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Anthropology short notes

Historical particularism (Boas)

UPSC Civil Services (Main) Examination • Anthropology Paper 1 • Anthropology GS 1 (Paper I)

(b) Historical particularism (Boas); Diffusionism (British, German and American)

Short notes by official syllabus heading.

Revision notes for the Anthropology optional. Confirm thinkers and examples against standard texts and recent papers.

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/archives/anthropology-notes/paper-1/historical-particularism-diffusionism/>

Historical Particularism (Boas)

Definition

Holistic approach | Specialized approach

Thinkers

K. S. Singh | Tribal and historical studies Bronislaw Malinowski | Fieldwork; Cultural Anthropology
Franz Boas | Cultural Anthropology; Historical Particularism Benjamin Lee Whorf | Linguistic
Relativity

Definition

Anthropology, defined as the scientific and holistic study of human beings, has undergone a profound evolution from its origins as a tool for colonial administration to a reflexive, interdisciplinary science. As Eric Wolf remarked, the discipline acts as a "bond between subject matters," bridging the gap between natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Its evolution can be traced through several distinct theoretical and methodological shifts.

Thinkers

Core Philosophy: Thinkers like E.B. Tylor (the "**Father of Modern Anthropology**"), Lewis Henry Morgan, and James Frazer proposed Unilinear Evolution, suggesting all societies progress through identical stages (e.g., Savagery → Barbarism → Civilization). Historical Particularism: Franz Boas (the "**Father of American Anthropology**") rejected universal laws, arguing that each culture has a unique history. He introduced the Four-Field Approach (Biological, Archaeological, Linguistic, and Cultural) to gather comprehensive empirical data.: The Golden Age of Fieldwork: Functionalism. Bio-cultural Functionalism: Bronislaw Malinowski pioneered Participant Observation, arguing that culture exists solely to satisfy biological and psychological needs. Structural Functionalism: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown applied an "**Organic Analogy**," viewing society as a system where institutions function like organs to maintain the stability of the social structure.: Structural and Psychological Turns. Structuralism: Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that human thought is patterned through binary oppositions (e.g., **Nature vs. Culture**) and that culture, like language, is a mental construct.

Definition

Burnt brick structures, water reservoirs.

Thinkers

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (Veranda Anthro) T: Red- Brown munda came India and gave gyan social order and cohesion maintain karta Baffin Island → Study of Eskimo (Inuit) → Early fieldwork of Franz Boas (1883-84). Bronislaw Malinowski - Trobriand Islands K. S. Singh | Tribal and historical studies Bronislaw Malinowski | Fieldwork; Cultural Anthropology

Definition

Beginning of scientific imperialism in forestry.

Example / case study

even Brahmins of Maharashtra showed diversity, not homogeneity.

Thinkers

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Example / case study

Naga identity - multiple tribes unified by colonial rule + Christianity.

Thinkers

Iravati Karve - Caste, kinship, family.: Analytical Phase (1950-1990). 4. Evaluative Phase (1990-Present) (not Vidyarthi's original) Singh: Future of caste is not decay but adaptation → caste changes form but continues to exist. André Bételle: In South India, old jajmani ties are gone, but caste associations thrive in urban Chennai and Bengaluru. Scholar: Clifford Geertz (Old Societies and New States, 1963).

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