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Q8(a)

Discuss various tools of data collection in conducting anthropological research

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · Tools of data collection

(c) Tools of data collection: observation, interview, schedules, questionnaire, case study, genealogy, life-history, oral history, secondary sources of information, participatory methods.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the tools of data collection in anthropological research
- Write about 250 words for 20 marks

Revision summary

Participant observation is the socio-cultural core, after **Malinowski**.

Genealogies, maps, and interviews structure the field diary.

Linguistic texts and speech events are data, not extras.

Biological anthropology adds measures and genetics; archaeology adds dig and date.

Triangulation and ethics decide whether the toolkit is science or extract.

Introduction

Anthropological data are gathered by watching, asking, measuring, and reading. The toolkit is four-field. No single tool is the discipline.

Body

Fieldwork core

- **Participant observation**, after **Malinowski** in the **Trobriands**, is long residence, daily talk, and a diary of the obvious. It is still the socio-cultural spine.
- **Census, genealogy, and mapping** of houses and gardens, as **Rivers** and later village studies did, give structure to the diary.
- **Interview**: informal, structured, life history. **Geertz** in **Java** and Bali needed talk that could be thickly described, not only a schedule.

Specialised social tools

- **PRA/PLA**, case study, and focus group for applied work. Photography and film, with consent.
- **Linguistic tools: texts, elicitation, and recording of speech events** after **Hymes**.
- Comparative reading of archives and myths, as **Lévi-Strauss** and **Dumont** used, is data, not a substitute for the village.

Biological and archaeological tools

- **Anthropometry**, blood, and now DNA, with ethics. Pedigrees for genetic counselling.

- Excavation, survey, and dating (**TL**, radiocarbon) for past subsistence and sites such as **Jericho**.
- Primatology adds observation schedules that look like ethnography of another species.

Quality

- Rapport, triangulation, and reflexivity. **Boas** demanded texts in the native language. Colonial power still shapes who speaks.
- Quantification is a tool, not a higher truth. A **Nuer** genealogy and a haemoglobin survey answer different questions.

Flow diagram

Data tools -> Participant observation
Data tools -> Interview genealogy
Data tools -> Anthropometry DNA
Data tools -> Survey excavation dating

Conclusion

The tools are observation, genealogy, interview, language texts, measures, and excavation. Anthropology is the disciplined combination, seated in a place and a question.

Facts & figures

Malinowski

Argonauts set immersion, corpus inscriptionum, and the native's point of view as method.

Rivers

Genealogical method for kinship and demography in the field.

Hymes

Ethnography of speaking as a data programme for language in use.

Boas

Insisted on native-language texts and against armchair stages.