

Comparison of Anthropological Approaches

Introduction

Different anthropological theories have helped in understanding the origin of religions as well as the myths and beliefs of different communities. Notably, anthropological approaches help in appreciating people's cultures and their symbols. Many older societies exhibited significant myths that have been influential in the contemporary world of reasoning and understanding. Anthropologists have exhibited interest in different aspects and theories that help in understanding people's cultures. Some of the most influential anthropologists that help in understanding the development of human societies and cultures include Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Victor Turner. These three anthropologists adopted various approaches for analysing and understanding the culture of different communities. Particularly, their anthropological approaches can help in understanding the significance and symbolism in one of the Mexican religious images referred to as the Virgin of Guadalupe. This paper will compare anthropological theories of the three anthropologists mentioned and carry out a critical comparison of their views. Moreover, the paper will explain the manner in which these anthropological theories help in understanding the significance of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Discussion

Sigmund Freud developed his concept of totemism to explain the evolution of different myths and religions. His theory focused on the psychoanalysis of myths. Freud went deeper into exploring different rituals and traditions that many societies promoted. Particularly, many older societies had numerous rituals, taboo beliefs, and traditions deeply rooted in their culture. For Sigmund Freud, the best way to appreciate such myths, rituals, and traditions was to explore their psychoanalytic significance. Freud also tried to develop a reliable explanation of how religion emerged. Freud's most significant psychoanalysis was the Oedipus complex (Lucas, 2015). For this reason, he used the Oedipus complex as the foundation of the explaining his concept of totemism. In the early 1900s, many communities had a significant ritualised symbolic relation to animal species. They strongly believed that the ritualised symbolic relation was an

aspect that had existed beforehand. Freud developed totemism to analyse the significant customs that served as the basis of religions.

One of the most outstanding cultural beliefs in that period was the limitation of the existence of a totem that prevented people with any form of interrelationship from engaging in sexual encounters. People sharing a similar clan belonged to a specific totem. There were restrictions on any sexual relations in different totems. For some analysts, such restrictions reflected a measure of civilisation in the traditional societies that compelled them to pursue totemism. Some scholars believe that such restrictive sexual behaviour would ensure that people of the same totem did not actively engage in sexual relations that would harm future generations. Sigmund Freud was against the concept of civilisation when analysing totems (Frazer, 2011). He believed that many of the older societies could not foresee the consequences of their actions on future generations. For this reason, he highlighted that older societies were savage and practically unable to exhibit any form of civilisation.

Based on his psychoanalytic approach, Freud highlighted that the Oedipus complex rendered sons guilty. The guilt drove them to seek a form of reconciliation from their dead fathers. Unfortunately, it was impossible to achieve such reconciliation. As a result, the people opted to regard their dead fathers highly to the status of a god. After elevating their status, they started worshipping the god and emphasising the need of exogamy. In this case, exogamy translated to restrictive sexual behaviours that prevented any intimacy between people from the same totem. The establishment of these restrictive sexual behaviours was to ensure that sons did not repeat the initial mistakes of their fathers (Frazer, 2011). Many rituals and myths emerged as a way of resolving the complications associated with the Oedipus complex. Sons felt that through worship, they would eventually gain forgiveness from their fathers. Freud believed that religions served to resolve problems associated with the Oedipus complex. Each society embraced religion as a way of covering up for their guilt.

In his text titled *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud explored the role of the older culture of origin in determining modern socialisation. He explained totem as a term denoting symbols that certain communities and societies held. In different chapters, he explained how the taboos preventing incest emerged. The Oedipus complex was the significant aspect that contributed to problems

for the societies. As a result, the totems emerged with promising solutions on how to deal with the adverse effects of the Oedipus complex. Particularly, the Oedipus complex often motivated the sons to murder their fathers as they sought to take control over their mothers (Lucas, 2015). The guilt associated with such actions explains the origin of different totems to re-establish a measure of order in the society.

On the other hand, Claude Lévi-Strauss developed his approach to structural anthropology. Particularly, he conceived that structuralism was the defining aspect in anthropology. The structural approach was to help him to reduce the significant amount of information concerning cultural systems (Lévi-Strauss, Jacobson, and Schoepf, 2008). He believed that cultures represented systems of communication that determine all the necessities in the formation of any relationship. Structural anthropology gained a significant level of popularity due to its ability to determine the underlying structures that govern a certain society. In his analysis, Claude Lévi-Strauss centred on outlining the fundamental structures in each culture that actuated the development of certain traditions and cultural norms. He gave attention to the mythology, kinship patterns, as well as food preparation and the underlying cultural structures.

In his view, myths from different cultures were under the influence of universal laws and exhibited similar underlying structures. In his view, human nature exhibited outstanding similarities despite location or the level of primitivism. He focused on figures such as the coyote, the trickster, and the raven that had similar roles and attributes despite the community of origin. Claude Lévi-Strauss was able to demonstrate that similar elements were defining the significance and role of these characters in myths from different societies (Lévi-Strauss, Jacobson, and Schoepf, 2008). He specifically identified opposing forces that contradicted each other in different myths. He discussed the role of the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis as important elements in mythology. Claude Lévi-Strauss described “mytheme” as the most underlying structure in the development of myths. Claude Lévi-Strauss further described the structure of human thought that has its basis on the binary opposition.

