not only as an account of past events leading up to and explaining the present, but also as the body of contemporary ideas which people have about these events what an English Philosopher Collingwood aptly called “encapsulated history” people’s ideas about the past are an intrinsic part of the contemporary situation which is the anthropologists immediate concern and often they have important implications for existing social relationships. Also, different groups of people involved in the same social situation may have very different ideas about the ‘same’ series of historical events. Myths and traditional histories may sometimes give important clues about the past events. History is part of the conscious tradition of a people and is operative in their social life. It is the collective representation of events as distinct from events themselves. Evans-Pritchard in his work *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, (1950) had stated that the functionalist anthropologists regard history in this sense, usually a mixture of fact and fancy, as highly relevant to a study of the culture of which it forms part. Neglect of the history of institutions prevents the functionalist anthropologist not only from studying diachronic problems but also from testing the very functional constructions to which he attaches most importance, for it is precisely history which provides him with an experimental situation.

It is true that some of the early anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown denied that history had any relevance for anthropology, mainly because they thought history dealt with unique events, and that a scientific study of the past was not possible. But,

Evans–Pritchard (1968) argued that anthropology was not a generalising discipline, but instead a branch of history. Much earlier Boas (1897), the founder of American anthropology, had included historical inquiry as a central feature of anthropological investigation.

Both social anthropologists and historians attempt to represent unfamiliar social situations in terms not just of their own cultural categories, but, as far as possible, in terms of the categories of the actions themselves. The main difference between social anthropology and history lies not much in their subject matter (though generally this does differ), as in the degree of generality with which they deal with it. Once again it is very much a question of emphasis. Historians are interested in the history of particular institutions in particular places. Although in a very general sense it is true that historians are concerned with what is individual and unique, social anthropologists, like sociologists, are concerned with what is general and typical, and this dichotomy is altogether too simple. As so often in the social sciences, the difference is largely one of emphasis (Ahmad, 1986)

Barrett, (2009) rightly summarises that today, most anthropologists would probably agree that a historical perspective enriches one's ethnography. Unlike historians, however, anthropologists include history not so much in order to document and explain what happened in the past, but rather to help to understand the present. There also appears to be a difference in styles of research. Whereas historians often seem reluctant to draw even modest generalisations from their data, anthropologists are much less cautious and there is more pressure than in history to tie one's ethnography to general theoretical orientations.

3.2.4 Social Anthropology and Economics

As we know economics focuses on a particular institution, and is concerned about the production, consumption, and distribution of economic goods, and with economic development, prices, trade, and finance. In anthropology there is an area of specialisation called economic anthropology. It is a precious fact that an institutionalised kind of economics first appears in anthropology in direct relation to the field research among exotic societies. Anthropology has a substantial overlap with economics, considered as the production and distribution of goods. While not all societies have a fully developed monetary economy, all societies do have scarce goods and some means of exchange.

Social anthropologists are interested in exploring the range of production and distribution systems in human societies and in understanding the particular system in the society being studied at a given time. Most social anthropologists are not scientifically interested in the operation of the economy of one's own society; the typical non-anthropological economist, on the other, hand is extremely interested in the operation of one's own economy. He will not ordinarily show much interest in the operation of greatly different economic systems. Social anthropology under the name of "formalist" vs "substantivist" interpretations of the primitive economics, bring with these terms the following option between the ready-made models of western economic science, especially the micro-economics taken as universally valid and therefore applicable to the primitive societies and the necessity – supposing the formalist position unfounded – of developing a new analysis more appropriate to the historical societies in question and to the intellectual history of anthropology.

3.2.5 Social Anthropology and Political Science

The foundation of anthropology was evolutionism, biology, and the great social theorists such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, whereas the foundation of political science was classical philosophy. While social anthropology deals with all the sub-systems of society, political science focuses on the political system and power. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that anthropology is not concerned with power. Edmund Leach (1965), a prominent British social anthropologist, has argued that power is the most fundamental aspect of all social life, and therefore central to the anthropological endeavour, and in fact there is an area of specialisation in anthropology called political anthropology.

