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Q5(e)

Austroasiatic languages.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 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

- Write a note on Austroasiatic languages
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Austroasiatic is a language family with **Munda**, **Khasi**, and **Nicobarese** in India.

Santali, Mundari, and Ho are major **Munda** speeches.

Santali is **Eighth Schedule**; many sister languages are not.

The family marks an eastern substratum and distinct kinship vocabularies.

It is a linguistic class, not a Risley race.

Introduction

Austroasiatic languages are a family that includes **Munda** speeches of India and Mon-Khmer languages further east. In India they are a tribal linguistic layer older than many Indo-Aryan overlays.

Body**Indian branches**

- **Munda** languages include **Santali**, Mundari, Ho, and Korku, spoken across Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and pockets of the western peninsula.
- **Khasi** in Meghalaya is Austroasiatic but not **Munda**. **Nicobarese** is another Indian branch.
- **Santali** is in the **Eighth Schedule**. Most sister tongues are not, which is a language-rights gap.

Why anthropology cares

- **S. K. Chatterji** and later linguists used Austroasiatic as evidence of an eastern Indian substratum under Indo-Aryan.
- Kinship and village terms in **Munda** areas often do not match Sanskrit varna maps that **Karve** drew for other zones.
- Script movements, such as Ol Chiki for **Santali**, are identity politics as well as literacy.

Limit

- Family is a linguistic classification. It is not a single race, and it must not be read through **Risley's** types.

Flow diagram

Austroasiatic -> Munda Santali Ho

Austroasiatic -> Khasi

Austroasiatic -> Nicobarese

Conclusion

Austroasiatic in India is mainly **Munda** plus **Khasi** and **Nicobarese**. It is a living tribal language family, not a footnote to Hindi.

Facts & figures

Santali

Largest Munda language; listed in the **Eighth Schedule** and written in Ol Chiki among other scripts.

Khasi

Austroasiatic language of Meghalaya, separate from the Munda branch.

Munda

Indian branch of Austroasiatic spoken on the **Chota Nagpur plateau** and adjoining tracts.

Nicobarese

Austroasiatic speeches of the Nicobar Islands, another Indian branch of the family.

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