

Relationship of Social Anthropology with Other Social Sciences

When we take up the relationship of social anthropology with other social sciences, the immediate question which confronts us is, what do we mean by social anthropology in terms of its tradition. In Britain social anthropology means ethnology or sociology; in the US it refers to culture, and in France and other countries it means structuralism. The point is that all the branches of anthropology have varying meanings and traditions in different countries. Such a situation cautions us from relating social anthropology with other social sciences keeping in view the specific meaning given by different traditions to social anthropology.

Yet another explanation is necessary. There are two kinds of relationships in anthropology. One is of sister type. For example, anthropology has some important branches, such as social anthropology, cultural anthropology, ethnology, pre-history, linguistics, and physical anthropology. The relationship among these branches is sisterly or collateral. There is another level, for instance, that with economics, politics, history and psychology. These two kinds of relationships are discussed in the following paragraphs:

Sociology and Social Anthropology

Sociology and social anthropology are very closely related. This closeness or proximity is more intensive in Great Britain. In the universities of England social anthropology is considered to be a branch of sociology. Evans-Pritchard, writing about the relations of these two disciplines, states:

When people speak of sociology they generally have in mind studies of particular problems in civilized societies. If we give this sense to the word, then the difference between social anthropology and sociology is a difference of field, but there are also important differences of method between them. Social anthropology studies primitive societies directly, living among them for months or years, whereas sociological research is usually from documents and largely statistical. The social anthropologist studies society as wholes... The sociologist's work, on the other hand, is usually very specialized, being a study of isolated problems, such as divorce, crime, insanity, labor unrest, and incentives in industry.

Evans-Pritchard agrees that generally both sociology and social anthropology study the society. But they both differ on the following points:

1. *Field differences:* Social anthropology focuses on primitive societies whereas sociology concerns itself with civilized society.
2. *Methodological differences:* Social anthropology employs fieldwork as a dependable source of data generation. Sociology, on the other hand, depends on the collection of documents and generation of statistical data.
3. *Holistic and specific differences:* Social anthropology believes in making holistic studies of the primitive community. Different institutions of the community are functionally interrelated. Quite contrarily, sociology dwells on specific problems of the society.
4. *Philosophical orientation:* Social anthropology makes a general body of information about primitive social life. In anthropological studies theoretical input is relatively less; the sociological approach, on the other hand, has a heavy dose of social philosophy and theoretical approach.

In conclusion, it could be said that both these social sciences have difference of emphasis and perspective. The specialization of social anthropology rests on primitive peoples and methodology of research. Fieldwork method is taken up in small-scale society; it takes a long time to generate data. On the other hand, the theme of study of sociology is larger societies and the fieldwork is through tools such as schedule and questionnaire which usually take lesser time.

In India, the development of social anthropology is conditioned by certain historical factor. Yogendra Singh has discussed the relative situations of sociology and social anthropology in terms of historical and social forces. He observes:

This social conditioning, however, is historically constituted. To the western pioneers of sociology, major challenges come from the emerging industrial society and its accompanying cultural and epistemological tensions. In the Indian context, the colonial experience, the memory of the past glory and the project for future political and cultural emancipation constituted the major cognitive and moral concerns.

In a later description Yogendra Singh cites illustrations from the British anthropologists and says that they treated caste and tribe as dis-

quite useful in understanding tribal ethnography and social anthropology. Despite this relationship, social anthropology earns its own autonomous status. For it there is no bias of time. It studies its subject matter notwithstanding any period boundaries.

Psychology and Social Anthropology

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American anthropologists were greatly influenced by this relationship. However, Franz Boas, a noted American cultural anthropologist, literally dominated the field of the relationship of social anthropology and psychology. Boas had undoubtedly stressed the importance of the relationship of these two fields of study. In his monumental book, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, he set forth his conviction that there is no fundamental difference between the mind of primitive man and that of civilized man, and that whatever differences exist between the achievements of different races could be accounted for on historical and cultural grounds rather than in terms of innate biological differences. Lewis has also established the role of psychology in understanding the ethnology of primitive peoples. Social psychology, however, is the closest kin of social anthropology. If, for example, the mass behaviour of the primitive peoples. If, for example, the tribals are influenced by the Devi movement in south Gujarat, it is a clear case of the relationship of social psychology and social anthropology. However, general psychology interprets the behaviour of man as his individual manifestation.

Regarding the relationship of psychology with social anthropology, it can be said that there are two different realms dealt with by the two disciplines. Psychology is concerned with the behaviour of man and social anthropology focuses on interrelationship among different institutions of the society. There is a basic contradiction regarding the approach adopted by the two disciplines. Psychologists begin by taking the tribal culture for granted, as if it were uniform and universal. With this assumption they study psychic behaviour in a tribe. On the other hand, the same approach is taken by social anthropology. It tends to take human nature for granted, as if it were uniform and studies the diverse cultures of the tribe. In reality, in technical language, we have two variables, viz., mind and culture, and each science, that is, psychology and social anthropology, assumes that it can go ahead by treating the other variable as if it were constant. But researches now undertaken in both the fields have made it clear that such constancy is not actual. But, to deal with two highly complex variables is difficult; and as for specific findings, only beginnings have as yet been made.

W.H.R. Rivers, who conducted his studies among the Todas of South India, has dealt with the relationship of psychology and ethnology or social anthropology. He has argued for the independent science

of social anthropology, though ultimately the discipline is related to human behaviour because, as he observes:

The final aim of the study of society is the explanation of social behaviour in terms psychology.

