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Q2(b)

Discuss different forms of primate social organisation

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Characteristics of Primates

1.5 Characteristics of Primates; Evolutionary Trend and Primate Taxonomy; Primate Adaptations; (Arboreal and Terrestrial) Primate Taxonomy; Primate Behaviour; Tertiary and Quaternary fossil primates; Living Major Primates; Comparative Anatomy of Man and Apes; Skeletal changes due to erect posture and its implications.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss different forms of primate social organisation
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

Revision summary

Primates are not all troop animals.

Orangutans disperse, gibbons pair, gorillas often keep one-male groups.

Macaques and baboons live in ranked multi-male troops.

Chimpanzees use fission-fusion parties, as at **Gombe**.

Ecology, predation, and kinship explain the spread.

Introduction

Non-human primates live in several stable grouping patterns. Form follows feeding, predation, and kinship, not a single ladder toward the human family.

Body**Main forms**

- **Solitary and dispersed:** Orangutans show a female and young in a range, with males overlapping. This is not asocial life; it is a spacing system.
- **Monogamous pairs:** Gibbons and some titi monkeys hold a territory as a pair plus offspring. Pair-living is rare, not the primate default.
- **Polyandry:** Some **Callitrichids** (marmosets and tamarins) show one breeding female and several males who carry infants.
- **One-male groups:** Gorillas and some langurs, as **Sarah Blaffer Hrdy** discussed for infanticide, keep a silverback or resident male with females.
- **Multi-male-multi-female troops:** Baboons and macaques, including Indian **rhesus**, have ranked males and females and wide kinship networks. **Washburn** and **DeVore** made the baboon troop a teaching model.
- **Fission-fusion:** Chimpanzees, described by **Jane Goodall** at **Gombe**, split into parties that reunite. **Frans de Waal** stressed politics inside that fluidity.

Reading the variation

- **Robin Dunbar** linked group size to neocortex and grooming time. Ecology still decides whether a species can afford a crowd.
- Human bands and families are not copies of the gorilla harem or the gibbon pair. The lesson is flexibility plus kinship.

Flow diagram

Primate groups -> Solitary orangutan
Primate groups -> Pair gibbon
Primate groups -> One-male gorilla
Primate groups -> Multi-male macaque baboon
Primate groups -> Fission fusion chimp

Conclusion

Primate social organisation runs from dispersed orangutans to fission-fusion chimpanzees. Each form is an ecological and kinship solution, not a rung on a human ladder.

Facts & figures

Gombe

Goodall's long study showed chimpanzee hunting, tool use, and shifting parties.

Hrdy

Langur infanticide linked one-male takeovers to reproductive conflict, not to species evil.

Rhesus macaque

A multi-male Indian species whose matrilineal ranks are a standard field case.

Dunbar

Social brain hypothesis related grooming time and group size to primate cognition.

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