ANTHROPOLOGY NEWS DIARY

(AND)

12.05.2021

FOR UPSC CSE MAINS

This series provides compilation of daily CURRENT AFFAIRS of Anthropology.

It is aimed at addressing the requirement of aspirants to add contemporary aspects of the subject to the answers.

It also helps in understanding the trends of anthropology across India and the world.

**NOTE:** Please attempt the questions given at the end of the document and can upload on the [telegram channel: Sosin for Anthropology Q&A](#), for peer review
INDEX

A. SOCIO - CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
   1. Khasis : India’s Indigenous Matrilineal Society .........................................................03
   2. Anthropologists and Bitcoins ......................................................................................04

B. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
   1. Cerebellum ..................................................................................................................05
   2. Origin of Hominin .........................................................................................................06

C. ARCHAEOLOGY
   1. Israeli Archaeologists’ expedition ...............................................................................07
   2. Chinese Archaeology ..................................................................................................08

UPSC ANTHROPOLOGY PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS .................................................09
PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR PEER REVIEW ..................................................................09

Note - For convenience, the respective reference links have been dropped at the end of every topic.
A. Socio-Cultural Anthropology

1. Khasis: India's Indigenous Matrilineal Society

Who are the Khasis?

- According to local folklore, Khasis come from seven divine clans. In the 1967 book, The History And Culture Of The Khasi People by Hamlet Bareh, the Indian author and historian traces them to an ancient Austroic race in South-East Asia who descended from a Mon-Khmer group of people in the remote Burmese jungles.

- While it's uncertain when Khasis migrated west to the mountains and foothills of north-eastern India, linguistic evidence shows that their language – Khasi – has similarities to Mon-Khmer dialects.

- During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, some Khasi families became separated and now live across the border from Meghalaya in Bangladesh. Another significant portion of the population lives in the neighbouring Indian state of Assam.

- As warriors who often battled with other groups for land, Khasi men often went down to the plains for clashes. During those battles, some men died. Others settled for a new life in the plains.

- Left without their partners, Khasi women would remarry or find other partners, and it often became difficult to determine a child's paternity.

- Khasi matriliny shares similarities with the world's other handful of matrilineal societies, such as wealth and property passing from mother to their daughters, and descent through the mother's line.

- Traditionally, Khasis live in close-knit extended families or clans. Since children take their mother's last name, daughters ensure the continuity of the clan.

- Daughters have the liberty to live in their ancestral home or move out, except for the youngest daughter (called ka khadduh), who is the custodian of the property. Even after her marriage, she never leaves home. She looks after her parents and eventually becomes the head of the household after her mother's death.

- With colonisation and missionary education, however, some Khasis left their villages, looking for work in towns.

- When nuclear families emerged, the knis' power began to decline, and while villages still follow the traditional matrilineal structure, in some urban Christian families today, fathers are the head of the household.

- Although some Khasi fathers now head up certain households, Passah – like most people in Meghalaya – believes that age-old Khasi cultural practices through the mother's line are so embedded in their lives that Khasi's unique matriliny will survive for decades to come.

- Meanwhile, things are also evolving for Khasi women. The traditional matrilineal society has always kept women out of the larger decision-making process in social institutions like the village council.
But in recent times, Passah believes that it's slowly beginning to improve, especially in urban localities.

Reference:

2. Anthropologists and Bitcoins

• Anthropology is a social science that is concerned with understanding culture through participatory observation, or ethnography: cultural immersion in the social worlds being studied.

• Anthropologists often end up in heated debates with economists, who instead understand the world through numeric aggregates and abstract models.

• Mainstream economists take a top-down view of the world based on deductive reasoning stemming from their models and assumptions, which are heavily influenced by classical Newtonian physics and its notion of “equilibrium of the heavenly bodies” and lack the “systems perspective” that emerged from thermodynamics and influenced engineering.

• Another key element of anthropology is its concern for the “emic” (people’s subjective beliefs and experiences of the world) above the “etic” (objective truth).

• So, anthropology takes the view that objective measures such as various economic growth parameters can mean very little when abstracted away from people’s experiences and lived realities.

• Looking at the emic gives anthropology a superpower: the ability and need to be open to alternative belief systems, challenge its own mental models, take in additional insights, and craft a more nuanced and holistic view of the world as a result.

• In anthropology, emic truth is multiplicitous and relative rather than universal and absolute.
● “Cultural relativism” doesn’t mean that “2 plus 2 does not equal 4”. It just means that a particular belief system may have come to that conclusion, and that in itself may reveal something about that culture.

