ANTHROPOLOGY NEWS DIARY

(AND)

24.06.2021

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

1. Iron Age People
   • From outgrown baby clothes to hideous mugs once used by a parent, there are certain items it is curiously hard to part with. Now research suggests the difficulty of what to do with such objects could date back at least 2,000 years.
   • Writing in the journal Antiquity, Dr Lindsey Büster, an archaeologist at the University of York, argues that bone spoons and gaming pieces found between the walls of an iron-age roundhouse at the Scottish hillfort settlement of Broxmouth, as well as worn-out grinding stones in its floors, could be a centuries-old example of the same conundrum.
   • The locations of the items, said Büster, were clearly not an accident, while their low value meant they were not put away because of their worth.
   • The archaeologists have things like grave goods, which people understand as things to accompany the dead into the afterlife, and we have hoards – really shiny objects deposited in certain places without bodies which people interpret as maybe gifts for the gods or hidden for safekeeping.
   • But then there is this category of artefacts – these little caches of objects which aren’t necessarily accompanying the dead and they are not high material value or of exotic quality but they are clearly not just rubbish either. They have been very deliberately deposited.
   • The realisation had come to her after talking to people about death, grief and bereavement in modern society, and hearing how quickly mundane objects could become hard to part with.
   • Dr Sarah Tarlow, a professor of archaeology at the University of Leicester, who was not involved with the work, said the research highlighted how objects were not just important for their practical or symbolic function but also for their idiosyncratic and personal meanings, which were often about memory and emotion.
   • It is a nice way of looking at later prehistory which is not about power and status and it is not about religion and cultural identity. It is about the emotional bonds between people.

Reference:
https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/jun/22/iron-age-people-emotionally-attached-objects-researcher

2. 18th century roads
   • Archaeologists have excavated a wooden road in the town of Jarosław, Poland.
   • The discovery was made during works on the present-day road surface and sewage connections, revealing a 30-metre-long wooden road in the town centre that would have connected to the city gate.
   • The road represents one of the longest wooden routes discovered in Poland and is approximately 3 metres in width, meaning that it was a one-way system for carriages passing through the town.
• The road consisted of a load-bearing structure in the form of three wooden joists arranged transversely to the beams that were connected with pegs.
• There are no traces of hooves on the road or carriages grooves that ran along it, which means that the wood used for its construction – probably oak – was very durable. Additionally – as the research shows – traces of repairs are visible in several places, which proves that there was regular “road works”.
• After removing parts of the road for preservation, archaeologists also uncovered an earlier hardened road beneath that dates from around the 14th century.

Reference:
https://www.heritagedaily.com/2021/06/archaeologists-discover-18th-century-wooden-road/139416

3. Ancient Grave
• People living across Europe around 1,400 years ago had a habit of reopening graves and taking out objects for reasons that archaeologists are trying to understand, according to a new study.
• The practice of reopening and manipulating graves soon after burial, traditionally described — and dismissed — as 'robbing,' is documented at cemeteries from Transylvania to southern England.
• In their study, the researchers reanalyzed previously excavated cemeteries from five regions of Europe. They found that between roughly the sixth and eight centuries A.D., people frequently opened graves and took out objects for reasons that don’t seem linked to grave robbery.
• The researchers also found that many of the items removed from the graves were in poor condition, particularly the swords, and would have had no practical use or economic value, the researchers said.
• Grave reopening became part of a repertoire of possible engagements with mortuary remains over a wide geographic area, but motivations were probably driven as much by local concerns as by broadly shared understandings of death and its rites.
• Swords and brooches are some of the most symbolically laden objects in the graves. These were given as gifts and passed on as heirlooms; they’re objects used to link people, including across generations. They bring stories and memories. So it’s likely that they are retrieved for these reasons.
• The reopening custom spread over western Europe from the later sixth century and reached a peak in the seventh century.