Social anthropologists do look at something politically. There is a range of anthropological behaviours depending on the sophistication of the society being studied and the goals and theoretical awareness of the investigator. The overlap of political and other activities is greater in simpler societies than in more complex societies. To put it in a slightly different manner, there is less functional specificity of different cultural aspects. Or, in simpler societies activities that social anthropologists regard as clearly and predominantly political are usually embedded in other kinds of activities.

Political activity is an aspect of all human social action and “interest articulation” is a universal function of all systems. Social anthropologists represents a highly diverse set of policies for whom political theory should be applicable if such ideas lay claim to universality. For a political scientist the presence of anthropological literature is not only a stimulus to theory testing but forms a basis for understanding local political situations as well. The theoretical contribution that anthropology is making to political science, related to functionalism, is the evolutionary point of view. Cohen, (1967) stated that explicitly or implicitly, social anthropologists have almost always ordered the societies they study into an evolutionary framework. Research on the local areas and institutions of the new nation brings the political scientist and the social anthropologist into the same area treating with the same populations and many of the same behaviours. In many parts of the non-western world, local political systems are heavily dependent on forms of socio-political structures that are still strongly influenced by their traditional cultures. Social anthropology can aid political science in the analysis of ethnicity and in preparing researchers for the use of participant observation techniques in the field. Social anthropology on its side has a great deal to gain from political science, in terms of theory and more precise behavioural methods, which at this point of its development the discipline needs (R. Cohen, 1967).

3.2.6 Social Anthropology and Social Work

According to Keith Hart (1996 : 42) the only thing which can truly distinguish anthropology from the rest of the social sciences is that it addresses human nature plus culture plus society. The knowledge about society and culture is very important to the social worker. Social anthropology is the systematic study of social relationships at levels ranging from individual interaction to global political and economic relations. It also examines the cultural, historical, physical, and linguistic behaviour of people from all parts of the globe both in the past and present. Social workers help people in a number of ways including: dealing with their relationships with others; solving their personal, family, and community problems; and growing by learning to cope with or shape the social and environmental forces affecting their daily lives. Social workers practice their professions in specific social and cultural contexts which will definitely influence their mode of practice (Payne, 1997). They have to take into consideration the values, norms, beliefs, ideologies of the society before they create programs of action to ameliorate social problems and resolve conflicts.

Equally important is the necessity of the social worker to understand himself or herself. Social workers are themselves products of the societies that they live in and are inevitably influenced by it. Knowledge about society and culture is also needed to help the social worker gain self-awareness about himself or herself. The personality of the social worker is a major tool used in practice and culture plays a major role in the development of the personality.

Society and culture are basic concepts used by social anthropologists to understand the social reality around us. In social anthropology, we usually study the various comparative components of social system, their structure, their organisation, function, etc. The social systems are the interdependent activities, institutions, and values by which people live and it is the job of social anthropologists to identify these components of social systems. In social anthropology, various theories and concepts have been developed to understand the meanings of social structure, the social organisation and the social function.

Social anthropology and social work differ in many aspects. In social anthropology the approach to society is theoretical and theory building is its major concern. Social work on the other hand has to be practical and deal with problems. On the other hand, anthropologists find social worker's work to be fragmented and oriented only towards the problem at hand. Another important distinction between social work and social anthropology is that the latter made claims to be a value free discipline. Being objective and free from bias was considered a virtue. Social work on the other hand is a value based profession based on humanitarian principles (Johnson, 1998 : 14).

By going through the above discussion it is very much clear that social work often borrows from different disciplines from the wider society. Thus we may conclude by saying that unlike social anthropology, social work knowledge comes from a wider range of sources which includes precedent, experience and common sense.

