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](https://t.me/SosinforAnthropology), for peer review.
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Note - For convenience, the respective reference links have been dropped at the end of every topic.
A. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Human Ancestors & Processed Food

- An article from BBC Future explains that the earliest evidence of food processing can be linked to *Homo habilis*, a hominid that roamed Africa between 2.4 million and 1.4 million years ago.

- In contrast to earlier hominin, *Homo habilis* had teeth that were much too small to rip apart raw animal flesh, a fact that implies they had discovered how to cook meat to make it easily chewable, and that their faces evolved accordingly.

- In addition to conquering the power of fire, *Homo habilis*’ adoption of tools significantly expanded their diet; by thinly slicing meat and pounding firm, hard-to-chew vegetables into small pieces, these primitive home cooks managed to reduce their need to chew by a whopping five percent.

- *Homo habilis*’ body didn’t need to focus as much energy on its face muscles, so while the skull stayed about the same, the size of the face got smaller.

- By the time *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis* came around, their teeth were relatively tiny in comparison to their big, hulking skulls, implying that these human ancestors had fully embraced the wonders of cooked food.

- Aside from reducing their need to chew, cooking also allowed them to absorb more calories and nutrients from their food, leading to stronger, bigger bodies and the development of better brains.

- When *Homo sapiens* finally arrived on the scene 300,000 years ago, our species came out of the gate with relatively small teeth, chiseled faces, and complex neural networks.

Reference:
https://thetakeout.com/the-history-of-processed-foods-is-longer-than-you-think-1846917616
2. Hominid Reconstruction

Context:
Soft tissue measurements critical to hominid reconstruction

Highlights:
- Accurate soft tissue measurements are critical when making reconstructions of human ancestors, a new study from the University of Adelaide and Arizona State University has found.
- Reconstructing extinct members of the Hominidae, or hominids, including their facial soft tissue, has become increasingly popular with many approximations of their faces presented in museum exhibitions, popular science publications and at conference presentations worldwide.
- It is essential that accurate facial soft tissue thickness measurements are used when reconstructing the faces of hominids to reduce the variability exhibited in reconstructions of the same individuals.
- Hominids have been readily accepted to line the halls of even the most trusted institutions. They are predominantly used for disseminating scientific information to the public in museum displays and students in university courses, which will influence the way humanity is perceived and defined more generally.
- Up until now soft tissue reconstruction has been based on mean tissue depth measurements which does not take into account variation in tissue depths between individuals.
- In this study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, the authors have formulated a facial soft tissue thickness dataset for adult chimpanzees, and a set of regression equations that can be used to reconstruct the soft tissues for ancient hominids, such as those dated from 4.0 to 1.2 million years ago.
- Correlations have been found and multiple regression models have been used to generate equations for improving estimations of soft tissue thickness from craniometrics in modern humans.
- This research is invaluable for future efforts reconstructing ancient hominids, as well as for comparative studies within and outside the discipline of biological/physical anthropology.

Reference:
https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-06/ua-std06321.php
3. Fossils & Animals

Context:
A large group of iconic fossils widely believed to shed light on the origins of many of Earth's animals and the communities they lived in may be hiding a secret. Scientists have modeled how exceptionally well preserved fossils that record the largest and most intense burst of evolution ever seen could have been moved by mudflows.

Highlights:
- The finding, published in *Communications Earth & Environment*, offers a cautionary note on how palaeontologists build a picture from the remains of the creatures they study.
- Until now, it has been widely accepted the fossils buried in mudflows in the Burgess Shale in Canada that show the result of the Cambrian explosion 505 million years ago had all lived together but that's now in doubt.
- This finding might surprise scientists or lead to them striking a more cautionary tone in how they interpret early marine ecosystems from half a billion years ago.
- It has been assumed that because the Burgess Shale fossils are so well preserved, they couldn't have been transported over large distances.
- However, this new research shows that the general type of flow responsible for the deposits in which they were buried does not cause further damage to deceased animals. This means the fossils found in individual layers of sediment, and assumed to represent animal communities, could actually have been living far apart in distance.
- The site is an area rich in fossils entombed in the deposits of mudflows and is one of the world's most important fossil sites, with more than 65,000 specimens already collected and, so far, more than 120 species counted.
- It's not known precisely what caused the mudflows which buried and moved the animals which became fossilised, but the area was subject to multiple flows, causing well preserved fossils to be found at many different levels in the shale.
- Palaeontologists need to appreciate the nature of the sediments that fossils are preserved within and what the implications of that are. We could be overestimating the complexity of early marine animal communities and therefore the patterns and drivers of evolution that have led to our present day diversity and complexity.
- The researchers hope to do further study to investigate whether differences in the species that are present in other fossil sites are due to evolutionary changes through time or the nature of the flows and the effects of transport and preservation of the fossils.

Reference:
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/06/210602091406.htm
B. SOCIO - CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Ethnocentrism

- Ethnocentrism is a term applied to the cultural or ethnic bias—whether conscious or unconscious—in which an individual views the world from the perspective of his or her own group, establishing the in-group as archetypal and rating all other groups with reference to this ideal. This form of tunnel vision often results in:
  - (1) an inability to adequately understand cultures that are different from one’s own and
  - (2) value judgments that preference the in-group and assert its inherent superiority, thus linking the concept of ethnocentrism to multiple forms of chauvinism and prejudice, including nationalism, tribalism, racism, and even sexism and disability discrimination.
- Ethnocentrism is a concept that was coined within anthropology and formed the cornerstone of its early evolutionary theory before becoming one of the discipline’s primary social critiques.
- It continues to both challenge and inspire anthropologists, shifting in meaning and application with theoretical trends and across the subdisciplines.
- For many anthropologists in the Boasian tradition, ethnocentrism is the antithesis of anthropology, a mind-set that it actively counters through cultural relativism, education, and applied activities such as cultural brokering.
- Physical anthropologists have tended to define the concept more generally as preferential cooperation with a defined in-group and to interrogate its potential evolutionary origins, while the postmodern trend has been a growing suspicion of the anthropologist’s own ability to transcend cultural bias in his or her analysis and presentation of the “other,” leading to an emphasis on reflexivity and subjective diversity.
- Outside of the discipline, ethnocentrism is a topic of study for biologists, political scientists, communication experts, psychologists, and sociologists, particularly in the areas of politics, identity, and conflict. Marketing has seized on the term to describe consumers who prefer domestically produced goods, and the derivative ethnocentric has become a common criticism in the era of globalization for those assuming their own cultural superiority.

Reference:

2. Humanity in Diversity

- Culture is more than just the arts – it’s the totality of systems of behavior and thought that is transmitted from one generation to the next, that we learn as we grow up as a part of a particular community, in a particular place and time.
- It includes traditions, religious and ethical beliefs, social norms and taboos. It’s how we are taught to make sense of the world around us, determine what is right or wrong and how to live our lives.
- It’s something that goes beyond our biological drives and instincts – every animal needs to eat and drink, but culture is what humans have developed to guide us in what we can eat, when we should eat, how we must eat. It is something learned, symbolic and shared.
- Culture is something that is fundamentally human and fundamentally humanizing.
According to the United Nations, three-quarters of the world’s major conflicts have a cultural dimension. You only need to look at the headlines throughout the years to realize the truth of this statement.

Even now – faced with existential threats such as climate change and a worldwide pandemic – there are those who use culture as the justification for war and atrocity.

States that are more interested in mobilizing an army can hijack culture and turn it into an engine of repression, all in the service of a national identity that excludes inconvenient narratives and unwanted minorities.

Some of the very greatest of crimes against humanity, such as ethnic cleansing or genocide, are fueled by a perverse desire to wipe out cultures other than one’s own.

Yet culture can also be wrongfully twisted in other ways, not as a weapon but as a shield to cover long-standing inequalities and injustice. Cultural relativism – when taken to mean that an action that is justified within a culture cannot be judged as wrong by one outside it – undermines the idea of universal human rights and has been used to justify the continuation of historical practices that are objectively harmful to the disadvantaged. This includes concepts such as sexist double standards and child marriages.

Culture is not static. This is something that those who hide behind cultural relativism refuse to understand – to value culture and heritage is not the same as demanding the impossible: that it remains unchanged. Humans change, we evolve with the times and so too do our customs and traditions.

To respect culture and heritage means that we don’t erase our past, and we don’t discard traditions simply because they’re old – we see their longevity instead as a mark of distinction, as a thread that ties us to those who have gone before us.

Culture is something that makes us distinctly human. But for culture to be truly humanizing, it must not be one that seeks to dominate difference, but one that celebrates our diversity.

Reference:
https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2021/05/25/2100565/humanity-diversity

UPSC Previous year questions based on today’s concept:
1. Cultural Relativism (10 Marks - 2016)
2. Biological Evolution of Early Man (S.N. - 1998)

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. Cultural relativism and ethnocentrism (20 Marks)