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Q5(d)

Shaman, sorcerer and medicine man

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Religion

5. Religion: Anthropological approaches to the study of religion (evolutionary, psychological and functional); monotheism and polytheism; sacred and profane; myths and rituals; forms of religion in tribal and peasant Societies (animism, animatism, fetishism, naturism and totemism); religion, magic and science distinguished; magico-religious functionaries (priest, shaman, medicine man, sorcerer and witch).

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on shaman, sorcerer and medicine man
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

A shaman uses trance and soul travel, as in Siberian cases **Eliade** used.

A sorcerer harms by learned rite, as **Azande** sorcery shows.

Witchcraft in **Evans-Pritchard** is a different, often inherited, accusation.

A medicine man treats with herbs and ritual skill.

Roles can overlap; the terms should not.

Introduction

These three figures heal, harm, and mediate spirits, but they are not one office. Ethnography keeps the words apart.

Body**Shaman**

- **Mircea Eliade** stressed ecstasy and a soul journey. Siberian Tungus cases named the type. **Evans-Pritchard** would have called this a specialist who travels, not only a priest who prays.
- Amazonian and Himalayan specialists, including some **Bhotia** and **Naga** ritualists, fit when trance and retrieval of soul are central.

Sorcerer

- A sorcerer uses techniques, medicines, and spells to injure. **Evans-Pritchard's Azande** distinguished witchcraft as inherited substance from sorcery as learned rite.
- The sorcerer is often accused in feud, as in many Melanesian and African village studies.

Medicine man

- The medicine man or woman, in **North American** and African usage, diagnoses and treats with herbs, sucking, and song. **Rivers** already treated such healing as a social institution.
- One person may hold two roles. The analytic task is to name trance, malice, and therapy separately.

Flow diagram

Spirit specialists -> Shaman journey
Spirit specialists -> Sorcerer technique
Spirit specialists -> Medicine man therapy

Conclusion

The shaman journeys, the sorcerer attacks by art, and the medicine person treats. Azande and Siberian cases keep the triangle clear.

Facts & figures

Eliade

Shamanism as archaic technique of ecstasy, built from Siberian ethnography.

Evans-Pritchard

Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande split witchcraft from sorcery.

Rivers

Medicine, Magic and Religion treated healers as part of social organisation.

Azande

Oracle and accusation make misfortune intelligible without dropping empirical herbal skill.

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