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Q1(b)

Marriage Regulations and Alliance Theory

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Family

2.4 Family: Definition and universality; Family, household and domestic groups; functions of family; Types of family (from the perspectives of structure, blood relation, marriage, residence and succession); Impact of urbanization, industrialization and feminist movements on family.

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Marriage Regulations and Alliance Theory
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Marriage regulations forbid and prefer categories of spouse.

Alliance theory reads marriage as exchange that constitutes society.

Lévi-Strauss contrasted restricted and generalised exchange.

Kachin and Dravidian systems illustrate positive alliance.

Weiner's Trobriand work shows women as givers, not only gifts.

Introduction

Marriage regulations say who may marry whom. Alliance theory, after **Lévi-Strauss**, reads those rules as the exchange that makes society, not as a private romance.

Body

Regulations

- Incest prohibition, exogamy, endogamy, and preferred cousin marriage are the usual toolkit. **Morgan** tabulated kinship terms; the rules sit inside those terms.
- Positive rules name a category of spouse, as in Dravidian cross-cousin marriage. Negative rules only forbid.
- **Louis Dumont** showed how Indian alliance and hierarchy interlock. Marriage can rank houses, not only join two persons.

Alliance

- **Claude Lévi-Strauss** treated the woman-as-gift as the elementary structure: restricted exchange between two groups, or generalised exchange in a circle, as among Kachin discussed by **Edmund Leach**.
- **Annette Weiner** and Trobriand ethnography stressed that women also give and that valuables return. Alliance is not only men swapping sisters.
- The theory explains why a rule persists. It does not excuse treating women as objects.

Flow diagram

Marriage rules -> Incest exogamy endogamy

Marriage rules -> Alliance exchange

Alliance exchange -> Levi-Strauss

Alliance exchange -> Kachin Trobriand

Conclusion

Regulations are the grammar. Alliance theory is the claim that marriage weaves groups. Trobriand, Kachin, and Dumont's India remain the teaching cases.

Facts & figures

Lévi-Strauss

The Elementary Structures of Kinship made alliance, not descent alone, the motor of kinship.

Leach

Political Systems of Highland Burma used Kachin gumsa-gumlao and marriage circles as a political field.

Dumont

Linked South Indian alliance to hierarchy and the gift of a daughter as a ranked act.

Weiner

Trobriand cloth and women's wealth revised the sister-exchange picture.

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