
UNIT 1 EVOLUTION OF PRACTICING ANTHROPOLOGY

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Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, you will be able to know:

- how anthropology has an applied or practicing aspect to it;
- how applied anthropology developed and passed through different stages; and
- that finally practicing anthropology and applied anthropology are two sides of the same coin.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose for a compulsory course on practicing anthropology arose so as to acquaint and guide you about the many vocations that anthropologists can take in the modern world. You will be glad to know that after formal training in anthropology, a person can apply anthropological knowledge in different arenas. This is not something new and it started many years ago with what we call applied anthropology. The many processes it went through, brought out a part in it, what we today call practicing anthropology. However one should not forget the fact, that both stemmed out from the same objective, i.e., to pragmatically use anthropology for society.

In this lesson, we will specifically talk about how applied anthropology came into being, what routes it followed after its inception and how it branched out as practicing anthropology (See **Box 1**), while retaining its main focus. As part of the course we plan to provide a detailed, in depth and critical evaluation of the pragmatic applications of anthropology. It would hopefully assist you in future, when you would want to associate yourself with government, non-government organisations or as individual consultants and provide valuable inputs by practicing as anthropologists in pragmatic arenas. With this as the core idea, this lesson will be of help to you as you will, before learning about the involvement of anthropology as a practice in diverse fields in the next blocks, equip yourself with knowledge of its growth and progress.

Box 1

Practicing anthropology is the use of ideas, values, theories, skills, etc. for practical purposes in real life. This involves the use of anthropological perspectives in government, policy making, creation of new laws, corporate world, education, economic development, different forms of communication, areas of health, environment, hazards, disasters, media, new media, sports, indigenous knowledge and much more.

1.2 HISTORY

1.2.1 Proto-Anthropology and Use of Applied Knowledge

The practice of using anthropological skills for useful purposes sprouted from conducive studies conducted in the United States of America and other countries during the World Wars. These fieldworks were done to understand human behaviour and provide solutions to concerns and afflictions which existed in human societies. However it was as early as the late nineteenth century that anthropology may be said to be used for pragmatic causes. It can be noted that the founder of the Anthropological Society of London, James Hunt, used the phrase, “practical anthropology” in the 1860s to express the pragmatic use of anthropological skills. But before all these took shape, we can still go back to even older stages where events depict to prove that anthropology is fundamentally a science concerned with practice and application. Herodotus (485- 325 BC), a philosopher, who has influenced the beginnings of anthropology as a discipline, is undoubtedly one of the original documenters of “cross-cultural description”. He and his contemporaries, believed in providing information having practical intention, through their writings. Much later, in a completely different period, the same methodology of gathering information about a population was used to facilitate proper administration of an area. The appointment of Francis Buchanan in 1807 to the East India Company is a good example (Sachchidananda, 1972). His task was to learn and document material on the ways of life in Bengal, India. During the period of the British regime, such methods of studying the natives became quite popular as it professed to use the knowledge for the betterment of the local inhabitants. Establishments [like Aborigines Protection Society (1838)] were started in London which through investigation of native culture offered them social service (Keith 1917; Reining 1962).

Initial ethnological work like that of Father Joseph Lafitau who documented the life of people (Mohawks) residing in New France in North America, led to a rich collection of custom and rituals (Fenton and Moore 1974). In terms of policy research, an early example may be that of Henry R. Schoolcraft who was assigned by the United States government to collect data on the history, condition and prospects of the Indian Tribes in the U.S. The material is a report from 1852 to 1857 based on which the United States government made policies for the Indians. Though professionally Schoolcraft was an administrator, with the development of anthropology as a discipline, he came to be known as an ethnologist as well. In fact he is one of the initiators of the American Ethnological Society. William Duncan, another missionary, worked significantly towards social reform of the Indian tribes. One such program was to provide training to colonial officers by giving them ethnological knowledge of the Indians for better administration (Barnet 1969 [1942]). European countries like Great Britain and Netherlands too offered such programmes in 1806 and 1819 respectively.

In this proto-anthropology stage of application, though we have learned about the above examples, as anthropologists of today, there is little we can gain in terms of methodology of real research. Their documentation was inadequate and includes nothing to be taken as a base on how applied studies are to be conducted. The only part which cannot be denied is its applied aspect thus proving that anthropology has its beginnings in application and practice.