● Anthropologists recognize that math and physics have more adequate tools, languages and frameworks to assess the etic.

● Anthropologists have ventured to study the world of bitcoin miners, holders, speculators, and local bitcoin merchants, among others. This has allowed them to understand the communities’ beliefs and points of view by going beyond their own perspectives. Many anthropologists have come out of the studies inspired by the ethos and beliefs of these communities, as I will explain in more depth in the next section.

● Anthropologists have no problems admitting that bitcoin is money, first and foremost “because people call it so, [and] many use it as money”.

● Anthropologists reject the notion that Bitcoin is just about speculation. Bitcoin is an asset for owners to hold for the long term.

● The key takeaway here is that anthropologists have many interesting things to say about Bitcoin. In contrast, economists’ commentaries are often very stale and uninformed.

● Anthropologists recognize the important role that Bitcoin is playing in leading us to rethink what money is, which in turn has many consequences for social life. At the same time, anthropologists also recognize that the social dynamics and community surrounding Bitcoin, its memes and the socio-cultural elements of the Bitcoin phenomenon are critical to its success.

Reference:
https://bitcoinmagazine.com/culture/anthropologists-are-interested-in-bitcoin

2. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Cerebellum

Context: The cerebellum -- a part of the brain once recognized mainly for its role in coordinating movement -- underwent evolutionary changes that may have contributed to human culture, language and tool use, according to a new study.

Highlights:

● Scientists studying how humans evolved their remarkable capacity to think and learn have frequently focused on the prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain vital for executive functions, like moral reasoning and decision making. But recently, the cerebellum has begun receiving more attention for its role in human cognition.

● Compared to chimpanzees and rhesus macaques, humans showed greater epigenetic differences in the cerebellum than the prefrontal cortex, highlighting the importance of the cerebellum in human brain evolution.
The epigenetic differences were especially apparent in genes involved in brain development, brain inflammation, fat metabolism and synaptic plasticity -- the strengthening or weakening of connections between neurons depending on how often they are used.

The epigenetic differences identified in the new study are relevant for understanding how the human brain functions and its ability to adapt and make new connections.

These epigenetic differences may also be involved in aging and disease. Previous studies have shown that epigenetic differences between humans and chimpanzees in the prefrontal cortex are associated with genes involved in psychiatric conditions and neurodegeneration.

Overall, the new study affirms the importance of including the cerebellum when studying how the human brain evolved.

The results of the study support an important role for the cerebellum in human brain evolution and suggest that previously identified epigenetic features distinguishing the human neocortex are not unique to the neocortex.

Reference:
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/05/210506142039.htm

2.Origin of Hominin Context:
Understanding the origins of the human lineage (hominins) requires reconstructing the morphology, behavior, and environment of the chimpanzee-human last common ancestor. In new research, paleoanthropologists from the American Museum of Natural History and elsewhere looked at the major discoveries in this area since Charles Darwin’s works and concluded that the morphology of fossil apes was varied and that it is likely that the last shared ape ancestor had its own set of traits, different from those of modern humans and modern apes.
Highlights:

● Humans diverged from apes — specifically, the chimpanzee lineage (genus Pan) — at some point between 9.3 and 6.5 million years ago, and habitual bipedalism evolved early in hominins.

● To understand hominin origins, paleoanthropologists aim to reconstruct the physical characteristics, behavior, and environment of the last common ancestor of humans and chimps.

● In The Descent of Man in 1871, Charles Darwin speculated that humans originated in Africa from an ancestor different from any living species.

● 150 years later, possible hominins have been found in eastern and central Africa, and some claim even in Europe.

● In addition, more than 50 fossil ape genera are now documented across Africa and Eurasia.

● There are two major approaches to resolving the human origins problem:
  1. ‘top-down,’ which relies on analysis of living apes, especially chimpanzees;
  2. And ‘bottom-up,’ which puts importance on the larger tree of mostly extinct apes.

● For example, some scientists assume that hominins originated from a chimp-like knuckle-walking ancestor.

● Others argue that the human lineage originated from an ancestor more closely resembling, in some features, some of the strange Miocene apes.

● ‘Top-down’ studies sometimes ignore the reality that living apes are just the survivors of a much larger, and now mostly extinct, group.

● On the other hand, studies based on the ‘bottom-up’ approach are prone to giving individual fossil apes an important evolutionary role that fits a preexisting narrative.

● The unique and sometimes unexpected features and combinations of features observed among fossil apes, which often differ from those of living apes, are necessary to untangle which features hominins inherited from our ape ancestors and which are unique to our lineage.

