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Q2(a)

"Anthropology is the systematic, objective and holistic study of human kind in all times and places." Elaborate the argument

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · 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

- "Anthropology is the systematic, objective and holistic study of human kind in all times and places." Elaborate the argument
- Write about 250 words for 20 marks

Revision summary

The definition blocks anecdote, presentism, and a West-only sample.

Boas and **Malinowski** made fieldwork and comparison the system.

Holism joins bones, tools, words, and institutions.

All times and places include fossils and Indian villages alike.

Objectivity is method, not innocence about colonial power.

Introduction

The sentence is a teaching definition of anthropology as one science of humans. Each adjective blocks a common reduction.

Body**Systematic and objective**

- **Systematic** means comparison, genealogy, excavation, and measurement, not traveller's anecdote. **Franz Boas** made method the reply to armchair ranking.
- **Objective** here means controlled observation and the attempt to separate the ethnographer's values from the report. It does not mean a view from nowhere. **Malinowski's** Trobriand diary later showed the strain.
- **Emile Durkheim** and **Radcliffe-Brown** wanted social facts treated as things. Interpretive workers such as **Clifford Geertz** kept systematic description while reading public meaning.

Holistic, all times, all places

- **Holism** joins biology, language, archaeology, and social life. A palaeolithic flake, a kinship term, and a haemoglobin allele are one species' file.
- **All times** runs from **Australopithecus** and the Indian palaeolithic to the factory and the clinic.
- **All places** refuses a civilised-savage split. **Boas**, **Herskovits**, and **Srinivas** at Rampura treated every society as a full case.

Limits of the slogan

- Objectivity is an ethic of method, not a claim that culture has no power. Feminist and postcolonial critique, after **Talal Asad** and others, showed how colonial offices shaped the archive.
- Holism is a research programme. No monograph covers everything. The argument still holds as a refusal to study only the West, only the present, or only the gene.

Flow diagram

Anthropology -> Systematic method

Anthropology -> Disciplined observation

Anthropology -> Four-field holism

Four-field holism -> All times

Four-field holism -> All places

Conclusion

Anthropology is systematic comparison, an effort at disciplined observation, and a four-field holism across time and space. The slogan is a charter. Practice must still name power, history, and the observer.

Facts & figures

Four fields

Biological, archaeological, linguistic, and socio-cultural anthropology as one holism in the Boasian tradition.

Malinowski

Argonauts of the Western Pacific set long residence and the native's point of view as the objective method of his day.

Geertz

Thick description kept systematic ethnography while treating culture as public meaning.

Srinivas

Rampura showed that an Indian village is a full anthropological case, not a leftover of custom.

Asad

Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter warned that archives and questions can be politically seated.