Reference:
https://www.livescience.com/medieval-graves-reopened.html
B. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Metabolic Indicators of Obesity

- A recent paper by researchers from St John’s Medical College and Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research has found that, in India, metabolic indicators of obesity (abnormal blood sugar or blood lipids) are seen well before the child becomes obviously overweight by anthropometry.

- The paper published in *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in April suggests that all children need to be evaluated by blood metabolic biomarkers, in addition to the standard anthropometry (height and weight) markers.

- While the biggest problem in India is perceived to be undernutrition, where children have weight and height well below the World Health Organization reference for their age (undersize), a worry has begun to surface that there is also an increase in overweight children.

- The most recent survey available, the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), done in 2016-2018 under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with UNICEF and the Population Council, shows that there are 35% stunted and 33% thin (underweight) among children less than 5 years in India, but also, about 5% overweight.

- However, this double burden, as measured by body size (anthropometry), hides a major unseen problem. While we measure over and undernutrition with external signs that we can see, there is a hidden but very real risk, called metabolic disease or risk, that occurs even before children become overweight, and even in thin children.

- Metabolic markers of obesity are measured by blood sampling, where an increase in blood sugar or blood lipids has damaging consequences for tissues through glycation (as in diabetes) or through the deposition of lipids in blood vessels. These are also referred to as cardio-metabolic risk factors, as they substantially increase the propensity to develop related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including hypertension, heart attack, angina, stroke and diabetes.

- In the CNNS survey, both anthropometry and venous blood metabolic biomarkers of overnutrition were evaluated in about 20,000 children across India. The biomarkers were blood glucose, glycated hemoglobin, serum triglycerides and serum cholesterol, which are standard risk biomarkers used in medicine to diagnose NCD like diabetes and hypercholesterolemia.

*Reference:*

2. Dwarfism

- In a retrospective study believed to be one of the largest of its kind, researchers say they have successfully charted the health risks, growth patterns, and medical and surgical outcomes of 1,374 people with the most common form of dwarfism, called achondroplasia, seen over a 60-year period at four academic medical centers.
- Achondroplasia is caused by a rare genetic mutation that alters the activity of the fibroblast growth factor receptor 3 (FGFR3) gene involved in bone growth.
- Occurring in about 20,000 live births in the U.S. each year, the condition is marked by short stature, bowed legs, disproportionately large head and other musculoskeletal problems that cause pain, sleep problems and other symptoms.
- Among other findings, the new study affirms that the vast majority -- at least two-thirds -- of those with the condition are born to parents of normal stature and bone development, meaning that the genetic mutation mostly arises spontaneously and randomly.
- One focus was on patterns of growth, including weight gain and head circumference among the patients from birth through adulthood, which are important for clinicians who need to know if their patients are growing as they should and for ensuring that different populations are evaluated appropriately in clinical trials of new therapies. Their database could be further improved by conducting similar analyses of information in people with achondroplasia worldwide.
- The findings also confirmed evidence from previous studies that children with achondroplasia are more likely than the general population to be born preterm. Some 12.7% (174 of 1,374) of the study population was born prematurely. In the overall U.S. population, preterm births occur approximately 9.8% of the time. Most of the premature achondroplasia patients were born to mothers of average stature.
- Analysis of trends in treatments revealed that limb-lengthening surgeries and use of growth hormone were relatively uncommon among patients, at only 1.2%.
- Sleep apnea occurred among 38.4% of the achondroplasia patients, likely due to distorted bone growth in the head and throat. The prevalence of apnea among those with average stature is also high -- as much as 22%, according to some studies.
- Because those born with achondroplasia need early interventions, clinicians should have an immediate, definitive diagnosis right away.

Reference:
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/06/210621094613.htm
UPSC Previous year questions based on today’s concept:

1. Give an account of the field methods used in the study of Archaeological Anthropology (15 Marks - 2018)
2. Genetic Adaptation (S.N. - 2000)

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. Genetic polymorphism and anthropological studies. 20 Marks