

Relationship Between Sociology and Anthropology –

The relation between Sociology and Anthropology is widely recognised today. Anthropologist Kroeber pointed out that the two sciences are twin sisters. Robert Redfield writes that “one sees that the relations between sociology and anthropology are closer than those between Anthropology and Political Science due to greater similarity in ways of work”.

Anthropology is a general science like sociology. The word Anthropology is derived from two Greek words —Anthropology meaning ‘man’ and logos meaning ‘study’. Thus, the etymological meaning of ‘Anthropology’ is the study of man.

Precisely, it is defined by Kroeber as ‘the science of man and his works and behaviour’. Anthropology is “concerned not with particular man but with man in groups, with races and peoples and their happenings and doings”.

Though the youngest of the traditional social sciences, it has developed and gone ahead of many of them. It has made outstanding contributions to the study of man. Sociology, in particular, has been immensely enriched by the anthropological studies.

Anthropology seems to be the broadest of all the social sciences. It studies man both as a member of the animal kingdom and as a member of the human society. It studies the biological as well as the cultural developments of man. Anthropology has a wide field of study. Kroeber mentions two broad divisions of anthropology: (i) Organic or Physical Anthropology and (ii) the Socio- cultural Anthropology.

(i) Physical Anthropology:

Physical Anthropology studies man as a biological being, that is, as a member of the animal kingdom. Here, anthropology accepts and uses the general principles of biology; the laws of heredity and the doctrines of cell development and evolution.

Also, it makes use of all the findings of anatomy, physiology, zoology, paleontology and the like. Its business has been to ascertain how far these principles apply to man, what forms they take in his particular case.

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Physical Anthropology is concerned with the evolution of man, his bodily characteristics, racial features, and the influence of environment and heredity on the physical characteristics of man. It has two main branches: (i) Human palaeontology which concentrates on the study of fossils, and (ii) Cosmetology which deals with the human body in particular.

ii) Sociocultural Anthropology:

Sociocultural Anthropology, more often referred to as ‘Cultural Anthropology’, studies man as a social animal. This branch of anthropology which is concerned with the more-than-merely-organic aspects of human behaviour seems to be more interested in ancient and savage and exotic and extinct peoples.

The main reason for this is a desire to understand better all civilisations, irrespective of time and place, in the abstract, or as generalised principles as possible. (Social Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology are often treated as two separate branches).

Sociocultural Anthropology’s main concern is culture. It deals with the origin and development of man’s culture. It also studies various social institutions of primitive communities of the past as well as that of the present. It has three subdivisions:

(i) Ethnology—the science of peoples and their cultures and life histories as groups, irrespective of their degree of advancement.

(ii) Archaeology—the science of what is old in the career of humanity, especially as revealed by the excavations of prehistorically importance, and

(iii) Linguistics—the study of language in its widest sense, in every aspect and in all its varieties, but with its main accent on the languages of the primitive peoples

The Relationship between the Two Sciences:

According to Hoebel, “Sociology and Social Anthropology are, in their broadest sense one and the same”. Evans Pritchard considers social anthropology a branch of sociology. Sociology is greatly benefited by anthropological studies.

Sociologists have to depend upon anthropologists to understand the present-day social phenomena from our knowledge of the past which is often provided by

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anthropology. The studies made by famous anthropologists like Radcliffe Brown, B. Malinowski, Ralph Linton, Lowie, Raymond Firth, Margaret Mead, Evans Pritchard and others, have been proved to be valuable in sociology.

Sociological topics such as the origin of family, the beginning of marriage, private property, the genesis of religion, etc., can better be understood in the light of anthropological knowledge. The anthropological studies have shown that there is no correlation between anatomical characteristics and mental superiority. The notion of racial superiority has been disproved by anthropology.

Further, sociology has borrowed many concepts like cultural area, culture traits, interdependent traits, cultural lag, culture patterns, culture configuration etc., from socio-cultural anthropology.

The knowledge of anthropology, physical as well as socio-cultural, is necessary for a sociologist. An understanding of society can be gained by comparing various cultures, particularly, the modern with the primitive.

Anthropology as a discipline is so closely related to sociology that the two are frequently indistinguishable. Both of them are fast growing. The socio-cultural anthropologists today are also making a study of the present peoples and their societies. In a number of universities anthropology and sociology are administratively organised into one department.

The conclusions drawn by sociologists have also helped the anthropologists in their studies. For example, anthropologists like Morgan and his followers have come to the conclusion regarding the existence of primitive communism from the conception of private property in our modern
