ANTHROPOLOGY NEWS DIARY

(AND)

29.07.2021

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. TRIBAL/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

1. Assam - Mizoram border dispute

- In 1933, the British conducted demarcations in the northeast for separate districts based on culture, linguistic and tribal lines. This led to a new boundary separating Lushai Hills, Cachar, and the former princely state of Manipur.
- The dispute over the 165-km Assam-Mizoram border has its origin in British era demarcations and has since led to persistent conflict.
- Mizoram backs 1875 demarcation, saying it took place in consultation with then Mizo tribal chefs. Mizoram has rejected the 1933 demarcation saying Mizo tribal chiefs were not consulted then.
- When Mizoram was granted statehood in 1987, Mizo tribal leaders raised the border dispute claiming that Assam had taken away their land.
- In 1995, the first major skirmishes were reported in Lushai Hills along the border when the Mizoram government tried to settle people there as per the 1875 demarcation.
- Assam also has border disputes with Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh, the other states carved out of Assam.
- Over 100 people have been killed, most of them on the Assam side, in attacks by armed men from Nagaland in separate incidents in 1979, 1985, and 2014.
- The Meghalaya government informed the state assembly in 2020 that 56 incidents related to the border dispute with Assam have taken place since 2017.

Reference:

2. Assimilation of Indigenous Communities

- One of the most disturbing news to emerge in recent times is the continuing discovery in Canada of unmarked graves used to bury the bodies of indigenous children.
- More than 1,000 graves have been unearthed at the sites of residential schools run in the 1800s, mostly by the Canadian government and Christian missions, to forcibly “assimilate” the children of indigenous Canadians — Indians, Inuit and Métis.
- Assimilation means that tens of thousands of children belonging to Canada’s original inhabitants were taken away from their homes and families and locked up in boarding schools, where they were coerced and brainwashed into becoming part of the ‘mainstream’ — this meant making them forget their native language, customs, dress, and religion, and forcing them to adopt the white man’s culture.
- Survivors narrate heart-breaking stories of systematically being told they were ‘savage’, taught to hate themselves, fed soap if they spoke in their tongue.
- The Virginius Xaxa Committee, set up in 2013 to study the educational, health and socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in India and recommend schemes and proposals
for improving their status, noted in its 2014 Report that “the State is actually pursuing assimilation rather than integration”.

- It pointed out that classrooms are not free of social prejudice against tribal people. It recommended locally recruited teachers, and classes in tribal tongues that are “in tune with tribal culture”.
- Most importantly, the Xaxa Report noted the move to set up large, centrally-located residential tribal schools, a project that began in the 1950s and intensified in the 90s. Children are brought from distant villages to these schools.
- The Report listed the state-run Ashram School, Eklavya Model School, and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and alluded to their names coming up in stories of corruption, bad facilities, and sexual exploitation.
- Mega residential schools, such as Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, recently established by private entities, are also now being questioned.
- Uprooting children from their homes and villages and erasing their mother tongues results in dissociating tribal children from their community and culture, an aggression that is reinforced by brutal disciplinary methods, replacing Adivasi names with mainstream ones, enforcing short hair, or mocking tribal dress, ornaments and customs.
- The cultural racism and violence inherent in such schools echo the harrowing experience that Canada’s indigenous people had with residential schools, which too had the backing of religious and social leaders, and whose fallout continues to haunt us till today.
- Several activists and educationists have spoken up against the residential schools in India’s tribal areas that are silently destroying entire cultures, and many small, alternate schools have come up that approach this field with sensitivity and humility.

Reference:

B. BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
1. Exploring Blood Types
- An analysis of the blood types of one Denisovan and three Neanderthal individuals has uncovered new clues to the evolutionary history, health, and vulnerabilities of their populations.
- Neanderthals and Denisovans were ancient humans who lived across Eurasia, from Western Europe to Siberia, from about 300,000 to 40,000 years ago.
- Previous research efforts have produced full-genome DNA sequences for 15 of these ancient individuals, greatly enhancing understanding of their species. However, despite being encoded in DNA, these ancient individuals' blood types have received little attention.
● In the new study, scientists investigated the previously sequenced genomes of one Denisovan and three Neanderthal individuals (ranging from 100,000 to 40,000 years ago) in order to determine their blood types and analyze the implications.

● While 43 different systems exist for assigning blood types, the researchers focused on seven systems that are often used in medical settings for blood transfusions.

● This analysis of the four individuals’ blood types revealed new information about their species. For instance, the ancient individuals had blood type alleles—different versions of the same gene—in combinations that are consistent with the idea that Neanderthals and Denisovans originated in Africa.

● The Neanderthal individuals also had blood type alleles associated with increased vulnerability to diseases affecting fetuses and newborns, as well as reduced variability of many alleles compared to modern humans.

● In addition, a distinct genetic link between the Neanderthal blood types and the blood types of an Aboriginal Australian and an indigenous Papuan suggests the possibility of mating between Neanderthals and modern humans before modern humans migrated to Southeast Asia.

● The results of the Groups system analysis of Neandertals and Denisovans confirm their African origin as well as the weakness in their fertility and susceptibility to virus infection leading to a high infant mortality rate.

Reference:

2. Fossil revealing lifestyles

● A finger-sized fossil from 308 million years ago unearthed in the United States gives tantalising clues to the habits of tiny dinosaur-like creatures that may be the forerunners of reptiles.

● The new species is a microsaur -- small, lizard-like animals that roamed the Earth well before proper dinosaurs made their appearance.

● The find sheds important light on the evolution of different animal groups, including amphibians and reptiles, scientists wrote in the journal Royal Society Open Science.

● Microsaurs lived during the Carboniferous period, when the forebears of modern mammals and reptiles, called amniotes, first appeared.

● In deference to its tiny size, researchers dubbed the new species Jormungandr bolti after a giant sea serpent from Norse mythology who did battle with Thor.

● Contrary to previous ideas about microsaurs, which had been classed as amphibians, scientists discovered that Joermungandr had scales.

Reference:
3. Homo erectus tools

- Archaeologists in Morocco have announced the discovery of North Africa’s oldest Stone Age hand-axe manufacturing site, dating back 1.3 million years.
- The find pushes back by hundreds of thousands of years the start date in North Africa of the Acheulian stone tool industry associated with a key human ancestor, Homo erectus.
- Before the find, the presence in Morocco of the Acheulian stone tool industry was thought to date back 700,000 years.
- In 2017, the discovery of five fossils at Jebel Irhoud in Morocco, estimated at 300,000 years old, overturned evolutionary science when they were designated Homo sapiens.
- The Moroccan fossils were much older than some with similar facial characteristics excavated from Omo Kibish in Ethiopia, dating back about 195,000 years.

Reference:

UPSC Previous year questions based on today’s concept:
1. Neanderthalensis (S.N. – 2000)
2. Major issues faced by the tribal society (10 Marks - 1989)

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. Present an account of tool typologies and technologies of Homo erectus. 20 Marks
2. Blood groups as genetic markers. 15 Marks