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Q2(a)

Illustrate the contribution of Irawati Karve to Indian Anthropology. Make a special mention of her literary contribution

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 2 · 20 marks · Emergence, growth and development of Anthropology in India

4. Emergence, growth and development of Anthropology in India-Contributions of the 18th, 19th and early 20th Century scholar-administrators. Contributions of Indian anthropologists to tribal and caste studies.

Core demand of the question

- Illustrate the contribution of Irawati Karve to Indian Anthropology. Make a special mention of her literary contribution
- Keep the answer to a 20-mark length of about 250 words

Revision summary

Karve mapped Indian kinship by region in **Kinship Organization in India**.

She joined Indology, ethnography, and cautious anthropometry.

Caste was a marriage universe, not a nasal race.

Yuganta treated Mahabharata figures as mortal kin.

Marathi writing took the same method to a non-academic public.

Introduction

Irawati Karve built Indian anthropology from kinship, caste, and field measurement, not from a borrowed African tribe model. Her literary work, especially **Yuganta**, carried the same kinship eye into the Mahabharata.

Body

Kinship and regional structure

- **Kinship Organization in India** mapped north, south, east, and central zones by descent, marriage, and household, using Indology plus ethnography.
- She showed that Dravidian cross-cousin marriage, northern village exogamy, and central hypergamy are regional systems, not one Hindu family.
- Work on Maharashtrian kinship and the joint family tested what census categories hide.

Caste, race, and method

- Trained under **G. S. Ghurye** and later in Germany, she used anthropometry without turning caste into **Risley's** nasal races.
- She treated caste as a kinship and marriage universe with local ranking, which later village studies could use.

- **Deccan College** fieldwork joined linguistics, folklore, and physical notes, a four-field habit rare in Indian sociology.

Literary contribution

- **Yuganta** read Mahabharata figures as mortal kin in a collapsing order, not as plaster gods. That is anthropology of a text.
- Marathi essays and stories carried kinship and women's place to a public that never opened a monograph.
- The literary file is not decoration. It is Karve's method applied to epic persons, duty, and household ruin.

Limit

- Later feminist and Dalit criticism said her caste map still sat too close to Sanskritic centres. The kinship zones remain the teaching grid.

Flow diagram

Karve -> Kinship zones
Karve -> Yuganta epic as kin
Karve -> Caste without Risley race

Conclusion

Karve's gift is a regional kinship map of India and a literary reading of epic persons as kin. **Yuganta** is that anthropology in public language.

Facts & figures

Kinship Organization in India

Karve's 1953 monograph dividing India into kinship zones by descent and marriage.

Yuganta

Her reading of Mahabharata characters as human kin in a moral crisis, not as temple idols.

G. S. Ghurye

Teacher at Bombay whose Indological caste sociology Karve trained in and then recast through kinship.

Deccan College

Pune centre where her fieldwork mixed anthropology, language, and folklore.