3.2.7 Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies

Twenty first century world is moving towards a homogenous culture. Social scientists define Cultural studies as a combination of sociology, literary theory, film/video studies, and cultural anthropology to study various cultural phenomena in industrial societies. Researchers from Cultural studies basically concentrate on how a particular phenomenon is linked to matters of ideology, race, social class, and/or gender. Basically, Cultural studies deals with the meaning and practices of everyday life. Cultural practices comprise of the ways in which people do particular things in his/her own culture. In every culture specific meanings is attached to the ways people do things. Thus, cultural studies enable us to meaningfully engage and interact with the new modes of being and doing. It makes us conscious about the many complex ways in which power impinges on our lives and constructs our cultures. Cultural studies have the potential of empowering the society to critically read the media and other cultural institutions and texts. It also helps us to understand how they shape our identities and to think about how we could possibly shape them.

Thus, Cultural studies can be viewed as a historical, humanistic discipline, as well as a natural science, depending upon the method or approach which it is utilised in studying cultural phenomena. The traditional tendency to understand 'culture' as a naturalised concept is still quite dominant not only among the common folk in general but also among those engaged in the academic arena of culture. Such an understanding of culture also has its consequent reflection in the various forms of cultural activism

covering documentation, preservation, and conservation of culture. Thus, leading to the systematic classification of various cultural items like music, dance, literature, and language etc. and also assembling them in a hierarchy. Recent cultural theories have shown that classification of cultural objects is not exactly irrelevant, arranging them in a hierarchy like 'high' and 'low', 'great' and 'little' is definitely not desired because it is based on the celebration of the 'high' and 'elite' culture at the cost of the 'low' or 'folk' culture. However, at present, such terms like 'high' and 'low' are no longer used in cultural theories, because all cultures are considered as equal. According to social anthropological knowledge every culture has its own set of perspectives.

3.2.8 Social Anthropology and Literature

The scholars and academician very often question the validity of a strict disciplinary boundary between social anthropology and literature, at a time when schools and colleges are hiring faculties and establishing courses that speak to two or more disciplines. Literature may be used in the preparing of ethnography by social anthropologists, for example life histories of generations may be used as an important source of data. Collection of tradition narratives may add values to the ethnography of people. In studying the approaches to ritual and performance, Victor Turner uses poetry of contemporary as well as renaissance plays.

In the current attempts to redefine literature as social 'artifact' or social 'discourse', and to situate literary studies within cultural criticism, an indispensable role has been played by those who take society and culture as their primary subjects – sociologists and anthropologists (Ashley, 1990). Today, social anthropologists have come up with new ways to represent context and experience in the study of culture. Ethnography as text, narrative, allegory, and "true fiction" is the new approach.

Social anthropologists also use oral literature to study the unwritten forms which can be regarded as in some way possessing literary qualities. This avenue covers oral forms like myths, narratives, epics, lyrics, praise poetry, laments, and the verbal texts of songs; and also sometimes riddles proverbs and perhaps oratory and drama. This is an area in which both scholars from the field of literature, linguistic studies and folklorists have been interacting with social anthropologists for long.

Thus social anthropology and literature study with the purpose to integrate the literature experience into anthropology and to cultivate themselves as universal citizens. The intention to break the boundaries between literary study and other field of study and integrate literary study into cultural study is an evident important trend in the later 20th century. Clifford Geertz's role in the development of interpretive anthropology can hardly be overestimated. He remains one of the most productive and well-known social anthropologists. Yet today, within interpretive anthropology itself, critics of Geertz are increasing and his influence is waning. What is "thick description"? What are its main characteristics? How is it done? How do we come to know "the native's point of view", that is, how members of another culture think, feel and perceive? What is the relationship between "thick description" and anthropological theory? etc. are some of the rising questions.

Thus it shows similarity to interpretive anthropology which is mainly concerned with acquiring the native's point of view. It takes care of some of the pertinent questions like - How are we to approach and read native history and literature? Can we use such native expressions as data, as cultural artifacts? What modifications might the ethnographer have to make in doing so? These are some of the questions which would involve literature to answer them.

