**RELEVANCE OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

**Change and the Future of Anthropology**

Change is occurring at such an accelerated pace that it is difficult to keep up with all the changes in the world today. The recent revolution in transportation and telecommunications and the resulting increase in communications and travel are diffusing cultures at a much greater rate today than ever before.

Some argue that cultural anthropology will lose importance in the future since it is only a matter of time when all cultures will be homogenized. Yet few cultural anthropologists are studying pristine cultures as the discipline is adapting to the realities of this changing world.

Concern for survival of indigenous cultures and the study of complex societies is now the new focus area for many cultural anthropologists. There is also greater emphasis on using anthropological perspectives to deal with developmental problems.

There is little evidence to suggest that the world is becoming a cultural melting pot, so despite cultural changes there is enough diversity in the world to keep cultural anthropologists occupied for a long time to come.

**Ensuring Cultural Survival**

Cultural patterns – and in some cases people themselves – have been eradicated as a direct result of progress and economic development. The indigenous population of Tasmania in 19th century by white settlers for sheep herding is a tragic example of cultural extinction.

The 1884 Berlin Conference was a civilized way of dividing spoils of Africa but not safeguarding rights of indigenous people and numerous conflicts on the African continent are based on this insensitive division and lumping together of different ethnic groups.

The Brazilian Amazon shelters the largest population of the world’s still indigenous people. But by building roads through the Amazonian frontier, the Brazilian government has introduced diseases such as influenza and measles amongst the indigenous communities.

**Contemporary Anthropologists**

Anthropological research has great relevance for the public at large. Consider for example the role archaeology played in society during the nineteenth century. Books on the subject were widely read. Darwin’s work, for example, significantly changed beliefs on human history and development of the modern world.

Throughout this era of advancements academic archaeology was on the rise. This movement finally phased out the participation of amateurs in the field, creating a more elitist and inaccessible discipline.

While professionalization has certainly had numerous benefits - including developments in "method, theory and culture historical knowledge", its negative aspects are causing a significant deterioration of popular interest in archaeology.

A movement towards popularization through accessible writing must take place in order to involve the public and rekindle active interest in archaeology and indeed in other branches of anthropology.

Accessibility glorifies the field of anthropology, rather than denigrates it. Nowadays, rather than writing holistic ethnographies, cultural anthropologists bring to the study of cities and complex societies a more nuanced sensitivity towards understanding and dealing with the issue of ethnic diversity.

Anthropologists practicing "action anthropology" collaborate with other disciplines concerning the development of culture and how it relates to current pertinent issues.

**Useful Terms**

**Holistic ethnographies** – overarching description concerning all aspects of life of a given community

**Ethnic diversity** – different ethnic groups or the differences within or between them

**Pertinent** – relevant or important

**Nuanced** – having various aspects