ANTHROPOLOGY NEWS DIARY (AND)

28.08.2021

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 AFFAIRS
1. Voices from the Tribes
   - The Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation is located in north-central Nevada near the Oregon border.
   - For centuries, the area has been used by Paiute and Shoshone people for gathering and hunting. Now, with a lithium mining proposal for Thacker Pass, a region just south of Fort McDermitt, tribal members are worried about how this mine will impact the land.
   - Thacker Pass holds an important history for the tribe. According to tribal elders, the area contains burial sites from a massacre against Paiute and Shoshone people when the land was being settled by white soldiers centuries ago.
   - Thacker Pass also provides habitat for many plants and animals. According to Great Basin Resource Watch, a conservation organization in Nevada, Thacker Pass is designated in several federal environmental plans as a “Priority Habitat” for the greater sage grouse.
   - It also functions as a habitat corridor for pronghorn antelope. Some of the nearby springs are the only known location for the Kings River pyrg, a type of springsnail.
   - Thacker Pass sits on the largest known sedimentary lithium deposit in the United States, according to Lithium Nevada. With the resource becoming evermore utilized in the production of electric cars, cell phones, and other technologies, the mine is set to be one of the predominant lithium sources in the country.
   - For the tribe, protecting the area’s ecosystem from destruction is important because of the role of local flora and fauna within Paiute and Shoshone culture. According to Inelda Sam, a Fort McDermitt tribal elder, many regional plants can be used in medicinal remedies and are often boiled to make Indian tea.
   - The tribe’s members believe that this place-based knowledge gives them a better understanding of the area and what is best for it. They feel that the mining company and the state and federal permitting agencies have not adequately listened to their concerns about the mine.
   - While the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) has assured the community that appropriate measures will be taken to mitigate the mine’s effect on the groundwater and air quality, some tribal members believe that any impact on these essential resources is a negative one.

Reference:
https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/voices-from-the-tribes-paiute-shoshone-elders-perspectives-on-the-nevada-lithium-mine-proposal

2. Tribal Village & Vaccine Hesitancy Remedy
Context:
Skepticism about Covid-19 vaccination among tribal villagers in Maharashtra's Melghat forest is being reversed with advocacy in the local Korku language. It's a playbook for effective communication in India's remote, tribal-dominated pockets with longstanding low immunisation coverage.
Highlights:

- Tembhrusonda village, located on the periphery of the Melghat Tiger Reserve and 80 km from Amravati city in eastern Maharashtra’s Vidarbha region, appeared an unlikely setting for a video-recorded interview of a doctor speaking on public health policy.
- But when Chandan Pimparkar, a doctor at the Tembhrusonda primary health centre (PHC), urged viewers not to fall prey to rumors about Covid-19 vaccines, he had an attentive audience. He was speaking in Korku, the language spoken by at least 600,000 indigenous people in central India, and one of the world’s endangered languages.
- A video series of awareness was launched in their native language.
- For the Korku villagers of the region, not only the language, but the speaker too is one of their own, and that is why the video-series helped allay long-standing mistrust of public health systems among tribals in remote areas.
- Alongside a slew of other measures, such as gram sabha meetings and discussions at the village square led by vaccinated health workers, the use of Korku helped tweak vaccine advocacy to make it culturally relatable and trust-inspiring, a redesigning that doctors say will be central to reversing vaccine hesitancy among indigenous people across the country.
- Local language and culturally relatable Covid-19 vaccination awareness campaigns, recommended by both the WHO and India’s health ministry, are getting underway slowly in other tribal-dominated regions across India as well, such as messages in the local dialect in rural Nashik, Maharashtra, and songs and memes in the Wagdi dialect in southern Rajasthan.
- Grassroots organisations in Odisha and Jharkhand have reported that vaccination drives are still only starting off in remote areas and adivasi pockets, Tushar Dash, an independent researcher on adivasi communities and forest-based livelihoods based in Bhubaneswar.
- With four villages now established as ‘model villages’, the latest in Melghat’s video series takes viewers into one of these, Bahadarpur, featuring an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), a local politician and villagers lounging outside their homes with their children and goats. Speaking in Korku, they tell viewers that they’re perfectly healthy after getting the shot.

Reference:
https://www.indiaspend.com/covid-19/remote-tribal-village-shows-how-to-fight-vaccine-hesitancy-753840

3. Odisha’s Forest Dwellers

Context:
Odisha’s forest producers hit hard

Highlights:

- For the second year running, forest dwellers across Odisha have been deprived of the right price for the Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) gathered by them.
With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting local economies across the country, the NTFP market in Odisha has also suffered due to the absence of adequate buyers this year.

