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Q4(a)

Discuss the principles governing production, distribution and exchange in simple societies.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · Economic Organization

3. Economic Organization: Meaning, scope and relevance of economic anthropology; Formalist and Substantivist debate; Principles governing production, distribution and exchange (reciprocity, redistribution and market), in communities, subsisting on hunting and gathering, fishing, swiddening, pastoralism, horticulture, and agriculture; globalization and indigenous economic systems.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the principles governing production, distribution and exchange in simple societies
- Write about 250 words for 20 marks

Revision summary

Production is household and lineage labour on common or clan land.

Distribution follows reciprocity and redistribution more than wage.

Exchange is gift, **kula**-like partnership, and spheres of goods.

Polanyi and **Sahlins** name the principles.

Price market is not the default law.

Introduction

In small-scale societies, production, distribution, and exchange are instituted in kinship and ritual. They are not a miniature stock market.

Body

Production

- Labour is largely **household** and **kin**, as **Sahlins**'s domestic mode of production stated.
- Land is often **lineage estate**, not a freehold commodity. Tools are simple; knowledge is seasonal.
- **Gender and age** divide tasks: Trobriand gardens, Nuer herding, !Kung foraging parties.
- Surplus is modest. **Boserup** still applies when fallow shortens.

Distribution

- **Polanyi**'s three principles: **reciprocity**, **redistribution**, and **market**.
- **Redistribution sits on a chief or temple**: potlatch, Trobriand yam display, Indian jajmani as a debated case.
- Sharing of meat among foragers, as **Lee** and **Woodburn** described, levels luck.

Exchange

- **Reciprocity** after **Sahlins**: generalised, balanced, negative.

- **Malinowski's kula** and **Mauss's** gift: the thing carries a person and an obligation to return.
- **Bohannan's** spheres block conversion of all goods into one money.
- Barter and silent trade exist; they do not make the whole economy a price system.

Principle that governs

- **Embeddedness:** who you are to the other party decides the rate more than a posted price.

Flow diagram

Simple economy -> Kin household production

Simple economy -> Share redistribute

Simple economy -> Gift reciprocity spheres

Conclusion

Simple economies produce through kin labour, distribute by sharing and chiefly or ritual pooling, and exchange as gift, balanced reciprocity, or bounded spheres. Market price is a late, limited principle.

Facts & figures

Polanyi

Reciprocity, redistribution, market as forms of integration.

Mauss

The Gift: obligation to give, receive, and return.

Sahlins

Stone Age Economics: domestic mode and a typology of reciprocity.

Kula

Ceremonial exchange of armshells and necklaces around the Massim.