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Q4(a)

Anthropology provides a multidimensional understanding of human beings by bridging the gap between science and humanities. Elucidate

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · Applications of Anthropology

12. Applications of Anthropology: Anthropology of sports, Nutritional anthropology, Anthropology in designing of defence and other equipments, Forensic Anthropology, Methods and principles of personal identification and reconstruction, Applied human genetics-Paternity diagnosis, genetic counselling and eugenics, DNA technology in diseases and medicine, serogenetics and cytogenetics in reproductive biology.

Core demand of the question

- Elucidate anthropology's claim to study the human as both organism and meaning-maker
- Show the science side and the humanities side with fossils, ethnography and nutrition
- Explain the bridge as method
- Note tensions between the two cultures without abandoning the four-field wager

Revision summary

Anthropology studies one species as organism and as meaning-maker.

The science side is palaeoanthropology, genetics, anthropometry and dating.

The humanities side is ethnography, ritual, kinship and interpretation, as in Geertz.

The bridge is biocultural questions such as nutrition, forensics, language and embodiment.

The two failures are reductionism and culturalism.

Fossils and symbols belong in one understanding of the human.

Introduction

Anthropology's wager is that Homo is one animal who also lives in worlds of symbols, law and history. Science without the humanities yields a body without a world. Humanities without science yield a world without a primate. The discipline is multidimensional when it refuses that split in the same problem.

Body

The science limb

Biological anthropology, prehistoric dating and taphonomy, linguistics as a natural history of languages, and formal demography are scientific in the ordinary sense: measurement, hypothesis, comparison and falsification. **Franz Boas** insisted on this empirical discipline against armchair race science. **Sherwood Washburn's** new physical anthropology later joined fossils, function and behaviour.

Miocene hominoids, Mousterian assemblages, Mendelian loci and nutritional anthropometry are not metaphors. They constrain the stories we may tell about origins, health and variation.

Human biology also includes culture as a selective and developmental environment: plasticity and life history. That is science of a biocultural object.

The humanities limb

Ethnography, interpretation of ritual, kinship as moral reason, embodiment, and Geertzian reading of public symbols are humanist crafts: language, context, critique and the particular. **Clifford Geertz** made the literary analogy explicit. Frazer's evolutionism shows what happens when a humanist topic such as religion is forced through a thin scientific costume of unilinear stages. The remedy is not to abandon comparison. It is to interpret.

Bridging as practice

- **Four-field training:** Biological, socio-cultural, archaeological and linguistic wings in one syllabus. Fossils and Purum, nutrition and Turner, sit in the same discipline for that reason.
- **Biocultural problems:** Stunting is a z-score and a gendered plate. Forensic anthropology is osteology and a legal narrative of identity. Language is a cognitive system and a politics of tongue.
- **Against C. P. Snow's two cultures:** Anthropology trains one person to hold a cladogram and a kinship term without converting one into the other.

A current Indian join is anaemia or child growth in NFHS numbers plus ethnography of who eats eggs, who gets ICDS take-home rations, and whose work is in the heat. Another is Siwalik fossils beside living diversity.

Tensions worth naming

Reductionism (genes explain the cockfight) and culturalism (bones are only stories) are the two failures of the bridge. **A. L. Kroeber's** superorganic over-separated culture from biology. Some sociobiology over-joined them. The multidimensional claim is a discipline of the joint: different methods, one species.

Flow diagram

Human being -> Science: body, deep time, measurement
 Human being -> Humanities: meaning, ethics, interpretation
 Science: body, deep time, measurement -> Biocultural problems
 Humanities: meaning, ethics, interpretation -> Biocultural problems

Conclusion

Anthropology is scientific where the primate, the tool and the allele require it, and humanistic where meaning, power and history require it. The gap is bridged by biocultural problems that cannot be answered from one side alone.

Facts & figures

Four-field anthropology

Biological, socio-cultural, archaeological and linguistic wings as one training. This is the institutional form of the science-humanities bridge.

C. P. Snow, two cultures

The split between scientific and literary intelligentsia. Anthropology is often taught as a reply: one field, two toolkits.

A. L. Kroeber, superorganic

Culture as a level above the organism. Later biocultural work reopened that separation.

Biocultural approach

Treats human biology as historically and politically situated. Measurement plus ethnography on the same problem, such as nutrition or disease.

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