3.2.9 Social Anthropology and Public Health

Public health is “the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts and informed choices of society, organisations, public and private, communities and individuals (Winslow, C.E.A.1920).The relationship between anthropology, medicine and medical practice is well documented. General anthropology occupied a notable position in the basic medical sciences (which correspond to those subjects commonly known as pre-clinical). However, medical education started to be restricted to the confines of the hospital as a consequence of the development of the clinical gaze and the confinement of patients in observational infirmaries (Foucault, 1963). Most, not all because ethnography remained during a large part of the twentieth century as a tool of knowledge in primary health care, rural medicine, and in International public health. The abandonment of ethnography by medicine happened when social anthropology adopted ethnography as one of the markers of its professional identity and started to depart from the initial project of general anthropology.

The concept of *popular medicine*, or *folk medicine*, has been well known to both doctors and anthropologists since the beginning of the twentieth century. Doctors, anthropologists and medical anthropologists used these terms to describe the resources, other than the help of health professionals, which European or Latin American peasants used to resolve any health problems. The term was also used to describe the health practices of aborigines in different parts of the world, with particular emphasis on their local knowledge. Moreover, studying the rituals surrounding popular therapies served to challenge Western psychopathological categories, as well as the relationship between science and religion. Doctors were not trying to turn popular medicine into an anthropological concept; rather they wanted to construct a scientifically based medical concept which they could use to establish the cultural limits of biomedicine (Comelles, 2002).

Professional anthropologists started using the concept of folk medicine in the early twentieth century. They used this concept to differentiate between *magical practices*, *medicine* and *religion*. In addition, they also applied this concept to explore the role and the significance of *popular healers* and their self-medicating practices. The professional anthropologists looked at popular medicine as specific cultural practice of some social groups which were distinct from the universal practices of biomedicine. Thus, it may be assumed that every culture has its own specific popular medicine based on its general cultural features.

Under this concept, medical systems are seen as the specific product of each ethnic group’s cultural history. Scientific biomedicine is regarded as another medical system and therefore a cultural form is studied as such.

Reflection

The proposition of studying cultural form as it is originated in the ‘cultural relativism’ in cultural anthropology and allows the debate with medicine and psychiatry to revolve around some fundamental questions like- (i)What is the relative influence of genotypical and phenotypical factors on personality and what are the forms of pathology; especially psychiatric and psychosomatic pathologies?(ii) What is the influence of culture on what a society considers to be normal, pathological or abnormal?(iii)Verifies in different cultures the universality about the non sociological categories of biomedicine and psychiatry.(iv)How to identify and describe the diseases belonging to specific cultures which have not been previously described by clinical medicine? Such culture specific diseases are known as ethnic disorders and, more recently been termed as culture bound syndromes, that include the evil eye and tarantism, being possessed or in a state of trance in many cultures, and nervous anorexia, nerves and premenstrual syndrome across societies.

The medical anthropologists of twentieth century have a much more sophisticated understanding of the problem of cultural representations and social practices related to health, disease, medical care and attention.

source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/medical_anthropology#popular_medicine_and_medical_system.

The imperative of social anthropological perspectives, methods, information, and collaboration in the understanding and practice of public health is widely reckoned in the twenty first century. Social anthropologists develop and implement interventions to address particular public health problems, often working in collaboration with local participants. Their primary task is to work as evaluators, examining the activities of public health institutions and the successes and failures of public health programs. Their job is also to focus on major international public health agencies and their workings, as well as public health responses to the threats of infectious disease and other disasters. Thus the role of social anthropologists in public health is to examine the health related problems with a social anthropological perspective like (i) socio anthropological understanding of public health problems (ii) socio anthropological design of public health interventions (iii) socio anthropological evaluations of public health initiatives (iv) socio anthropological critiques of public health policies and health care reforms. Thus, the role of social anthropology is to bridge the difference in culture and society in the practice of public health (Mahn and Inhorn, 2011).

