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Q3(b)

Give a critical assessment of 'Negrito Problem' in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Give a critical assessment of 'Negrito Problem' in India
- Keep the answer to a 15-mark length of about 200 words

Revision summary

The Negrito problem asked if Andamanese and some southern foragers were a first Indian race.

Risley and Guha framed it with hair and stature.

Looks do not prove African Pygmy kinship or an all-India stratum.

Andaman history is isolation and colonial shock.

Drop the race problem; keep forager ethnography.

Introduction

- **The Negrito problem was a racial puzzle:** whether short, dark, curly-haired groups in India, especially Andamanese and some southern hill people, were a leftover first race. The problem was badly posed.

Body**How it was framed**

- **Risley, Guha**, and earlier travellers used hair and stature to invent a Negrito stratum under Dravidian and Aryan types.
- **Andaman Islanders** were the type case. **Kadar** and other southern foragers were sometimes pulled in.

Critique

- Hair and height are not a people. **Siwalik** apes and later genetics show deep mix, not stacked races.
- Andamanese history is island isolation plus colonial violence, not a museum of all-India origins.
- Linking them to African Pygmies by look is nineteenth-century analogy, not phylogeny.
- **Ghurye** and later anthropologists already doubted that caste and tribe are frozen races.

What remains

- The useful residue is a research question on Andaman and southern forager diversity, not a 'problem' of a missing race.
- Ethno-archaeology of hunt is a better frame than Negrito stock.

Flow diagram

Risley Guha types -> Negrito problem
Negrito problem -> Look-alike not phylogeny
Andaman foragers -> Diversity not stock

Conclusion

The Negrito problem was a colonial racial leftover. Assess it as a failed classification. Keep the Andaman and forager file without the race ladder.

Facts & figures

H. H. Risley

Racial typology that helped install a Negrito layer in India.

B. S. Guha

Census racial map that still used a Negrito category.

Andaman Islanders

Type case of the old problem; a living people, not a fossil race.

Kadar

Southern hill group sometimes misfiled as Negrito by trait lists.

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