

# ANTHROPOLOGY: It's more than just old bones

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As an undergraduate student of Anthropology, I've spent the past 4 years explaining to countless people what my major is. It's not an easy task because Anthropology is the result of some dissatisfied thinkers believing existing strongholds in the social sciences, such as Sociology and Economics, were not sufficient in explaining the complex social world of humans. Anthropology has emerged as a big player in the world of social sciences and is now offered as a major, minor or supplementary module in many universities.

## WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY?

Anthropology is usually defined along the lines of being the study of humans and some definitions include "early humans", "primates", "human behaviour", "past and present society" and other such terms within the mix. To put it simply, it is the study of the human experience. This means that the field looks into the social aspects (culture, politics, religion, etc.) and the physiological aspects (genetics, evolution, etc.).

There are four main subfields of Anthropology and they are Cultural Anthropology, Archaeology, Biological Anthropology and Linguistic Anthropology. Each of these subfields also have many branches within their scopes.

There's a common misconception among many that Anthropology only focuses on studying fossils and bones; at least from my experience this seems to be the case. Although not completely off, that's only a small part of what is studied under Archaeology as well as Biological Anthropology. Anthropology spreads its tentacles into everything in the world around us. There is probably an "anthropology" of everything humans create and do. As Anthropology believes in looking into the human experience, it doesn't concern itself much with numbers or models. This is why Anthropology is considered the most humanistic of social sciences. It fills the gaps that other social sciences create in their method of analysing and producing knowledge about the world we live in.

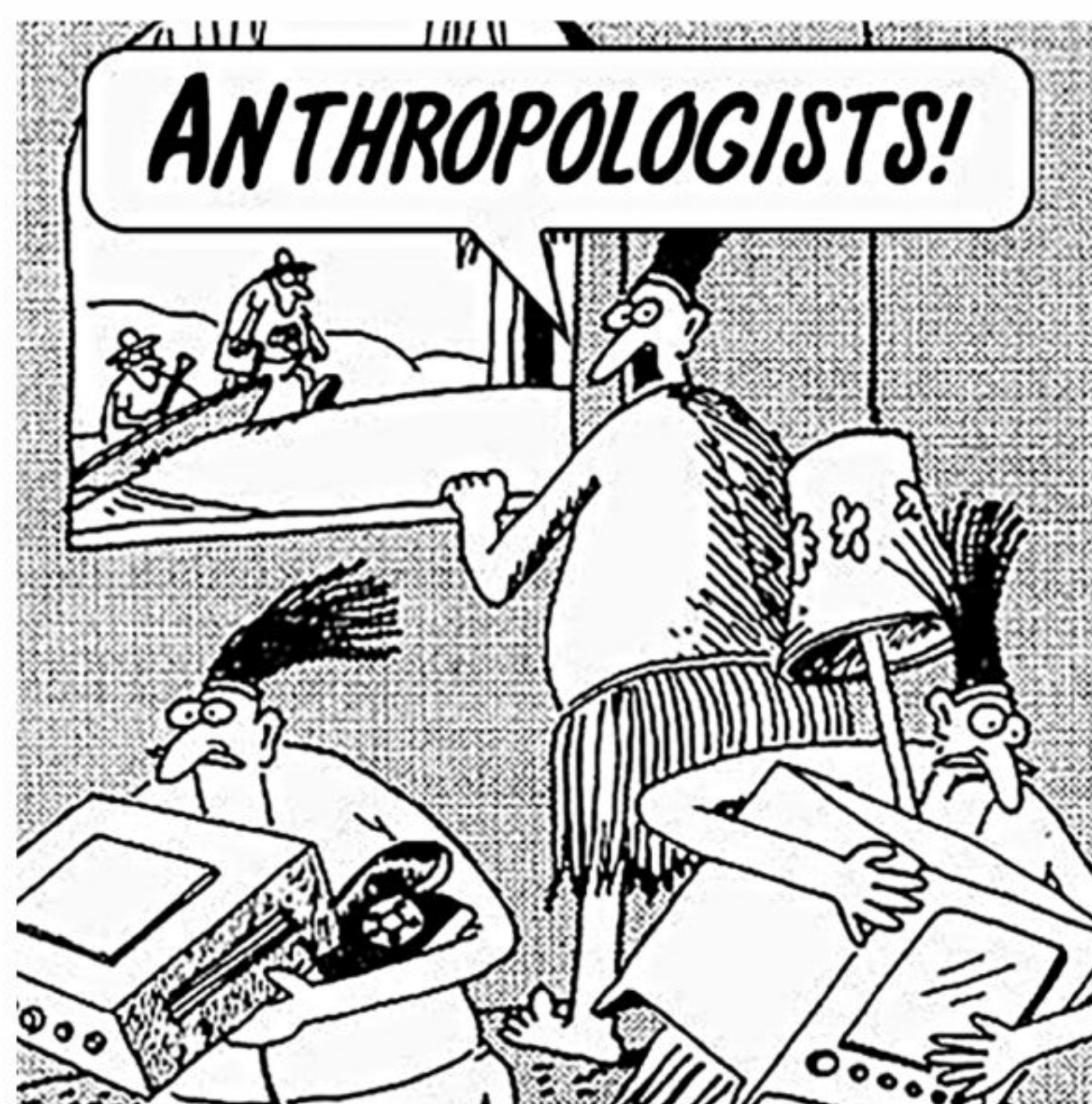
My professor often jokingly says that what we do is judge and check people out but we label it as participant observation and get along with our work. It is one of the most honest ways to describe it. By applying multiple techniques of studying humans, it is ultimately about a lot of judging (while trying to be neutral) and checking people out (whilst not being too creepy). While studying Anthropology, a student delves into understanding poli-

