

# Anthropology



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Anthropology What is anthropology? Why is it important to see the world through an anthropological lens? Anthropology is generally understood as the study of man. As such it “ includes the study of human physiology, human psychology, the study of human societies (origins, institutions, religious beliefs, social relationships, etc...) and all the other aspect of human culture, whether past or present” (Glossary). In short, everything related to man comes under the scope of anthropology. It is important to see the world through an anthropological lens because one can know better about one’s own past and present and can see for oneself where he/she stands in the entire humanity. Besides, knowing about the culture, customs, beliefs, myths and social relations of the past better equip one to be an anthropologist who values the human race. Viewing the world through an anthropological lens helps one to think beyond narrow nationalism, extreme fanaticism, and terrorism.

2. What is culture? Why is it important to understand culture from an anthropological perspective?

Culture is often conceived to be ‘ a body of accumulated wisdom’ of the past and it is said that one learns, “ unreflectively for the most part, to replicate forms of behavior that already exist, that come from the past” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990, p. 154). The culture of a society consists of certain commonly shared values, traditions, social and political relations and factors like common history, common language, common locality and religion play dominant roles in molding various cultures. There is no doubt that the culture of a society is shared by its inhabitants and they contribute to it either by enhancing it or modifying it. It is important to understand culture from an anthropological perspective because there is a direct link between

human character formation and cultural values because man learns a lot from various cultures that he comes across. Understanding various cultures enables human beings to assimilate the good aspects of each culture whether it is alien or native.

3. What is fieldwork? Why is this an important part of anthropology?

Field work offers one with the unique opportunity to come to original personal conclusions regarding an issue and to supplement the theory with practical observation, documentation and research. The field worker has to locate the issue and the area of study, and the success of an effective field work depends on the level of involvement of the field worker and the reliability of the data he collects through his interaction and observation. Field work is an essential component of anthropology as it offers the best opportunity for one to get into the lives of men, their culture, customs, values and life styles. No doubt, such field works can enhance one's understanding of the lives of the selected group.

4. What is Political Economy? Why is this important to understand when analyzing culture?

Political economy refers to “ the study of how the rules, regulations, laws, institutions and practices of a country (or a state, region, province) have an influence on the economic system and its features” (Online Glossary). It is to be kept in mind that just as culture influences the lives of men, political and economical factors too affect them. It is significant to understand the concept of political economy when analyzing culture because political and economic factors can alter the cultural heritage of a nation. The fact that globalization has brought about drastic changes to the culture and cultural value of many societies and nations is a clear cut example of the relation

between culture and political economy.

5. What is Social Constructionism? Why is this important concept in anthropology?

Social constructionism refers to the process of constructing one's values, ideas, social and cultural outlooks. Culture, social context and education can bring about this social constructionism in individuals. The cognitive development of a person depends very much on this process of social constructionism. Social constructivist theories are important in anthropology because they have clearly pointed out the importance of learning on human behavior and it is of primary importance for an anthropologist to know how human behavior is constructed or altered.

#### Works Cited

Glossary. 7 Dec 2008. Online Glossary. 7 Dec 2008. Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches. Stanford University Press, 1990.