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Q4(a)

Elaborate the scope of anthropology and elucidate its uniqueness in the field of other social sciences

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · Social-cultural Anthropology.

(a) Social-cultural Anthropology.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the scope of anthropology and its uniqueness among the social sciences
- Write about 250 words for 20 marks

Revision summary

- **Scope is four-field:** body, tools, language, and social life.

It includes fossils, villages, and cities, not tribes alone.

Uniqueness is holism plus long fieldwork and comparison.

Sociology, economics, and history each drop a piece that anthropology keeps.

The charter is connection across fields, not one scholar doing everything.

Introduction

Anthropology is the comparative study of humankind as organism, maker, speaker, and social being. Its scope is four-field. Its uniqueness is that combination, plus fieldwork among living people and deep time.

Body

Scope

- **Biological anthropology** covers primates, fossils, genetics, growth, and variation. **Homo erectus** and living high-altitude **Tibetan** physiology sit in one file.
- **Archaeology** covers tools, sites, and extinct ways of life, from Maglemosian camps to **Jericho**.
- **Linguistic anthropology** covers structure, meaning, and speech in society.
- **Socio-cultural anthropology** covers kinship, economy, religion, and politics, from **Nuer** and **Trobriand** to cities.
- Applied, medical, and development work extend the same holism into policy, without dropping comparison.

Uniqueness among social sciences

- **Sociology** often starts from modern industrial society and the survey. Anthropology starts from any human group and from participant observation, as **Malinowski** and **Boas** set the craft.
- **History** uses texts of the literate. Anthropology adds prehistory, oral worlds, and the body.
- **Economics** and **political science** abstract the market and the state. Anthropology embeds those in kinship and ritual, after **Polanyi**, **Weber**, and **Marx** read in the field.

- **Psychology** models the individual mind. Anthropology treats mind as public culture, as **Geertz** argued, and as a primate brain with an evolutionary past.
- **The uniqueness is holism plus the other:** the discipline is licensed to study bones and bridewealth in one argument, and to take the **Andaman** camp as seriously as a parliament.

Limit

- No person does all four fields in one career. Uniqueness is the charter of connection, not a claim of omniscience.

Flow diagram

Anthropology -> Biological
Anthropology -> Archaeology
Anthropology -> Linguistic
Anthropology -> Socio-cultural
Anthropology -> Holism fieldwork comparison

Conclusion

Anthropology's scope is humankind in all times and places. Among social sciences it is unique in joining biology, deep time, language, and intensive ethnography.

Facts & figures

Boas

Built the four-field university department and split race from language and culture.

Malinowski

Made long residence and the native's point of view the socio-cultural method.

Kroeber

Called anthropology the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities.

Srinivas

Showed that **Indian civilisation** is a full anthropological object, not a leftover of tribe studies.

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