tics, religion, culture, economies, kinship, marriage, gender and power relations among others. It ultimately sheds light on the interlinking between these factors which make up the world around us.

## WHO SHOULD STUDY ANTHROPOLOGY?

Anyone can take a few courses in Anthropology to supplement their knowledge base. However, Anthropology as a major or a minor is perhaps not for everyone.

Anthropology modules are reading-intensive and there is no way around it. It requires thorough reading and analysis of texts, formulation of arguments and views stemming from the text and ultimately the ability to articulate



those learnings into more texts. Anthropology in most places is taught as a research-oriented major and the end-game is the production of ethnographies, which is the anthropologist's tool to disseminate knowledge. Ethnographies are basically illustrations of the lives of those being studied and involve looking through the layers that create whatever aspect of whatever the study is about.

For those who enjoy mathematical problem solving and analysis, Anthropology might be a bit of a chore. There's also a misconception that Anthropology is for those who suck at Mathematics. You still have to learn

quantitative research methods which includes statistics and learning software that produce mathematical models. For the most part, not having good grasp on mathematics is acceptable, however.

To enjoy Anthropology, one has to possess a keen interest in learning about the humans and the ability to handle things that make up their surroundings being questioned. Most of us suffer from various crises from time to time thanks to our education.

## WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THIS DEGREE?

Social science subjects are quite versatile and it's possible to go into many streams. In terms of employment, the obvious choices are in the development sector and in academia. Anthropology students have a big scope to work in research, policy and similar fields. It's not limited to just these although both these sectors are pretty big. Most places accept a social science background in the entry level.

In terms of higher education, the versatility is similarly useful. The social science field itself is vast so there is a scope to explore other streams or specialise further in one of the many branches within Anthropology itself. Many other disciplines also accept a social science background and it's really about digging up something that is suitable.

## WHERE IS IT OFFERED?

Jahangirnagar University and University of Dhaka both boast a Department of Anthropology. Many public universities across the country such as University of Rajshahi, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology and University of Chittagong either have a department dedicated to or offer a degree in Anthropology. Among private universities, BRAC University and Independent University Bangladesh provide Anthropology as a major.

If you're considering studying social sciences, Anthropology might be an option to consider. Anthropology also complements most social science subjects as a minor as well. I've seen students from law, business and engineering backgrounds take various modules in Anthropology to strengthen their ideas and it is especially helpful for those who want to enhance their research capacities or understanding of how humans experience the world. All in all Anthropology embraces everyone and everyone can embrace Anthropology too.

*Nooha Sabanta Maula is an Anthropology major whose anthropologising has made her confused about life. Send her your thoughts to [noohamaula@gmail.com](mailto:noohamaula@gmail.com)*