1.2.2 Applied Ethnology to Applied Anthropology (1860-1945)

Applied anthropology in its formative years as a distinct discipline started with anthropologists as research experts offering their knowledge of findings to government or private funded administrative initiatives. This was done for the establishment of administration of power in colonies. But the same design of working was used later for development programmes. Anthropologists provided information to the government in policy making and solving of issues. Therefore it is not surprising that it was the British, during their colonial regime, who formally employed anthropologists for practical purposes (Forster 1969). At the same time it was the anthropologists who also realised that in the absence of funds, they can approach the administration/ government for money. In this way they were able to conduct their research in the field and also provide the rulers with the data they needed (Kuper 1983). However in the process of training administrators in anthropological and ethnographical know how, the department of anthropology at Oxford University was started. It was only in 1908, under the rule of the British, that anthropologists were financially supported for proper academic research. This research was done under Northcote Thomas in Nigeria, and was called a government anthropologist (ibid). Even anthropologists like A.R. Radcliffe Brown and Branislow Malinowski, in the 1920s and 1930s gathered monetary donations from the government with a view to advertise how pragmatic anthropological and ethnographical representation of colonies studied can tackle issues that the colonisers encountered. But Kuper (1983) is of the view that this was a garb really and the main intention of the anthropologists was to assure themselves a good research funding. Nevertheless it worked on both fronts.

As far as the United States of America was concerned, it was only in 1934 that anthropologists got involved in actual official administrative applied work with the Indian Reorganisation Act of the New Deal and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Anthropologists at that time offered their service on how the government should work on reservations for the Indians and also gave suggestions on the creation of tribal charters and constitutions (Foster 1969). John Collier, the then commissioner of the BIA, can be said to be the man behind involving the anthropologists' proficiencies in the public sector. In the 1920s when the government got interested in projects related to the public, applied work in archaeology began (Fiske and Chambers 1997). So from the above deliberations, we can clearly state that applied anthropology acts as the basis for the growth of the discipline's set up. The term applied anthropology was used for the first time as an explanation of an agenda in Oxford University. During this period the approach used by the anthropologists was "value-free". This can also be seen as the application of the first professional code of ethics in anthropology (Mead, Chapple and Brown, 1949).

Before World War II the debate that anthropologists put forward was that they could not put themselves in any role other than acting as consultants for administration. It meant compromising with the “value free” stance that they advocated.

Colonial service training like the kind introduced in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century by the British was also started in the then Union of South Africa in 1905 (Forde 1953), Anglo- Egyptian Sudan in 1908 (Myres 1928), Belgian territories in 1920 (Nicaise 1960) and Australian- mandated New Guinea in 1925. The British employed anthropologists as consultants and they were found in the military, foreign office, colonial office and India office, thus increasing interest in ethnological learning. So we find considerable growth of applied anthropology in the applied ethnology period. The literature too which were published during this time were the result of applied research. We can cite ethnographies written by British anthropologists on Africa and the Pacific and American anthropologists on North and South America.

United States: In the United States, applied anthropologists employed in abundance with the setting in of the Great Depression and the New Deal as the need for data by the government increased manifold. But anthropological employment reached a boom with the coming of the World War II. During all these periods, anthropologists became involved in many problem spheres and political backgrounds. In the process, other than focusing on the collection of general ethnography, they also concentrated on research on nutrition, education, migration, culture contact, etc. and many more areas. This occurred both in the United States and in Britain.

Many applied research organisations came into existence in the United States in the 1930s. To name a few, anthropologists were associated with the Applied Anthropology Unit (which researched the American Indians settlement patterns, education policy, economic development etc), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (which researched issues related to economic and resource development), the Department of Agriculture’s Rural Life Studies (which involved the classic study of political economy of agribusiness in California by Walter Goldschmidt), etc.

In the early 1940s, action research methodology was employed by an anthropologist named Laura Thompson. She used it to bring about changes in Hopi administration. This method is still used in the study of development. During this period, in the United States, two research committees were created for policy research by the National Research Council. The Committee on Food Habits had anthropologists like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Rhoda Metrax and the Committee for National Morale had anthropologists like Gregory Bateson, Elliot Chapple, and Margaret Mead, etc.

These committees looked into the nutritional and psychological aspects of people along with anthropological perspectives. This involvement of anthropologists was accentuated by the Great Depression and World War II. The American Anthropological Association made a commitment to the country by passing a declaration which mentioned that the “specialized skill and knowledge of its members, was at the disposal of the country for the successful prosecution of the war” (American Anthropologist, 1943). Anthropologists were mostly involved as liaisons with the War Relocation Authority which looked after the internment

camps that were built to put in prison Japanese Americans. Other initiatives that American anthropologists of that time were involved in were the Far Eastern Civil Affairs Training School (created by the University of Chicago) to train officers assigned to areas recaptured from the Japanese; the Foreign Morale Analysis Division where anthropologists gave information about the Japanese to the Departments of War, State and the Navy. Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) came out from this initiative. The Institute of Social Anthropology of the Smithsonian Institute was started in 1943 which conducted both fundamental and applied research. Early work included research on health. This was done under the leadership of George M. Foster, a pioneer in the establishment of present day applied medical anthropology.