To simplify the relations between psychology and social anthropology, it could be stated, that the study of interrelationship in a primitive society owes much to the psychological conditioning of the people in that society. This can be illustrated by referring to the situation of Indian tribals. The tribals, historically, have been exploited by the moneylenders and traders. I.P. Desai notes that when there is a meeting of the tribals of Bardoli *taluka*, they simply prohibit the entry of non-tribals. They consider caste Hindus as their enemies. This psychological mindset determines their behaviour. Therefore, in any study of primitive society, the psychology of the primitives constitutes a relevant point. This also explains the relationship between social anthropology and psychology; the former is concerned with a variable of culture and the latter with the mind.

Archaeology and Social Anthropology

Archaeology is a branch of anthropology and is very close to social anthropology and ethnology. In very simple terms, it could be said that archaeology is concerned with the historical reconstruction of human society. It tries to find out artifacts such as wheel, jug, axe, arrow, loin cloth, etc., which are made by humans. These findings are excavated. For instance, the excavations of Harappan culture help us to reconstruct the history of Indian civilization. In America, several of the areas of archaeology are taken over by ethnology. The basic objective of archaeology is, therefore, to find out, as Kroeber says, what is old in society.

Archaeology is basically prehistoric. It is specific to time. Admittedly, it is related to social anthropology but what is social anthropology in Britain is in reality ethnology. It focuses on finding out the old culture by excavation. Discussing the relationship between

History and Social Anthropology

There are many variants of history. It cannot be defined in a single sentence. Most of the scholars define history as a chronological account of the past events. Traditionally, therefore, the emperors, rulers and elites, who make history, constitute the theme of history. Looked at from this perspective, history is like a railway timetable which moves year after year, century after century. In simple words, history is the account of ruling dynasties. The preliterate people do not have anything of this history. There are no records for them. Here is a breaking point between history and social anthropology. Social anthropology writes about prehistoric people and their traditions and institutions. The field of history is the people of society; the field of social anthropology is the society; and the field of social anthropology is the masses of people who are illiterate.

Yet another definition of history is that given by the Indian historian, D.D. Kosambi. He has defined it from the Marxian conceptual framework and argues that history is about the means of production and the property relations developed out of production. On the other hand, yet another approach to history is suggested by Carr who says that the events which involve and affect larger masses of people are historical events. Without entering into the controversies of the definition of history, it must be said that history is a methodology and it

should be used as such only. The relationship of history and social anthropology is of a kind of love and hate. There was a time when social anthropology did not employ historical methodology. If we look at anthropological texts, we usually find that these are written in the present context. "Many of the most influential monographs in social anthropology were written half a century ago or more, and in virtually every case the societies they deal with have changed radically since the original fieldwork took place." The social anthropologists all over the world have hated history. They were concerned with detailed narration and, therefore, generated only empirical data. Tracing the relationship of history and social anthropology, Eriksen says that in the past social anthropology did not criticize historical accounts for empirical narrations. He writes:

Frequently, moreover, fieldwork was carried out during an unusual not a 'typical' historical period. For example, classic African anthropology was developed during the last phase of French and British colonialism, namely, between the First World War and 1960.

It must be stressed that social anthropology has never tried to replace history. Its analyses have traditionally been focused on social and cultural interrelationships at a particular point in time, and until recently, have rarely emphasized the historical processes which have led up to the present. Interestingly, in the British, American and French traditions, the aim is usually to account for the workings of a particular society or culture, not to try to explain how it emerged. As a matter of fact, the founding fathers of social anthropology, namely, Boas in the US and Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski in England, were all critical of the rather speculative forms of cultural history which preceded modern anthropology. Thus, the older social anthropology was more or less a still or snapshot anthropology. The historical methodology and social anthropology remained averse to each other because of the anthropological thrust of functionalism which dominated the first quarter of the 20th century.

A change has come about in the relationship of social anthropology and history after the 1980s. It became obvious to Third World countries that the situation of primitive peoples can hardly be analyzed without explaining the historical processes which shaped their structure. The status of Nuers in Africa is empirically alright but it is also resultant of the domination of whites over the coloured people.

In India also, the primitive peoples were dominated by the colonial rule. Functionalism as a methodology took an amazing turn in India. Though empiricism all over the world has emerged as a reaction to historicism, in India, empiricism and historicism go together. Here, those who are empiricists are also history-friendly. For instance, M.N. Srinivas explains the status of Coorgs and for that matter the caste hierarchy from a historical perspective also. Explaining the relationship as is currently found between social anthropology and history, Eriksen very interestingly observes:

Anthropology may be described as the processes whereby one wades into a river and explores it as it flows by, whereas historians are forced to study the dry river bed. One cannot engage in particular observations of the past.

Not only Eriksen who is British but also Kroeber from the US stresses the importance of knowing the history of a society and its contribution to the present. This can be specially rewarding—some would say absolutely necessary—in studies dealing with societies with a written history. Further, the connections between different societies which are often crucial for the understanding of each society, can only be properly investigated historically. It would be impossible to understand, for example, the Industrial Revolution in England properly without prior knowledge of the slave trade and the cotton plantations in the United States.

As a matter of fact, history and social anthropology are not mutually exclusive. Empiricism and history are both integrated. It could be safely said that in the Indian context social anthropology cannot be properly understood without reference to its history. The classical works of social anthropology, such as those of Andre Beteille, S.C. Dube and K.S. Singh, very clearly indicate that historical context is quite useful in understanding tribal ethnography and social anthropology. Despite this relationship, social anthropology earns its own autonomous status. For it there is no bias of time. It studies its subject matter notwithstanding any period boundaries.

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