Last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced, forest dwellers, especially tribals, could not get the price for their produce and even failed to dispose of NTFP stocks. After a year, the crisis has deepened further and hit them again.

Around this time, tribals collect sal leaves, siali leaves, mohua flowers, mango kernel, karanja seeds, char seeds and tamarind. The hard cash earned by forest dwellers and tribals in the summer helps them survive the critical four monsoon months and use the money in agricultural activities.

This year, the spread of COVID-19 infections was more profound in the rural and tribal hinterland. Unscrupulous traders took advantage of the fear prevailing in society and reduced the purchase price of NTFPs. Sources said NTFP gatherers sold their forest produce at lower prices, before government agencies intervened.

Tribal activists also expressed anguish over the alleged apathetic approach of government agencies in ensuring the right price for NTFP.

A recent letter of the Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation of Odisha Limited, a State government agency which helps procure NTFP from tribals, asked self help groups and producer groups to deliver sal seeds at a cold storage in Sambalpur district.

Many Van Dhan Vikash Kendras were yet to be fully functional in Odisha.

Reference:

B. ARCHAEOLOGY

1. Neanderthals & Counting

Context:
Origin of numbers: Report suggests Neanderthals might have learnt to count before modern humans

Highlights:

- Learning to count and the ability to compute has pushed humans to new heights of technological development. However, a new observation at the Les Pradelles near Angoulême in France shows that modern humans might not have been alone in developing a system of numerical notations, Neanderthals might have been the first.
- Neanderthals are the closest extinct relatives of homo sapiens, or humans who used a diverse set of tools, controlled fire, lived in shelters, made and wore clothing, were skilled hunters and ate plant foods, animals.
- Neanderthals and modern humans belong to the same genus and inhabited the same geographic areas in western Asia for 30,000-50,000 years.
● A report published in Nature states that there is not a lot of agreement over the origin of numbers and cognitive scientists, anthropologists and psychologists are trying to note the differences among existing number systems.
● Archaeologists have also begun looking for evidence of ancient numerical systems to detail some of the first prehistoric development of the numerical system.
● The hyena bone found at the site has nine notches that are similar and parallel denoting they meant something and its analysis could provide insight into how the early system was developed. The archaeologist, who has studied the bone under a microscope said that their shapes, depths and other details are "so alike that it seems they have been made using the same tool in a single session."
● The nature report stated that the archaeologist has also analysed the seven notches on a 40,000-year-old raven bone from a Neanderthal site in Crimea, which too are spaced with "the same sort of regularity."
● While the archaeologist states that there are gaps in the information channels, it is not clear what cultural or social factors might have encouraged Neanderthals to begin marking bones as a tool to count numbers. The Evolution of Cognitive Tools for Quantification (QUANTA), a project to provide insights into whether number systems are unique to modern humans will study the new developments to find the social factors that might have led to the decision.

Reference:

2. Prehistoric Ornaments

Context:
Archaeological research shows prehistoric pendants used in dance

Highlights:
● "Ornaments composed of elk teeth suspended from or sewn onto clothing emit a loud rattling noise when moving," says auditory archaeologist and Academy of Finland Research Fellow Riitta Rainio from the University of Helsinki. "Wearing such rattlers while dancing makes it easier to immerse yourself in the soundscape, eventually letting the sound and rhythm take control of your movements. It is as if the dancer is led in the dance by someone."
● The teeth worn out by dancing were analyzed for any microscopic marks before and after the dancing.
● Comparing the chips, hollows, cuts and smoothened surfaces of the teeth, the archaeologists observed a clear resemblance between teeth worn out by dancing and the Stone Age teeth.
● However, the marks in the Stone Age teeth were deeper and more extensive. The results show that the marks are the result of similar activity.
● As the Stone Age teeth were worn for years or even decades, it's no surprise that their marks are so distinctive.
Elk tooth rattlers are fascinating, since they transport modern people to a soundscape that is thousands of years old and to its emotional rhythms that guide the body.

A total of 177 graves of women, men and children have been found in the Yuzhniy Oleniy Ostrov burial site, of which more than half contain several elk tooth ornaments, some of them composed of over 300 individual teeth.

Reference:

UPSC Previous year questions based on today’s concept:

1. Tribes & Land Alienation  
(15 Marks -1998)
2. Homo Sapiens - Neanderthalensis  
(15 Marks - 2004)

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 medical anthropology.  
(15 Marks)