3.2.10 Social Anthropology and Policy and Governance

As we enter the twenty first century, the terrain on which social policy is made is changing rapidly. This has resulted in anthropologists, in combination with other social scientists, giving serious attention to the impact of this new phase of globalisation on changes in social and environmental policies. Social anthropology as a sub field has contributed, and continues to contribute, to social policy research, practice, and advocacy in a number of different ways; it has taken on increasing relevance as the world is rapidly being transformed by the process of globalisation (Okongwu and Mencher, 2000). Social anthropologists studying globalisation, the state, politics, development, and elites, among other topics, are discovering the centrality of policy to their research, and a body of work in the anthropology of policy is developing. Although some social anthropologists who study policy became involved in public debates or advocacy, and several movements in anthropology encourage activism, the anthropology of public policy is devoted to research into policy issues and processes and the critical analysis of those processes. Though anthropologists have generally had less influence than economists on public policy, there are a number of ways in which we have made our opinions known, such as by (a) documenting the conditions of the people we study, or other poor or disenfranchised people, and acting as their advocates-including serving as expert witnesses for the homeless (b) analysing, writing, and making public the effects of government policies and suggesting alternative policies (c) working with-or against-elected officials; (d) attempting to influence members of aid agencies in their varied roles and/or working from within these agencies to pinpoint critical issues (e) working with migrant populations, both forced and voluntary in terms of both policies to deal with migrants and studies of cultural capital and its intersection with both formal and informal labour markets in the north and south and (f) studying strategies of resistance and how the work of anthropologists can inform and help indigenous people (Wedel, et al. 2005).

There has long been a theoretical and individual divide between anthropologists focusing on pure research and those focusing on the problems faced by humans, including the growth of inequality. In a fast changing world, anthropologists' empirical

and ethnographic methods depicts how policies actively create new categories of individuals to be governed. Wedel, (2005) suggest that the long-established frameworks of “state” and “private”, “local” or “national” and “global,” “macro” and “micro,” “top down” and “bottom up,” and “centralised” and “decentralised” not only fail to capture current dynamics in the world but actually obfuscate the understanding of many policy processes.

Although some social anthropologists worked in earlier periods on policy-related projects in agriculture, the numbers of anthropologists in applied and policy work on the environment and in the field of agriculture have significantly increased as the multinational corporations have gained in power over governments. Anthropologists have been interested in such issues as the scale of farming, water use, use of petrochemicals and other inputs, increase in mono cropping (with all of its attendant potential for future famines), and quality- of-life issues. Others have been involved with issues related to the loss of biodiversity, and especially among ethno botanists working with centers for international agricultural research to help traditional societies preserve their native species. Most of the anthropologists working on agricultural and related issues have “in one way or another [been] critical of the dominant institutions and trends in food systems (Okongwu and Mencher, 2000), especially those [moving more and more] toward globalisation. Many others present alternative approaches, often stressing the importance of strengthening local food systems as a way of trying to provide not only buffers, but new organisational and institutional models for more sustainable and just food systems”. Giddens (1990, 1995) has noted that social anthropology must be ready to contest unjust systems of domination, seeking to decide along the way what injustice actually is, and to bring potential controversial issues to light.

Social anthropologists have traditionally had the reputation of working at the grassroot level and getting to know people and their problems and issues well. We also need to serve as conduits for solutions. One of the greatest strengths of social anthropologists is their ability to view systems holistically-in this case to deal not only with the theoretical issues of political economy, but also to work to influence policymakers to pay attention to the social, structural, and economic consequences of globalised agriculture on both farmers and consumers, on communities, and, taking the environment into account, on the very nature of life on this planet (ibid).

Surely there are many roles for social anthropologists in documenting protests, as well as in getting onto policy-making boards and into circles where large agency policy is formulated. The crisis situations created by capitalism today require a real reinventing of anthropology, with social anthropologists not only studying alternative policies but also working as advocates and with the people they have studied to put pressures on governments, international agencies, and multinational corporations to get them to change. These are issues that are extremely well suited for the involvement of social anthropology during the twenty first century. It is expected that social anthropologists, based on their in-depth knowledge and their ability to learn how to use the language of influence effectively, need to make clear and short statements available to policymakers. If social anthropologists fail to influence the policy, then others with far less understanding and insight will do so to the detriment of humanity (Okongwu and Mencher, 2000).

