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Q1(c)

Radcliffe-Brown's ideas on status, role and institution

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Functionalism (Malinowski)

(c) Functionalism (Malinowski); Structural-Functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown)

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on **Radcliffe-Brown's** ideas on status, role and **institution**
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Status is a recognised position in social structure.

Role is the rights and duties of that position.

Institution is the standardised behaviour that holds statuses together.

Andaman and Australian fieldwork supplied the cases.

The triad is useful if conflict and history are not treated as noise.

Introduction

A. R. **Radcliffe-Brown** treated society as a structure of positions. Status, role, and **institution** are the three words he used to show how persons fit that structure.

Body**The three terms**

- **Status** is a socially recognised position, such as mother's brother among the **Andaman Islanders** or a Nuer leopard-skin chief.
- **Role** is the bundle of rights and duties that go with the status. The person acts the role; the structure is not the biography.
- **Institution** is a standardised mode of behaviour, marriage or a legal ritual, which keeps statuses in relation.

Use and limit

- His **Andaman** and **Australian** work showed kinship statuses knitting solidarity, which he called social statics.
- **S. F. Nadel** later tightened role analysis. **Evans-Pritchard** kept the words but put history and feud back in.
- The limit is that status can look too fixed. Persons switch roles, and conflict is not a pathology of structure alone.

Flow diagram

Status position -> Role rights duties

Role rights duties -> Institution

Institution -> Social solidarity

Conclusion

Radcliffe-Brown's triad is position, performance, and standardised relation. It is still the cleanest teaching kit for social structure, if history is not erased.

Facts & figures

Radcliffe-Brown

Defined social structure as a network of actually existing relations of person to person, studied in the Andamans and Australia.

Status and role

Borrowed from a legal-sociological idiom and made the units of structural-functional analysis.

Institution

A standardised pattern, such as marriage or totemic rite, that regulates roles.

Nadel

The Theory of Social Structure developed role sets beyond Radcliffe-Brown's sketch.