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Q2(c)

## According to Geertz, how does the cock-fight reveal aspects of Balinese culture?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Symbolic and interpretive theories (Turner, Schneider and Geertz)

(h) Symbolic and interpretive theories (Turner, Schneider and Geertz)

### Core demand of the question

- According to Geertz, how does the cock-fight reveal aspects of Balinese culture?
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

### Revision summary

Geertz treats the Balinese cockfight as a readable public text.

Cocks stand for men; deep bets stand for honour, not utility.

Betting partnerships map kinship and rank.

The bout is a commentary on status that ordinary talk hides.

**Thick description** is the method that shows this.

### Introduction

- **In Deep Play:** Notes on the Balinese Cockfight, Clifford Geertz reads the fight as a public text. Balinese men stake status, not only cash, on the birds.

### Body

#### The event as text

- The cock is a male metaphor. Care, spurs, and the ring are a story about men, not a rural hobby only.
- **Deep play**, from **Bentham**, is a bet too large for utility. Men still bet because honour is on the line.
- **Wagers map** alliances: kin and status partners back the same bird. The village reads who stands with whom.

#### What is revealed

- **Status hierarchy** is performed and temporarily risked. A man cannot not care once his cock is in.
- Violence is displaced onto animals; the culture can show aggression without ordinary street feud.
- After the bout, everyday etiquette returns. The fight is a **meta-social commentary**, Geertz's phrase for culture reflecting on itself.
- **Thick description** of the wink-like detail—who bets, how much, which kin—makes the meaning visible.

**Limit**

- Critics say Geertz underplays women, the state ban, and material interest. The essay still trains interpretive method.

**Flow diagram**

Cockfight -> Status honour

Cockfight -> Kin betting alliances

Cockfight -> Public text thick description

**Conclusion**

For Geertz the cockfight is Balinese status, kinship alliance, and male selfhood written in blood and bets. It is culture reading itself, not a pointless gamble.

**Facts & figures****Deep Play**

Geertz's 1972 essay in *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

**Bentham**

Deep play: stakes so high that a utilitarian should refuse; Balinese do not.

**Thick description**

Ryle's wink: the meaning in the public act, not the twitch.

**Bali**

The field: a village fight after Geertz's awkward arrival scene.