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Q1(c)

Incest Taboos.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Marriage

2.3 Marriage: Definition and universality; Laws of marriage (endogamy, exogamy, hypergamy, hypogamy, incest taboo); Type of marriage (monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, group marriage). Functions of marriage; Marriage regulations (preferential, prescriptive and proscriptive); Marriage payments (bride wealth and dowry).

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Incest Taboos
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Incest taboos forbid sex inside a culturally named kin set.

Lévi-Strauss tied the rule to exogamy and alliance.

Westermarck tied it to childhood familiarity.

Genetics adds inbreeding cost but not the cousin map.

Gotra and clan extend the ban beyond the nuclear house.

Introduction

An incest taboo forbids sexual relations inside a named kin circle. The circle varies, but some ban on closest kin is very widespread.

Body**What is forbidden**

- Nuclear incest with parent or sibling is nearly universal as a rule, though breach is known.
- **Lévi-Strauss** said the taboo is the start of culture: it forces exogamy and the exchange of spouses.
- **Westermarck** argued childhood proximity kills desire, a view later linked to the **Kibbutz** and Taiwanese sim-pua cases.
- **Freud inverted this: desire is there, and the taboo represses it.** **Malinowski** used Trobriand data to dispute the Oedipus shape.

Biology and law

- Inbreeding risk is real, as genetic counselling still shows. That does not by itself write the local list of forbidden cousins.
- Indian **gotra** and clan rules extend the taboo far beyond the household.

Flow diagram

Incest taboo -> Exogamy exchange
Incest taboo -> Westermarck familiarity
Incest taboo -> Inbreeding risk

Conclusion

Incest taboos protect a kin boundary and push marriage outward. Alliance theory, familiarity, and genetics each explain a piece, not the whole list.

Facts & figures

Lévi-Strauss

The Elementary Structures of Kinship treated the incest rule as the passage from nature to culture.

Westermarck

Argued that early co-residence produces sexual indifference.

Malinowski

Trobriand avunculocal authority challenged a simple Freudian household triangle.

Gotra

North Indian exogamy often bans the father's clan line far beyond siblings.