Claude Lévi-Strauss viewed the human mind as having the capacity to consider lines of contrast in the process of thought. Similarly, social relations exhibited a similar structure. He also ventured into describing the role of taboos in the older societies. The taboos prevented sexual relations between family members and only allowed an individual to have a spouse or sexual partner

outside the family setting (Lévi-Strauss, Jacobson, and Schoepf, 2008). The taboos established kinship ties based on the binary distinction of kin networks. In his view, exploring the underlying structures in myths, language development, and human thought revealed important aspects of human nature. He concluded that getting a better concept was the underlying element of structure that was of fundamental significance in understanding how myths, taboos, and social ties emerged.

Victor Turner developed the concept of symbolic anthropology. Notably, symbolic anthropology is an approach that considers culture as an independent system comprising symbols, rituals, and belief systems. The meaning of a culture depends on the interpretation of the symbols and rituals governing it (Erickson & Murphy, 2016). Belief systems have a meaning when viewed as part of the cultural system. Victor Turner's efforts to develop the concept of symbolic anthropology were evident. He identified a symbol as a landmark representing the relationship between the known and the unknown. He explored the significance of prescribed formal behaviour which serves as the source of important symbols. He considered the symbol as a significant unit of a certain ritual that exhibited defining properties of the formal behaviours associated with a certain culture. Victor Turner emphasised the need to focus on interpreting the symbols and identifying their deeper meaning in connection to an independent cultural system.

His main area of expertise was ritual symbolism, a factor that motivated him to seek deeper understanding of the meaning attached to symbols and how they influenced behaviour and social transformations. Victor Turner appreciated the symbols as landmarks that helped to interpret the meaning of each culture and its belief systems. In his pragmatic approach to explaining the emergence of religions, Victor Turner highlighted that different rituals comprised religious and spiritual components that represented certain symbols (Erickson & Murphy, 2016). He emphasised the role of such symbols in understanding the formal behaviours of different societies. He was well aware that the symbolism of the conflict was also a major factor evident in various societies. He relied on the concept of "social drama" to explain the symbolism of the conflict. Based on Victor Turner's anthropological approach, it was apparent that understating cultures involved the understanding of different symbols. Some religions were able to manipulate the symbols with the intention of creating a specific message regarding their religious belief.

Analysis of the Virgin of Guadalupe using Anthropological Approaches

The Virgin of Guadalupe is a Mexican religious symbol that emerged from the indigenous culture. The people believed that the Virgin of Guadalupe represented an important message from the heavens. The sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe comprised different symbols, colours, and other details that were significant in the Mexican culture. For this reason, the sacred image served as a central object of worship (Rodriguez, 2005). Based on Freud's psychoanalysis, religious images represent people's efforts. Rituals, and taboos, that seek to resolve issues associated with the Oedipus complex. For this reason, Freud's psychoanalysis helps in comprehending the value of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the Mexicans. In their view, the Virgin of Guadalupe represented a mother that they worshipped. It is possible that they developed this perception out of the guilt associated with the Oedipus complex. The Virgin of Guadalupe promised them love, compassion, and protection. It was their way of recreating the sacred image of a mother after the adverse effects of the Oedipus complex.

Victor Turner's symbolic anthropology is quite relevant in understanding the symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Particularly, the Mexican people had developed an independent cultural system that helped them to understand the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It is possible to read meanings from the symbols, colours, and details of the sacred image that is unique to the indigenous culture of the native people in Mexico. The combination of the blue, green, and gold colours presents a deeper meaning of the sacred image depending on the people's perception of sacred images (Rodriguez, 2005). The position of the virgin on the angel's shoulders also communicated a deeper message that was unique to the people's culture. They considered her as a mother from above because she qualified to be carried on the shoulders of the angel. Based on these symbols, she qualified as a messenger from above, prompting the people to give reference to her in their prayers constantly. According to the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, it is possible to identify the binary oppositional elements governing the development of religion among the indigenous people. The attributes of the Virgin of Guadalupe reflect similar elements in various myths developed in different cultures.

Conclusion

Different anthropologists developed concepts and theories that have a great significance in understanding the development of cultural beliefs, myths, and kinship ties. Sigmund Freud applied a psychoanalytical approach in developing a better concept of how religions emerged. Claude Lévi-Strauss gave attention to the significance of underlying structures in understanding the development of language, culture, and taboos. The emphasis on symbolic anthropology developed by Turner helps in appreciating the importance of various symbols that are unique to every culture. The Virgin of Guadalupe is one of the most powerful religious symbols among native people in Mexico. Over the years, there has been a strong reference to the symbol due to the people's beliefs that she was sent from above. The anthropological theories described above help in developing a better concept of how religions emerged and eventually became critical aspects of culture. The significance of the symbol was a deep-rooted belief that Guadalupe had a message to deliver to the people. It is imperative to view religions and cultures from various perspectives with the core objective of developing a better appreciation of human nature.