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Q7(b)

Write the historical development of field work tradition in anthropology till recent times

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Fieldwork tradition in anthropology

(a) Fieldwork tradition in anthropology

Core demand of the question

- Write the historical development of field work tradition in anthropology till recent times
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

Revision summary

Torres Strait and Boas ended armchair evolution as the only method.

Malinowski made long residence the classic.

African and Indian village studies expanded the map.

Reflexivity and multi-sited work named power and movement.

Digital and urban fields still owe the ethic of presence.

Introduction

Fieldwork became anthropology's mark of honour. The path runs from travellers and missionaries to year-long residence, teams, multi-sited work, and digital fields.

Body

Beginnings

- **Rivers** on the Torres Strait expedition (1898) and genealogical method made intensive field science possible.
- **Boas** on the Northwest Coast demanded language and texts. Armchair **Tylor** was left behind.

The classic year

- **Malinowski** in the Trobriands set tent, vernacular, and the native's point of view. **Radcliffe-Brown** in the Andamans added structural questions.
- **Mead, Benedict, and Evans-Pritchard** (Nuer, Azande) normalised long stays. Indian village work by **Srinivas, Dube, and Marriott** brought the method home.

Critique and after

- Reflexivity after the 1980s, **Clifford** and **Marcus**, showed the ethnographer in the text. Colonial archives were reread.
- Applied, medical, and development fieldwork used PRA beside the notebook.
- Recent work is multi-sited (**Marcus**), urban, laboratory, and online. The ethic of consent and the long stay remain the core, even when the 'village' is a chat group.

Flow diagram

Expedition Rivers Boas -> Malinowski year
Malinowski year -> Village Srinivas
Village Srinivas -> Reflexive multi-sited

Conclusion

Fieldwork grew from expedition lists to Malinowskian residence, then to reflexive and multi-sited practice. The tradition is still presence plus method, not a postcard.

Facts & figures

Torres Strait 1898

Haddon and Rivers took survey toward intensive genealogical fieldwork.

Malinowski

Trobriand residence became the charter myth of the ethnographic year.

Srinivas

Rampura participant observation made Indian sociology-anthropology field-based.

Marcus

Multi-sited ethnography for people and things that do not sit in one village.