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Anthropology short notes

Biological Anthropology.

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

(b) Biological Anthropology.

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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Biological Anthropology**Definition**

The discipline has evolved from a "Science of Man" focused on the "primitive" to a global, reflexive discipline that addresses contemporary issues like Digital Anthropology, Medical Anthropology, and AI technology. As society changes, anthropology continues to adapt, fulfilling its role as a holistic framework for understanding human diversity and survival.

Thinkers

Neo-Evolutionism: Revived evolutionary theory by explaining cultural change through technology and ecology. Leslie White proposed that cultural development is a function of energy harnessed ($C = E \times T$), while Julian Steward introduced Cultural Ecology, focusing on multilinear evolution and environmental adaptation. Cultural Materialism: Marvin Harris argued that the primary driver of culture is the material constraints of existence, organized into a hierarchy of Infrastructure, Structure, and Superstructure.: The Symbolic and Reflexive Turn (Late 20th Century - Present). Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology: Clifford Geertz viewed culture as a "text" to be read through Thick Description, while Victor Turner focused on the dynamic role of rituals and Communitas. Metabolic Living: Harris Solomon (2016) studied obesity and diabetes in India, linking the physical changes in the Indian body to shifting food systems and global capital.

Definition

Biological anthropology studies human evolution, heredity, variation and adaptation using scientific methods, while recognising the influence of culture on biology.

Example / case study

Information is reconstructed almost entirely through archaeological evidence. Together they explain humans from biological, cultural, linguistic and historical perspectives. Anthropology today extends far beyond the study of tribes.

Thinkers

E.A. Hoebel: "Anthropology is the study of man and his works."

Definition

Drives cycle of suffering until Moksha is attained.

Example / case study

over-consumption of resources → karma teaches restraint. Lucia Michelutti (The Vernacularisation of Democracy, 2008) → Yadavs of UP link identity to Krishna descent. John Cort (Jains in the World, 2001) → Oswals consider themselves superior to other Jain castes (Shrimals, Porwals). Anuja Agrawal (Chaste Wives and Prostitute Sisters, 2008) → Bedia community narrates their Rajput origin despite prostitution as occupation.

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