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Anthropology short notes

Meaning, Scope and development of Anthropology.

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

1.1 Meaning, Scope and development of 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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Meaning

Definition

Anthropology is the holistic, comparative study of humans - biological evolution, culture, language, institutions and behaviour - across time and space (anthropos = human; logos = study).

Example / case study

Harappan urban planning is reconstructed from material remains, showing how archaeology recovers past social organisation. Tribal welfare uses anthropological field methods such as PRA/RRA so schemes fit local culture rather than a one-size plan.

Thinkers

E.A. Hoebel - Anthropology is the study of man and his works. L.P. Vidyarthi - three phases of Indian anthropology: Formative (1774-1919, colonial surveys), Constructive (1920-1949, institutional fieldwork), Analytical (from 1950).

Scope

Definition

Scope spans four branches (CLAP) - Cultural, Linguistic, Archaeological and Physical anthropology - plus applied work in health, development, forensics and policy.

Example / case study

Medical anthropology explains why vaccination or healing behaviour differs by culture, not only by biology. Forensic anthropology identifies human remains after disasters or crime, linking osteology to identity.

Thinkers

Franz Boas - four-field approach: biological, archaeological, linguistic and cultural study of humans together. Ralph Piddington - mapped economic anthropology around production, distribution and consumption in social context.

Development Of Anthropology**Definition**

The subject moved from armchair unilinear evolution and colonial administration, through field ethnography and structural-functional analysis, to applied and reflexive anthropology.

Example / case study

Formative phase (1774-1919): Risley's People of India and Thurston's Castes and Tribes of Southern India - survey anthropology for colonial rule. Constructive phase (1920-1949): Calcutta University department (1920); Majumdar on the Ho, Elwin in Bastar, Karve on caste and kinship.

Thinkers

L.P. Vidyarthi - Formative, Constructive and Analytical phases of anthropology in India. E.B. Tylor - unilinear evolution (savagery-barbarism-civilisation) and the doctrine of survivals. Franz Boas - rejected universal stages; each culture has its own history (historical particularism).

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