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Q3(b)

Discuss different social control mechanisms in simple societies.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Political Organization and Social Control

4. Political Organization and Social Control: Band, tribe, chiefdom, kingdom and state; concepts of power, authority and legitimacy; social control, law and justice in simple Societies.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss different social control mechanisms in simple societies
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

Revision summary

Control without police uses gossip, ridicule, and witchcraft accusation.

Feud and compensation handle homicide, as among the Nuer.

Taboo, oath, and ordeal are ritual courts.

Big-men and age-sets organise following and discipline.

Simple names scale, not the absence of order.

Introduction

Simple societies often lack a police and a written code. They still control behaviour through kin, ritual, talk, and force that is socially named.

Body**Informal and jural**

- **Ridicule**, gossip, and **witchcraft** accusation, as **Evans-Pritchard** showed among **Azande**, police the envious and the rude.
- **Kin avoidance** and respect rules, as in Indian tribal in-law taboos, prevent daily friction.
- **Blood feud** and **leopard-skin** peacemaking among Nuer turn homicide into a payable account.

Ritual and belief

- **Taboo** and oath bind the person. **Ordeal** and oracle decide guilt where evidence is thin.
- **Initiation** installs the law in the body. Elders' curses matter where the state does not.

Political

- **Big-man** generosity, as **Sahlins** described in Melanesia, buys following without a crown.
- **Age-sets** among Maasai-type systems discipline youth.
- **Gluckman**'s peace in the feud: conflict is channelled, not absent.

Limit of the word simple

- These mechanisms are complex. 'Simple' means scale and lack of specialised courts, not lack of law.

Flow diagram

Social control -> Gossip witchcraft
Social control -> Feud compensation
Social control -> Taboo ordeal
Social control -> Big-man elders

Conclusion

Social control in small-scale societies runs on gossip, witchcraft belief, feud-and-peace, ritual taboo, and big-man or elder authority. It is law without a police file.

Facts & figures

Azande

Witchcraft, oracles, and accusation as everyday control.

Nuer leopard-skin chief

A ritual peacemaker, not a king, in homicide cases.

Sahlins

Poor man, rich man, big-man: leadership by giving.

Gluckman

Custom and Conflict: feud as a structured peace process.