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Anthropology short notes

Social Sciences.

UPSC Civil Services (Main) Examination · Anthropology GS 1 · Anthropology GS 1 (Paper I)

Social Sciences.

Short notes by official syllabus heading.

Revision notes for the Anthropology optional. Confirm thinkers and examples against standard texts and recent papers.

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Social Sciences**Definition**

Anthropology, defined as the scientific and holistic study of human beings, has undergone a profound evolution from its origins as a tool for colonial administration to a reflexive, interdisciplinary science. As Eric Wolf remarked, the discipline acts as a "bond between subject matters," bridging the gap between natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Its evolution can be traced through several distinct theoretical and methodological shifts.

Example / case study

Study of caste and kinship in India draws on both sociology and social anthropology.

Thinkers

Core Philosophy: Thinkers like E.B. Tylor (the "**Father of Modern Anthropology**"), Lewis Henry Morgan, and James Frazer proposed Unilinear Evolution, suggesting all societies progress through identical stages (e.g., Savagery → Barbarism → Civilization). Historical Particularism: Franz Boas (the "**Father of American Anthropology**") rejected universal laws, arguing that each culture has a unique history. He introduced the Four-Field Approach (Biological, Archaeological, Linguistic, and Cultural) to gather comprehensive empirical data.: The Golden Age of Fieldwork: Functionalism. Bio-cultural Functionalism: Bronislaw Malinowski pioneered Participant Observation, arguing that culture exists solely to satisfy biological and psychological needs. Structural Functionalism: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown applied an "**Organic Analogy**," viewing society as a system where institutions function like organs to maintain the stability of the social structure.: Structural and Psychological Turns. Structuralism: Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that human thought is patterned through binary oppositions (e.g., **Nature vs. Culture**) and that culture, like language, is a mental construct.

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