Applied anthropology blossomed during this time as many employment opportunities were made available by the federal government connected to the Great Depression and the war. Many publications (like handbooks related to the war) came out. The most noteworthy result of this growth of anthropologists was the creation of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA). This development has been mentioned by Spicer as, "one of the most important events in the development of anthropology in the twentieth century" (1976: 335)".

When SfAA started, it concentrated on basically bringing together anthropologists who had done considerable applied work where they propagated the use of anthropological theories pragmatically. They published the much popular journal *Applied Anthropology* which later came to be known as *Human Organization*. SfAA aimed at working towards creating professional identity for anthropologists. However if we look at the entire scenario of the roles anthropologists played, they did not extend beyond being a policy researcher or trainer. This meant that there was no significant change in terms of roles from the earlier applied stage.

Great Britain: In Britain, with the coming of the World War II and also substantial changes in the colonial policies, the environment of the 1930s and 1940s saw clear modifications. The British were being touted for not giving attention to the economic development of the colonies. To rectify the situation, they involved themselves in new affirmative administrative planning (Mills 2002). For this purpose funding poured in from The Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation which allowed anthropologists to study subjects in a better way.

Moreover with the introduction of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (CDWA) in the 1940s, proper funding was allocated by the government to conduct social science research in the colonies. An organisation by the name of Colonial Social Science Research (CSSRC) was established. Raymond Firth and Audrey Richards from the London School of Economics followed the progressive agenda of the CDWA and used scientific and pragmatic research ideas in their investigations (ibid). The members of CSSRC, with its support, as intellectual leaders sought to bring forth to the public social research problems in untouched parts of Africa and thus in the process created inter-disciplinary sciences concerned with issues of all kinds, be it social, economic or political. In the process of researching social problems associated with being a colony, anthropology altered such researches into creations with theoretical meaning. This increased its validity in academy, with the creation of new anthropology departments all over Britain (ibid). An association named Association for Social Anthropology (ASA) was founded in 1946 as part of this progress.

The British also employed native anthropologists in the Third World nations including India, who were trained to study their own nations and states in order to bring out an insider's perspective on effects of policies. This was before the Second World War. These applied anthropologists did pure research in the hope that it will change the course of their nations. They hoped to build a strong new modern nation-state. However their participation in policy creation and reformation or pragmatic research and involvement, did not help in the establishment of applied anthropology in academic institutions or other arenas. This was mainly because, even though the colonisers employed native researchers/anthropologists for local intervention, when it came to the possession of the realms of pure anthropology, it was in the hands of the British anthropologists.

However there were clashes between the intellectuals of LSE and those at Oxford, as the latter believed that funding of social academic research should not be controlled by a colonial body such as CSSRC but by academics themselves. These clashes did not find any solution and with the demise of the British colonies by 1961, funding stopped and alternate funding agencies came by in the 1970s.

1.2.3 Applied Anthropology to Practicing Anthropology (1945 – Present)

That anthropology as an applied and a theoretical science could not be one was emphasised by the European scholars. Instead of removing the label of being recognised as service providers of the colonisers and arguing for other scholarly and academic goals, they preferred to dispute the non-possibility of anthropology existing as an applied science. So when application of anthropology in Europe drew to closure with the colonies becoming independent near about the time when World War II ended, in the United States, application of anthropology expanded to international areas due to its association with different concerns during World War II. With the United States developing as a super power in all fields of economy, polity and military, anthropologists in America took this opportunity to provide applied anthropology with authentic institutional recognition. It is obvious from this that a separation between pure anthropology and applied anthropology too occurred in America, however it did not have the similar reasons as that seen in Europe.

The reasons for the split in America can be said to have occurred due to: 1) An increase in the need to learn “pure” anthropology which eventually led to the rise of theoretical anthropology; 2) Questions related to knowledge, meaning, moral, ethical and political concerns connected to application of anthropology; and 3) Development of organisations which allowed job opportunities for non-academic practitioners with anthropological skills, which also somewhat made a faint shift in the description of what applied anthropology meant in the United States. These new vistas did not allow pure and applied anthropology to solve contemporary problems of society together. Thus slowly a separation between what is called applied anthropology and practicing anthropology was emerging, with the practicing anthropologists working purely non-academically.

