SAN 1. SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: THE COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE
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Paper aims and objectives:
To provide a general introduction to the aims, scope and methods of Social Anthropology by following three complementary avenues to the comparative study of human society and culture: ethnographic description and analysis of particular societies and cultures; the comparative study of social institutions; and the different theoretical approaches involved in anthropological description, analysis and comparison.

General Background Reading:

Core Ethnographies:


Syllabus:
Social Anthropology addresses the really big question – what does it mean to be human? – by taking as its subject matter the full range of human social and cultural diversity. What does this diversity tell us about the fundamental bases and possibilities of human social and political life? Can it help us to comprehend how contemporary global changes manifest themselves in people’s lives across the world? In this paper you will learn how anthropologists study, analyse, and theorise about the immense variety of forms of social life they have found across the world: how such taken-for-granted categories as gender, family, sexuality, economy, and the state are subject to radical cultural variation, and how everyday matters such as food, clothing, work, and trade may be bound up with religious and other symbolic meanings. You will also learn about the main kinds of social theory developed by anthropologists in response to the challenge of understanding this diversity, and about the distinctive forms of ethnographic field research anthropologists use in order to gain close, first-hand knowledge of the societies they study.

The paper provides: (1) An introduction to the key anthropological concepts such as society and culture, examining different approaches to social and cultural analysis through empirical case studies; (2) a framework for understanding variations in social organisation, with an emphasis on politics and economic life, kinship, and symbolism; (3) an overview of the history of anthropological theory in relation to changing social contexts; (4) an introduction to the ethnographic method. These themes will be covered by separate lecture courses (there will also be video classes) during the Michaelmas and Lent Terms; they will be brought
together in the Easter Term through the in-depth analysis of two social groups via the ‘core’ ethnographies.

Assessment:
This paper is assessed through a three-hour written examination. All topics are covered in a single undivided paper, and candidates must answer three questions from a choice of (approximately) 12. Credit will be given to students who display a wide range of ethnographic knowledge.

Structure of Teaching:
In addition to attending lectures, students will receive regular supervisions, in preparation for which an essay will normally be required, covering the key topics of this course.

Supervisions are arranged by Directors of Studies, and should be distributed evenly across the three terms. A normal supervision load would be three supervisions in each of Michaelmas and Lent, and two in Easter; a small number of additional discussion/revision sessions, without requiring an essay, are usually considered helpful.

During the Michaelmas and Lent Terms there will also be video classes. Students are encouraged to incorporate material from these video classes into their regular supervisions and essays.

Detailed Reading Lists will be made available for each lecture series. Below are introductory background readings.

Lecture series provided on the course:

1. Introduction to Anthropological Theory
Explores major themes and perspectives in the social and cultural theories employed by anthropologists.

Background Readings:

2. Politics and Economic Life
Presents political organisation and processes and economic life in cross-cultural perspective.

Background Readings:

3. Identity and Difference
Considers the socio-cultural bases of people’s identities.

**Background Readings:**

4. Ethnography
This section focuses on two core ethnographies to discuss the nature of ethnographic fieldwork and of ethnographic texts.

**Core Ethnographies:**

**Background Readings:**
5. The Symbolic and the Real
These lectures provide a broad introduction to anthropology’s concerns with the role of symbols and symbolism in human society.

Background Readings: