ANTHROPOLOGY NEWS DIARY

(AND)

19.06.2021

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. SOCIAL, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Why Anthropology Matters........................................................................................................................................03
2. Deceased & Sapling Planting Culture.........................................................................................................................04
3. Culture & Cuisine...........................................................................................................................................................04

B. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. DNA - Packaging Motor..................................................................................................................................................05
2. Great Apes & Australopithecines.....................................................................................................................................06

UPSC ANTHROPOLOGY PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS.......................................................................................................06
PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR PEER REVIEW......................................................................................................................06

Note - For convenience, the respective reference links have been dropped at the end of every topic.
A. SOCIAL, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Why Anthropology Matters

- In 2012, both Kiplinger and Forbes ranked anthropology as the least valuable undergraduate major, unleashing a small wave of indignation as many outside the field rushed to defend the study of culture as ideal preparation for any life or career in an interconnected and globalized world.

- Ruth Benedict, acolyte of the great Franz Boas and in 1947 president of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), reputedly said that the very purpose of anthropology was to make the world safe for human differences.

- Race was accepted as a given, a biological fact, with lineages dividing white from Black reaching back through primordial time. Differences in customs and beliefs reflected differences in intelligence and destiny, with every culture finding its rung on an evolutionary ladder rising from the savage to the barbarian to the civilized of the Strand in London, with technological wizardry, the great achievement of the West, being the sole measure of progress and success.

- Sexual and behavioral characteristics were presumed fixed. Whites were smart and industrious, Blacks physically strong but lazy, and some people were barely distinguishable from animals; as late as 1902 it was debated in parliament in Australia whether aborigines were human beings.

- Politics was the domain of men, charity work and the home the realm of women. Women’s suffrage only came in 1919. Immigrants were seen as a threat, even by those who had themselves only just managed to claw their way ashore.

- The poor were responsible for their own miseries, even as the British army reported that the height of officers recruited in 1914 was on average six inches taller than that of enlisted men, simply because of nutrition. As for the blind, deaf and dumb, the cripples, morons, Mongoloids, and the mad, they were best locked away, lobotomized and even killed to remove them from the gene pool.

- Widely acknowledged as the father of American cultural anthropology, Franz Boas was the first scholar to explore in a truly open and neutral manner how human social perceptions are formed, and how members of distinct societies become conditioned to see and interpret the world. What, he asked, was the nature of knowing? Who decided what was to be known? How do seemingly random beliefs and convictions converge into this thing called culture, a term that he was the first to promote as an organizing principle, a useful point of intellectual departure.

- Every culture was a unique expression of the human imagination and heart. Each was a unique answer to a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human and alive? When asked that question, humanity responds in 7,000 different languages, voices that collectively comprise our repertoire for dealing with all the challenges that will confront us as a species.
2. Deceased & Sapling Planting Culture

- In the lush green village of Kalihand, residents commemorate their deceased by planting trees, the fruits of which are meant for friends, neighbours and travellers.
- Surrounded by lush green trees and rugged mountain slopes, villagers in Kalihand have a unique culture of commemorating the dead by planting a fruit tree and watering it for at least a year or longer till it bears fruit. Nearly a third of the population in the village are Hindus who follow this tradition.
- Pandit Daya Ram, the village priest, referred to Garuda Puran (a Hindu religious text that speaks of heaven and hell, karma and rebirth and ancestral rites, among other things) to describe how this culture is deeply rooted in religious beliefs.
- Those who follow the Sanatan Dharma, the priest explained, believe that there is life even after death. And the deeds you do in your life, or those done in your name after your death, decide your path - either leading you to heaven or hell.
- When someone rests under the shade of the tree or the fruit satiates someone's hunger, it becomes punya ka kaam that would help in the salvation of the one who has died.
- Planting a tree also ensures that the soul of the deceased would have shade to rest and fruit to eat.
- There is a shared understanding among the villagers about what a funeral entails. For economically weaker families, the villagers who come to mourn the deceased contribute financially in order to offer support and sympathy to the bereaved.

Reference:
tribuneindia.com/news/schools/in-this-jammu-village-the-dead-live-on-in-the-trees-269878

3. Culture & Cuisine

- One of the benefits of dealing with different cultures is the opportunity to explore the tastes of foreign lands and other people. Food and drink are as much representations of culture as are the arts, architecture, attire, or human behavior.
- According to agricultural experts there is some truth to the assumption that groceries do have different qualities in different countries, or rather, in different cultures.
- In the case of the United States and Europe this has very little to do with location, soil, or climate. The main reason why produce tastes different here and there is choice. Consumers in the U.S. have other preferences in groceries than most Europeans. It comes down to culture.
- Add to this the unwavering American belief in progress and the benefits of technology, and it becomes clear why adherence to tradition doesn’t have to be a strong value. Food for U.S.
consumers is produced throughout North America and shipped across the country. Refrigeration technologies were first adopted here and made it possible to store perishable foods longer.

- The industrialization of food production resulted in new breeds of produce. The population growth called for higher quantities. Farmers and growers are paid for yield, not for flavor.
- Finally, geography plays another role here. European cultures are rather regional, and this means food traditions have remained intact in fairly small areas.
- Within these regions and communities people often shop locally, from regional producers. And they shop more frequently than Americans. Europeans often go to the local market daily, whereas millions of shoppers in the U.S. purchase one or two weeks’ supply of groceries in one single visit to the big box store.
- All these consumer choices, based on cultural behaviors, have had a lasting impact on how our food is grown and what it tastes like.

Reference:
https://theculturemastery.com/2016/03/30/how-culture-affects-cuisine/

B. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. DNA - Packaging Motor

- Researchers have discovered the inner workings of the molecular motor that packages genetic material into double-stranded DNA viruses.
- The advance provides insight into a critical step in the reproduction cycle of viruses such as pox, herpes and adenoviruses.
- It could also inspire researchers creating microscopic machines based on naturally occurring biomotors.
- There were several missing pieces of information that prevented us from understanding how these kinds of DNA packaging motors work, which hindered our ability to design therapeutics or evolve new technologies.
- Viruses come in many varieties, but their classification generally depends upon whether they encode their genetic blueprints into RNA or single- or double-stranded DNA. The difference affects how the genetic material is packaged into new viruses.
- While some viruses build a protein container called a capsid around newly produced RNA or DNA, others create the capsid first and then fill it with the genetic material.
- Most double-stranded DNA viruses take the latter route, which presents many challenges. DNA is negatively charged and does not want to be crammed together into a small space.
- Forcing DNA into a tiny capsid at that pressure requires an extremely powerful motor. Until recently, researchers only had a vague sense of how the motor worked. "This work demonstrates how even simple viruses have evolved very complex machinery," said Wilson Francisco, a program director in NSF’s Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences.
Reference:

2. Great Apes & Australopithecines

- A research team measured the rate of blood flow to the cognitive part of the brain, based on the size of the holes in the skull that passed the supply arteries.
- The research team calibrated this technique in humans and other mammals and then applied it to 96 great ape skulls and 11 Australopithecus fossil skulls.
- The study revealed a higher rate of blood flow to the cognitive part of the brain of living great apes compared to Australopithecus.
- The results were unexpected by anthropologists because it has been generally assumed that intelligence is directly related to the size of the brain.
- At first, brain size seems reasonable because it is a measure of the number of neurons. On second thought, however, cognition relies not only on the number of neurons, but also on the number of connections between them, called synapses.
- The human brain uses 70% of its energy on synaptic activity, and that amount of energy relies on a proportionately high blood supply to deliver oxygen.
- Although our brain occupies only 2% of our body weight, it uses 15-20% of our energy and requires about 15% of the blood from the heart.
- However, the study shows that cerebral blood flow rate of human ancestor's falls well below the data derived from modern, non-human primates.

Reference:

UPSC Previous year questions based on today's concept:
2. Pattern Of Culture (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. Scope of Applied Physical Anthropology. (20 Marks)