

An Introduction to Agricultural Anthropology

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Abstract: This article introduces you to a new branch of applied anthropology Viz. Agricultural Anthropology. Though much has been done and researched on this topic outside India, it is still in its nascent stage in India. This article is an attempt to give a broad picture on what agricultural anthropology is and the inter link between Agriculture and Anthropology.

Keywords: Agricultural Anthropology, Applied Anthropology, Agriculture, Anthropology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Robert (Bob) Rhoades (1942–2010) developed and adopted the term “agricultural anthropology” to describe his work to other social and biological scientists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during his post as a Rockefeller Postdoctoral Fellow (and soon after, Senior Social Scientist) at the International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima, Peru (Rhoades 1980,1984). At the time, and still today, research protocols and policies in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system were largely catered to and dictated by agronomists and biologists. Among CGIAR social scientists, economists were the most valued.

It was not long before Bob (in collaboration with a fellow post-harvest colleague, biologist Robert Booth) turned the CIP approach on its head, suggesting that research should both begin and end with the farmer instead of the top-down approaches that prevailed at the time. Rhoades and Booth (1982) called their model “farmer back- to-farmer”, which quickly became an early and popular participatory approach in agricultural development, leading to the formation of an entire new program in the CGIAR system directed by Rhoades (Users Perspective with Agricultural Research Development—UPWARD, Asia) and the diffusion of appropriate technologies to millions of farmers worldwide.

II. BACKGROUND

India is the land of agriculture and agriculture is the main occupation for more than 70 percent of the population of our country. The economic prosperity of our country to a major extent depends on prosperity of agriculture. Mahatma Gandhi said that “India lives in villages”. Agriculture is derived from two Latin words Agri means Field and Culture means to cultivate and a way of life. Agriculture is basically cultivation of crops and tending of domesticated animals for human benefit. It is a known fact that most of the Indian population lives in the villages and majority of villagers are engaged in agriculture. Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy. It has also been pointed out that agriculture and allied sectors contribute nearly 22 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India, while about 65 to 70 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. In the modern period the agriculture has become an industry on one side and on the other it is facing problems due to lack of financial and credit support.

Anthropology is a social science that studies the social environment in which people live and the impact of this social environment upon feelings, attitudes, behaviour, etc. Anthropology consists of two Greek words ANTHROPOS –meaning MAN & LOGOS –meaning STUDY or SCIENCE. It is science of Man and his works and his behaviour. Kluckhohn famous American Anthropologist defines Anthropology as “Out of all the sciences which studies various aspects of man, anthropology is the one which comes nearest to being a total study of man.”

Anthropology uses the concept of culture to describe and analyze human behaviour, values, choices, preferences, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and so on. In classical anthropological theory, culture is an underlying dimension of all societies and all social life. All human behaviour takes place within a cultural context.

INTERLINKS BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY & AGRICULTURE:

Because food production is so central to human life, scholars have had a long interest in agriculture, its origins, and its effects on population and society. Archaeologists generally emphasize two major revolutions in agricultural history: the Neolithic revolution in which plant and animal species were domesticated and agriculture spread and the Industrial Revolution that allowed food to be produced in ever greater quantities for a capitalist society. Here special attention is paid to the range of preindustrial farming, some of the most important developments in this field, environmentally and socially, relate to the ongoing process of agricultural industrialization. Although agriculture can refer generally to production in a field, such processes are inextricable from horticulture, or garden production, and animal husbandry. Scholars of early agriculture and energetics often ask why people farm at all, when hunting and gathering seems to be a highly effective and efficient form of production. Others continue this line of questioning when considering the diversity of agricultural modes, asking why and how agricultural production reaches this variation in efficiency, yield, and external input. Various demographic, climatic, and social theories have been forwarded to address this key issue in agricultural development. When considered as a social process, agriculture can be understood as part of larger cultural elements including religion, state projects, industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of global capitalism. Conversely these social processes can be seen as elements of agriculture as well, especially when scholars examine disparities in access to the means of production, famine, usufruct rights, and social organization as a response to production and ecology. Industrialized, capital intensive agriculture, as well as some of its contemporary alternatives, is of special importance to social science as it seems to produce both vast quantities of food and socioeconomic hierarchies that reimagine farms as corporations.

AGRICULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY:

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DEFINITION: Rhoades defined agricultural anthropology as the comparative, holistic, and temporal study of the human element in agricultural activity, focusing on the interactions of environment, technology, and culture within local and global food systems, and it has the practical goal of responsibly applying this knowledge to improve the efficiency and sustainability of food and fiber production.

Agricultural anthropology views agriculture neither as a mere technical process nor even as techno-economic combination, but as a complex human creation and evolutionary process that includes equally important sociocultural and ideological components in interaction with each one another and the natural environment.

Agricultural anthropology is broader in scope than other agricultural disciplines which focus, and rightly so, on specialized and limited problems in agriculture.

One of Rhoades’s fundamental assumptions throughout his career guides the conceptualization, namely, we view agricultural anthropology as consisting of both an anthropology “of” and “in” agriculture. By this we mean that academic study of agricultural formations and processes as well as applied work within agricultural systems are interrelated and

necessary for the sub discipline of agricultural anthropology to flourish and remain relevant to contemporary global issues.

Robert Rhoades highlighted on three themes throughout his distinguished career: agro biodiversity conservation (Brown; Nazarea; Veteto;), participatory and collaborative research (Crane; Nazarea; Skarb and Vander Molen; Veteto;), and the multilayered politics of agricultural development (Crane; Skarb and Vander Molen;).

Three main works of Rhodes in the field of Agricultural Anthropology are

1. "Potato Eyes: Positivism Meets Poetry in Food Systems Research."
2. "Long in the Horn: An Agricultural Anthropology of Livestock Improvement,"
3. the preservation and breeding of Pineywoods cattle,

James Veteto continues with the topic of agro biodiversity, building on Rhoades's work in mountain studies, cultural ecology, and ethno ecology in his article, "Seeds of Persistence: Agro biodiversity in the American Mountain South." By analysing how varietal richness emerges from the history of social, economic, and geographic marginality in southern Appalachia and the Ozarks,

Todd Crane in his article "Bringing Science and Technology Studies into Agricultural Anthropology: Technology Development as Cultural Encounter between Farmers and Researchers," offers a critical reconsideration of Rhoades's "farmer-back-to-farmer" model for the development of agricultural technologies.

Threading together agrarian anthropology with science and technology studies, Crane points out that within the "farmer-back-to-farmer" model, anthropologists have been strong at analyzing rural culture and the logics it brings to socio-technical change, but have not adequately analyzed the institutions of science as cultural spaces that shape the ways scientists engage in participatory research.

Matthew Corey Gaittin, and Terrell Case, the film uses the perspectives of applied and environmental anthropology to tell the story of how residents organized and continue to fight herbicide spraying and environmental contamination in the Ozarks. By blurring the supposed boundaries between science and humanism, theory and application, those of us who continue to draw inspiration from the dynamic work of Robert Rhoades hope to make useful contributions toward the future of a fully engaged and relevant agricultural anthropology.

III. CONCLUSION

Agricultural Anthropology has a very vital role in Indian scenario given the farmer suicides and the social status of the farmers. This branch of applied anthropology is still in a very nascent phase in India and really need government and the educational institutes' support to flourish and help the Government and other regulatory authorities to help the agricultural community better and save many farmers from suicide.

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