3.2.11 Social Anthropology and Management

Over the last century, social anthropologists have created a discipline to make sense out of human behaviour through the culture concept, a holistic analytical approach, and empirical research. Although social anthropological concepts have been defined

largely in academia, the discipline has always had ‘applied’ practitioners working in areas like health care, education, business and industry. These practitioners have demonstrated time and again that an anthropological perspective has a great deal to offer the wider world. At first glance, the two professions – anthropology and management may appear highly dissimilar. But a closer look reveals many points of common interest. For example, like social anthropologists, management practitioners attempt to make sense out of human behaviour as they address the ‘people’ dimensions of doing business. Hence, there is an opportunity for a valuable exchange between social anthropologists and management practitioners. To some extent this is already taking place. Social anthropologists are working as consultants and many consultants are using an anthropological perspective perhaps without knowing it (NAPA Bulletin, 1990).

The almost exponential rate of change in the contemporary business world challenges business leaders in many ways. The survival of a business depends on management’s ability to adjust to change. Social anthropology can help consultants and their clients respond successfully to five major trends that will shape the way we all live and work in the future (Giovannini & Rosansky, 1998). They are in the areas of –

- 1) Increasing Globalisation
- 2) Demographic Trends
- 3) Social Issues
- 4) Technological Innovation
- 5) Organisational Change

Social anthropology as a field science has great potential for informing multi-disciplinary research in management both conceptually and methodologically. Anthropology’s main distinguishing method is participant observation which involves the anthropologist spending a prolonged period, doing fieldwork in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the organisation under study. By virtue of its eclecticism and experience of facilitating understanding of the processes of change across institutions and other social phenomena, anthropology can make a significant contribution to the implementation of knowledge management. Objective of social anthropology is to take accurate description of context and precise understanding of how those contexts are interpreted and experienced by participants. Ethnographic immersion is the methodology adopted. This enables the capture of elusive, ambiguous and tacit aspects of research settings, and also allows grounded theory to be generated from ‘thick’ or ‘rich’ data. Social anthropology, having taken into account recent developments in postmodern and critical thought, can contribute to the study, practice, and teaching of management in three categories.

Reflection

Linstead (1997) states that the focuses are on the following aspects; (a). *culture*, new theoretical lines of enquiry can be developed that reassess the significance of shared meaning and conflicting interests in specific settings; the concept of the symbolic in management can be critically elaborated; and modes of representation of management can be opened up to self-reflexivity; (b). *critique*, ethnography can be used to defamiliarise the taken-for-granted circumstances and reveal suppressed and alternative possibilities; new or unheard voices and forms of information can be resuscitated and used to sensitise managerial processes; and cognitive, affective, epistemological, ideological and ethical considerations can be linked in the same framework; (c). *change*, anthropological ideas and concepts can shape and reflect change processes and resolve unproductive dilemmas; and managerial learning can be enhanced by promoting the ethnographic consciousness as a way of investigating and understanding, an attitude of openness. Thus, we can say that social anthropology can state an example of the application of the approach in a management development programme, where teaching and research would progress in harness.

3.3 SUMMARY

Social anthropology is, thus, able to relate to almost all the disciplines in its quest for an understanding of human behaviour, and draws upon all of them to interpret the way in which all biological and social factors enter to depict man's culture and behaviour in totality.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Which disciplines are considered cognate disciplines of Social anthropology?
- 2) What is the contribution of Social anthropology in Sociology and Psychology?
- 3) Can the Historians study the particular sequences of past events and their conditions without incorporating social anthropological approach?
- 4) How are the disciplines of Cultural Studies and Literature related to Social anthropology?
- 5) What are the diverse roles of Social anthropologists in solving various problems of the traditional as well as contemporary society?