After the war anthropological knowledge was mostly used in government and private sectors. This shift was an important move towards practice from a purely academic field. The demand for applied anthropologists kept on increasing and led to the formation of many programmes providing new degrees and

organisations like Local Practitioners Organizations (LPOs), associations like the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) by the American Anthropological Association, groups like the Coalition of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA), journals like *Practicing Anthropology* and Napa's bulletin series, etc. (van Willigen 2002) came up. This also brought home the point that the creation of applied anthropologists for external work would need anthropologists from the academic field. Hence, during this time we find academics who also acted as applied anthropologists work both in academics and also outside. As applied anthropology got institutionalised, which clearly occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, the meaning of "applied" saw a slow transformation. Initially applied anthropology tried hard to keep a connect between theoretical and practical objectives, but this 'new applied anthropology' of the late 20th century was completely concentrated on utilising anthropological knowledge in the arena of policy making. The difference between theory and practice was however unlike what was seen in Great Britain. The distinctiveness was in the ability of the American anthropologists to sustain a separate identity and focus on contemporary concerns. This allowed the growth of applied anthropology in an extraordinary way in the United States in the later part of the 20th century.

With the end of the cold war, new structures of economy developed and boundaries were broken to create a new system in economy which is known as globalisation. In the process both humanitarian conflicts and varied intercultural meetings took place. Such a situation where people and states were being connected across the world gave anthropology a fascinating area to practice its skills. Globalisation led to the differences or distinctions between pure academic and non-academic practices to become distorted. Now research was oriented towards more present issues-related interdisciplinary investigations with the use of methodologies which were both collective and participatory. This new kind of research also concentrated working more on policy-making.

A term called 'institutional anthropologies' (Bennett 1996) came up in the last part of the 20th century. These though not strictly applied in form connected the discipline to other areas of study with professional dealings. For example, legal anthropology, medical anthropology, organisational anthropology, etc. focus on contemporary issues. However the institutional anthropologists do work in similar ways used by applied anthropologists and eventually influence the distortion between theory and pragmatics. When academically connected anthropologists started using participatory methodology, a huge change was observed in practice.

The first person to use such participatory method in order to work for the community was Paulo Freire from Brazil (Greenwood and Levin 1998, Wallerstein and Duran 2003). Through his work he wanted to create a new area to generate knowledge and in the process, break the myth that it was only academic organisations which had the power to produce knowledge and distribute it (Elden and Levin 1991, Taylor 1993). This method of participatory research was deemed as a novel tactic in anthropological investigation.

Practicing anthropology at the end of the day is all about bringing changes in people's lives through research, formulation of plans and policies and finally action. Anthropology as an applied science has been involved with framing of public policies for more than a hundred years now. Anthropology and more so

the arena of practicing anthropology is no more about just accumulating knowledge of cultures and have an understanding of them. It is now more a collection of knowledge and information to cater to concerns which require immediate attention. This accumulation of knowledge and finding solutions for communities and their transformation is to be seen as a global process as it involves serious issues of different societies and affects all. In this setting the students would learn skills that will allow them to use as methodologies and techniques in future when they opt for careers other than academics. This may include knowledge related to medicine, economy, education etc. where they can utilise their expertise to create policies and schemes for communities. Such situations will hopefully take away disputes related to “applied” versus “practice”. With practicing anthropological methodologies, the use and help of multidisciplinary subjects can also be seen to be of immense utility as concerns and issues can only be solved by collaborating with different levels of knowledge.

1.3 SUMMARY

To summarise, this unit is about how anthropology developed as an applied science and in this how it followed various paths to build itself as applied anthropology and later on as both applied and practicing anthropology, finally blurring the differences in ideology and technique by coming out of trivial beliefs of applied being part of academics and practicing being part of everyday pragmatic life and issues. Both today, compliment each other and exist as one with only the difference being in the use of nomenclature. This unit shows how applied anthropology was initially about collecting information about societies to know more about them and if possible to offer them assistance. Gradually it became a way to study societies to help administrators or colonisers manage their colonies conscientiously. This kind of collection of data, as time went by, led people with a background in anthropology being offered jobs, like for example, after the Great Depression and the World Wars to understand the situation of effected people and offer them assistance by governments concerned. In this entire process, debates and arguments started arising between academics and practitioners where, academics considered themselves to be superior in the dissemination of knowledge. However with changing scenarios and the need for tackling varied global concerns in present times has made the separation between applied and practice indistinct.

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the development of applied anthropology from the period 1860 to 1945.
- 2) What role did anthropology have to play during the World Wars? Did it help in the growth of the subject as an applied science?
- 3) Can anthropologists play the role of policy makers? If so, how can they contribute?
- 4) Is there a demarcation between applied anthropology and practicing anthropology today? Elaborate.