

Lecture 07: Anthropology

1. Etymology

Anthropology is from the New Latin word anthropologia (“the study of humanity”) and shares its ultimate root in Greek, anthrōpos meaning "human", and "logia", meaning "study".

2. Definition

Anthropology is the study of people and cultures in the past and today. How did people live a few decades ago, or thousands of years ago? And how have societies and cultures changed over time?

3. Branches of Anthropology

Anthropologists study people from every angle. Some look at different people's customs, like how they eat, celebrate, or worship. Some study their history and the languages they speak. And others study the genetic differences within the human species.

Anthropology has four main branches:

- **Cultural anthropology:** is the study of how people live — in the present and the recent past.
- **Linguistic anthropology:** is the study of language within the context of anthropology.
- **Archaeology:** is the study of past people through the things they left behind.
- **Biological anthropology:** is the study of how humans have evolved and differences within the species.

3.1 Cultural Anthropology: Studying Cultures Today, Yesterday, and Long Ago

Cultural anthropologists study present cultures. Some also study cultures in the recent past using what people remember and have recorded.

What we call "culture" is everything that makes up the way a group of people live. It includes their beliefs, values, and traditions.

Culture is usually passed down from one generation to the next. For example, how does your family celebrate holidays? Maybe there's a special food or prayer that's been passed down by your grandparents and great-grandparents. Or your family might have a holiday game you play every year. Culture is also always changing. For example, can you think of a new holiday food or custom in your family?

It would be a huge job to study everything about one culture. So an anthropologist usually focuses on just one part of a culture. For example, how do people in a Malaysian village celebrate the birth of a baby?

Getting an Inside View

Cultural anthropologists try to see things through the eyes of the people they're studying. To get a real insider's view, they do fieldwork. They go to the places where people live. But before they go, cultural anthropologists spend years preparing. They want to understand what it would be like to be part of the culture. They read all about the history and customs of the people. They also learn to speak their language.

When they get there, anthropologists usually spend more than a year with the people they study. And they might go back many times over several decades. They live with the people. They observe what people do and how they live and ask lots of questions. They take photos, films, and audio recordings. Along the way, they record their observations and interviews in field journals and computers.

Fieldwork is only part of their job. After the trip, they analyze what they learned and write about it to share with others.

3.2 Linguistic Anthropology: Learning About People Through Their Language

Languages can tell us about the people who speak them. For example, children in Japan and Korea speak one way to their friends, but a different way to people who are older like a parent or teacher. They don't just use polite words. They speak in longer and different sentences. This way of speaking shows the importance of manners and respect for elders in Japanese and Korean society.

In the study of language, scientists look at present and past languages. They document the history of spoken and written language. Some study how languages began when early humans started to speak. Others study how different languages developed over time. They look for links between languages in different societies and also make connections between language and the brain. Anthropologists are among many who study language, since language has much to tell us about ourselves.

3.3 Archaeology: Digging Up Clues About People of the Past

Archaeologists use the things people left behind to help us understand how they lived long ago. Archaeologists find and study objects like broken pottery, graves, and ancient homes and other ruins. These objects can provide clues about how people lived, such as what they ate and how they worshipped.

Over time, most objects from the past decay or get buried. At dig sites, archaeologists carefully excavate and record artifacts that they find and the way the artifacts are arranged. Archaeologists use this information to create a picture of what life was like long ago. Sometimes they have to piece together this picture without any written records at all.

3.4 Biological Anthropology: Humans Change Over Time

Biological anthropologists study how humans and their ancestors have evolved — or changed over time. They also study how humans behave and interact with their environment. They ask questions like: How did early humans hunt and search for food? When did humans first settle in the Americas?

To find out, some biological anthropologists examine fossil remains of humans that lived tens or hundreds of thousands or millions of years ago.

Biological anthropologists are also interested in variations within our species, like our body types, facial features, and skin colors. As humans spread across every continent over thousands of years, minor differences developed between people living in different places.

Sometimes, biological anthropologists are called in to help the police solve crimes. They examine a victim's remains to look for clues about the person's identity and how he or she lived and died.

4. Exploring Cultures

Museums are a great place to learn about people from different places and times. Anthropologists work with exhibition teams to create the exhibits. They use artifacts and fossil evidence to show how people lived. They also include photos, films, and sound recordings from their fieldwork.

Most artifacts are displayed in context — like in a scene or with related objects. This helps show how the artifacts were used and why they were important. Exhibits also reflect how anthropologists view the culture at the time the exhibits were made.

Artifacts on display are carefully selected from a museum's collections. The American Museum of Natural History has collected over 500,000 objects from around the world. Only a

few hundred may be on display, but they are all available for anthropologists and others around the world to use in their research.

5. Importance of Studying Anthropology

1. Economic Benefits

We live in a world where global marketing has become quite common. If you want to expand your firm to the global sectors, you not only need to learn a foreign language but understand the country's culture. The existence of anthropology is quite crucial for companies. With the help of cultural anthropology, business manager residing in the United Arab Emirates can learn the history and culture of the United States. When you learn about the culture, tradition, rituals, and lifestyle of people living in America; there is a high chance that you will settle the business deal easily.

2. Cross-disciplinary Subject

You might have heard of several disciplines that talk about different features of humanity. For example, history helps you to learn the ancient era and historical deals; biology teaches you the makeup of the human body; literature features the writings of different people. When you choose anthropology as the main subject, you get to learn all these concepts in one course. Whether you are curious about the cultural environment in countries or the biological system of humans; anthropology has everything you are curious about.

3. Curiosity

Have you ever wondered how our ancestors survived on earth? How did they adapt to the environment? What ailments did the people suffer in the past? How genetics make the human body?

Curiosity is part of human life. It answers all the questions related to humanity. No matter what you are curious about, this course is the perfect solution to find the answers to your long-pending questions.

4. Cultural Connections

We live in a world where people follow different cultures and practices. Even if you live in the same society, you follow different rituals. For example, people belonging to a specific culture prefer to eat the meat of the animals that are regarded as holy animals in other cultures. From worshipping practices to the regular lifestyle; there is a vast difference between humans when it comes to culture.

Anthropology helps you to learn about different cultures and understand what all rituals do the people of a particular culture follow. It also helps you to find the similarities and differences between the two cultures.

Understanding different cultures, linguistic skills, the biological formation of our bodies, and the history of humans are some of the important concepts you get to learn in Anthropology.