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Q7(c)

Elucidate the role of anthropology in nation building. Illustrate with suitable examples.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Role of anthropology in tribal and rural development.

9.2 Role of anthropology in tribal and rural development.

Core demand of the question

- Elucidate the role of anthropology in nation building
- Illustrate with Indian examples
- Cover knowledge, administration, critique, and inclusion
- Avoid claiming that anthropology owns the nation

Revision summary

Nation building needs a map of tribes, castes, languages, and prehistoric pasts, which Indian anthropology supplied.

Elwin, Panchsheel, ASI, and **People of India** fed administration and education.

PESA, FRA, and 371 clauses used ethnographic facts in law.

Critique of dams and mines is also nation building because it names who is left out.

- **Colonial racial census is the warning:** the same craft can rank instead of include.

Introduction

Nation building is the making of a common political community from many languages, tribes, and regions. Anthropology's role in India has been to describe that plurality, to advise administration, and to criticise policies that break land and dignity. It does not replace the Constitution. It supplies the social map the Constitution must govern.

Body**Knowledge of plurality**

- **S. C. Roy**, **N. K. Bose**, **Irawati Karve**, **M. N. Srinivas**, **L. P. Vidyarthi**, and **Verrier Elwin** documented tribes, villages, kinship, and sacred geography. A nation that does not know its groups cannot include them.
- The **Anthropological Survey of India** and **People of India** produced a community inventory used in education and, with caution, in policy.
- Physical anthropology and prehistoric archaeology (**Sankalia**, Siwalik teams, Harappan excavations) gave the nation a deep past that is not only a Sanskrit text.

Administration and protection

- Elwin's **NEFA philosophy** and **Nehru's Panchsheel** were anthropological inputs into frontier state-making.

- Fifth and Sixth Schedules, **PESA**, and **FRA** drew on tribal ethnography even when lawyers wrote the final text.
- **Census ethnography from Risley onward also shows the danger:** anthropology can serve ranking. Nation building needs the critical use, not the colonial type list.

Critique as a public service

- Studies of dams (**Baviskar**), mining (**Samata**, Niyamgiri), and PVTGs (**Xaxa**) tell the nation where development splits the people.
- **Ambedkar** was not an anthropologist by department, but his caste sociology is required reading for a republic that claims equality.
- Forensic and developmental anthropology (nutrition, sickle-cell, disaster) are practical nation-building tools in health.

Inclusion and limits

- Anthropology can train officers to hear Gram Sabha and custom. It cannot by itself stop a mine.
- If it only celebrates diversity without land rights, it becomes a festival of costumes.

Illustrations

- Nagaland and Mizoram statehood used ethnography of custom in **Article 371A/G**.
- **Dongria Kondh** Gram Sabha at Niyamgiri used anthropological and legal recognition of sacred hill and forest dependence.
- Village studies (Rampura, Bisipara, Tanjore) still train the civil services in the social structure behind the file.

Flow diagram

Ethnography archaeology -> Map of plurality
 Map of plurality -> Panchsheel PESA FRA
 Ethnography archaeology -> Critique of dams mines
 Panchsheel PESA FRA -> Inclusive republic
 Critique of dams mines -> Inclusive republic

Conclusion

Anthropology builds the nation by mapping peoples, advising protective law, and criticising dispossession. Indian examples run from Roy and Elwin to PESA, FRA, and Niyamgiri. The role is evidence and empathy in public reason, not a substitute for democratic power.

Facts & figures

S. C. Roy

Early Indian ethnographer of Mundas and Oraons whose work made tribal Chotanagpur visible to the national public.

A Philosophy for NEFA

Elwin's policy book linking anthropology to frontier nation-building in today's Arunachal.

People of India

Anthropological Survey project documenting communities as a national knowledge base.

Niyamgiri Gram Sabha

Legal-political process that used Dongria Kondh sacred geography in a national court and local assembly.

Xaxa Committee 2014

Official anthropological-sociological audit of tribal development for the Union government.

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