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Q1(a)

Animism and Deep Ecology

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Religion

5. Religion: Anthropological approaches to the study of religion (evolutionary, psychological and functional); monotheism and polytheism; sacred and profane; myths and rituals; forms of religion in tribal and peasant Societies (animism, animatism, fetishism, naturism and totemism); religion, magic and science distinguished; magico-religious functionaries (priest, shaman, medicine man, sorcerer and witch).

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Animism and Deep Ecology
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Taylor's animism is belief in spiritual beings as the minimum of religion.

Later work reads animism as relating to animals and places as persons.

Naess's Deep Ecology gives nature intrinsic worth beyond human use.

The two meet as critiques of a dead, owned environment.

They are not the same theory and must not revive **Taylor's** ladder.

Introduction

Animism and Deep Ecology both refuse a dead nature. One is a classical theory of religion. The other is an ecological ethic that anthropology now reads beside indigenous personhood.

Body

Animism

- **E. B. Taylor** defined animism as belief in spiritual beings. Souls, ghosts, and nature-spirits were, for him, the minimum of religion.
- Later ethnography, from **Irving Hallowell** on Ojibwa other-than-human persons to Amazonian work, treated animism as a relational ontology, not a childish error.
- **Andaman** islanders and many forest peoples address animals and places as persons. The point is social relation, not a museum of superstition.

Deep Ecology

- **Arne Naess** coined Deep Ecology. Nature has intrinsic worth, not only use-value for humans.
- The platform rejects shallow conservation that saves a park for tourism. It asks for biospheric equality.
- **Link and limit:** animist personhood can support **Naess's** ethic, but **Taylor's** evolutionary ladder must not be smuggled back in.

Flow diagram

Nature as person or worth -> Tylor animism
Nature as person or worth -> Naess Deep Ecology
Tylor animism -> Other-than-human persons
Naess Deep Ecology -> Intrinsic value

Conclusion

Tylor named soul-belief. **Naess** named an ethic of intrinsic nature. Anthropology joins them only as two refusals of a resource-only world, not as one creed.

Facts & figures

Tylor

Primitive Culture (1871) defined animism as belief in spiritual beings and made it the starting point of religion.

Naess

Norwegian philosopher who named Deep Ecology and distinguished it from shallow, use-centred conservation.

Hallowell

Ojibwa ethnography treated thunder, stones, and animals as other-than-human persons.

Andaman

Forest and sea beings enter ritual address, a living animist field, not a Tylocean survival.