● Living apes alone offer insufficient evidence. Current disparate theories regarding ape and human evolution would be much more informed if, together with early hominins and living apes, Miocene apes were also included in the equation.

● In other words, fossil apes are essential to reconstruct the ‘starting point’ from which humans and chimpanzees evolved.

Reference:

A. Archaeology

1. Israeli Archaeologists’ expedition
Contexts: Israeli Archaeologists Find Rare Bronze Oil Lamp
Highlights:

- Decorated bronze oil lamps were discovered throughout the Roman Empire.
- For the most part, such oil lamps stood on stylish candelabras or were hung on a chain.
- Collections around the world contain thousands of these bronze lamps, many of which were made in intricate shapes, indicating the artistic freedom that Roman metal artists possessed.
- This lamp is a unique find, and as far as we know, the first of its kind discovered in Israel. The uniqueness of the current object is that it is only half a face.
- The lamp may have been attached to a flat object or wall, serving as a wall lamp, but the possibility that it was an object used in some sort of ceremonial ritual should not be ruled out.
- Foundation deposits (offerings) were prevalent in the ancient world and were intended for luck, and to ensure the continued existence of the building and its occupants, and they were usually buried under the floors of buildings or foundations.
- The building where the lamp was discovered was built directly on top of the Pilgrimage Road at the end of the Second Temple period.
- The construction of such a massive structure in the period after the destruction of Jewish Jerusalem demonstrates the importance of the area even after the destruction of the Second Temple.
- It is possible that the importance of the building, and the need to bless its activity with luck by burying a foundation deposit, was due to its proximity to the Siloam Pool, which was also used in the Roman period as the central source of water within the city.

Reference:

2. Chinese Archaeology

Early in April, news broke that a 3,000-year-old “lost golden city” had been discovered in Luxor, Egypt.

- Described in some articles as the most important find since the 1922 discovery of the tomb of the boy king Tutankhamen, the city of Aten, founded sometime between 1391 and 1353 B.C. — during Egypt’s 18th dynasty — appears to have been the largest settlement of that era.
- The lavish coverage of the Aten dig contrasted with the lack of attention given in the United States, two weeks before, to a stunning new set of discoveries, dating to about 1,200 B.C. at the site of Sanxingdui in Sichuan province, China, near Chengdu.
- There archaeologists unearthed more than 500 objects, including a large gold mask, ivory, bronzes and remnants of silk — with more coming.
- The ivory finds include whole tusks of Asian elephants — evidence of tribute brought to the Sanxingdui leaders from across the Sichuan region — and anthropomorphic bronze
sculptures distinct from other contemporary East Asian bronzes (which were primarily ritual vessels and weapons).

- New, highly meticulous archaeological work is providing unprecedented detail about this important site, a crucial window into an early state in East Asia.
- If U.S. outlets largely ignored the news, media interest in China was intense, with multi day, prime-time coverage, including live broadcast of the excavations. And the attention was warranted: Discoveries at Sanxingdui have totally transformed our understanding of how multiple, regionally distinct yet interrelated early cultures intertwined to produce what came to be understood as “Chinese” civilization.
- Chinese archaeology has a very different history from Egyptian archaeology. It has largely been done by local, Chinese archaeologists, for one thing; it was not an imperialist project. And it was also tied, early on, to nationalist claims of identity.
- In the late 1920s, Chinese archaeologists began to unearth what turned out to be the last capital of the Shang Dynasty (dating to circa 1250 to 1050 B.C.) near Anyang, in Henan province, right in the heart of the Central Plains. These excavations revealed a city with a large population fed by millet agriculture and domesticated animals; there were palace foundations, massive royal tombs, evidence of large-scale human sacrifice and perhaps most importantly, cattle and turtle bones used in divination rituals and inscribed with the earliest Chinese texts.
- The sophistication of the society that was revealed in these digs helped to solidify belief that there was a single main source of subsequent Chinese culture: This was its epicenter.

Reference:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/05/11/chinese-archaeology-egyptian-bias-sanxingdui/

UPSC Previous year questions based on today’s concept:
1. Economic Anthropology (L.Q. - 1993)

DAILY PRACTICE QUESTION/S FOR MAINS 2021.

Pl do not forget to upload your answer sheet for a peer review on the telegram channel: Sosin for Anthropology Q&A

1. Patrilineal societies of India. (20 Marks)
2. Role of Anthropology in understanding modern trade and business practices. (20 Marks)