
UNIT 1 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

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Suggested Reading

Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



Once you have studied this unit, you would be able to:

- understand the various types of traditional political and economic organisations and economic systems studied in social anthropology; and
- describe different forms of “distribution of goods and services” among the simple societies.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Every society, be it a simple or traditional society or complex or modernised society has certain rules and regulations to maintain social order. Human societies have developed a set of customs and procedures for making and implementing decisions in order to resolve disputes, and for regulating the behaviour of its member in their day-to-day life. They have also developed collective decisions about its relationship with other neighbouring societies. The first part of this unit deals with the general features of political organisation, social control, conflict resolution and the cultural arrangement by which societies continue and maintain social order for the betterment of society. While, the second part of the unit will deal with the economic organisations in social anthropology.

1.2 TYPES OF POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Let us now discuss the mechanisms in our society for making and enforcing political decisions as well as the collective efforts about its relationship with the neighbouring people for the well being of society. As we know, political organisation is found in all societies. However the degree of specialisation and formal mechanisms in functioning of political systems may vary considerably from one society to the other. As mentioned by Ferraro, Gary P (1992) all societies differ in their political organisations based on three important dimensions:

- 1) The extent to which political institutions are distinct from other aspects of the social structure; that is, in some societies, political structures are indistinguishable from economic, kinship, or religious structure.
- 2) The extent to which authority is concentrated into specific political roles.
- 3) The level of political integration (i.e. the size of the territorial group that comes under the control of political structure). Ferraro, Gary P (1992, 220)

In order to understand how effectively the political organisations administer themselves and maintain social order, the above three dimensions are useful. These dimensions also form the basis for the classification of societies into four important types of political structures like band societies, tribal societies, chiefdoms, and state societies. Let us now discuss briefly about the conceptual meaning of these four important types of political structure.

1.2.1 Band Societies

Band organisation is considered to be the least complex form of political arrangement which is characterised by small group, also known as local groups, usually among the nomadic population of hunter and gatherers. The size of a band can range from 30-50 people or more. However, the size of a band may vary from one band to the other depending upon the food gathering techniques and the availability of the food in their natural environment. Band may have little or no concept of individual property ownership and place a high value on sharing, cooperation and reciprocity. They may also loosely associate with a specific territory of their own in the sense that the members of one territory can seek membership in a neighbouring territory. The members of each band have less role specialisation and are highly egalitarian. Band organisation is predominantly found among the hunting and gathering communities representing the oldest form of political organisation. Common language and common cultural features bound

band members together. In band societies, no political allegiance occurs with any one or more supreme authority or with other similar bands of their own ethnic community. Their political decisions are frequently embedded in the wider social structure of the local group. It is difficult to distinguish purely political decisions from those related to the family, economic or religious decisions. In other words, political life is simply one part of social life.

Leadership roles are iterative within the band; there be could several leaders and each leader's role may end with the accomplishment of a particular task. Leadership tends to be informal having no authoritarian political roles or leaders with designated authority. But the elderly are respected for their experience, wisdom, good judgment and knowledge of hunting. So, adult men gave decision. The headman can persuade and give advice but has no power to impose his will on the group.

Bands may have a headman, as in case of Eskimo bands and the Chenchu who are recognised by the band members for their special skills in making implements, hunting, ritual, judgment acumen, folklore, world view, magic, medicinal and ecological knowledge etc. There were no strict rule of succession to the position of headman; sometimes it is hereditary as in case of the Kung bushman and a fresh person can be chosen as in case of the Chenchu.

1.2.2 Tribal Societies

The tribal political organisations are predominantly associated with food production i.e. horticulture and pastoralism. Tribal societies are little bigger or larger in size than the band societies. Egalitarian principle is the common feature of both tribe and band organisations. Both of them are similar in several important aspects as the political leaders have no marked differences in status, rank, power and wealth. In addition to these, both of them have local leaders but do not have permanent, centralised leadership.

However, tribal political forms can be distinguished from bands by the presence of some impermanent and informal pan-tribal associations that can bring together, whenever necessary, a number of local groups into one larger unit. Each of these associations operate autonomously but integrate themselves into one or more larger units when an external threat arises. The larger unit breaks back into original local units once the threat is nullified.

The tribal associations emerge based on kinship and kin units like clan, and age grades, or secret societies. In many tribal societies, the kinship unit called Clan, a group of kin who consider themselves to be descended from a common ancestor, serves a mechanism for political integration. Clan elder usually looks after the affairs of their clan like settlement of dispute between the clan members, negotiating with other clan groups, etc.

Segmentary lineage system is another form of tribal association where individuals of different genealogical levels integrate to form a bigger unit in opposition to another such unit. Genealogical connections bring groups with closer affiliation together. Such political integration of closely affiliated groups within the tribal societies is important in order to mobilise their military force in defending themselves from outside forces or for expanding into the territories of weaker societies. As mentioned by Evan-Pritchard (1940), the pastoral Nuer of southern Sudan serves as a good example of a tribal form of political organisation.

1.2.3 Chiefdoms

Ferraro, Gary P (1992: 223) has mentioned that the band and the tribal societies are economically and politically autonomous, authority is not centralised and they tend to be egalitarian having no specialised role, small population in size depending largely on subsistence economy. However, societies become more complex as the population increases with higher technology for fulfilling their subsistence needs. In Chiefdoms, a number of local communities are integrated into a more formal and permanent political unit but the political authority rests with single individual, either acting alone or in conjunction with an advisory council. Chiefdoms may also comprise more than one political unit, each one is headed by a chief and/or councils. Societies with chiefdoms are socially ranked and the chief and his family enjoy higher status and prestige. The chief ship is mostly hereditary and the chief along with his or her kinfolk comprises social and political elite within their society. Subsequently, the chiefs have considerable power and authority in resolving or pronouncing judgments over internal disputes, issues, etc. In addition to these, he may distribute goods, supervise religious ceremonies and functions military activities on behalf of the chiefdom. Hawaii and Tahiti are the examples of chiefdom societies.

1.2.4 State Societies

Of all the above mentioned societies, state societies have more complex and advance form of political organisation. According to Sahlins (1963: 297), state is defined as “an autonomous political unit, encompassing many communities within its territory and having a centralised government with the power to collect taxes, draft men for work or war, and decree and enforce laws”. It is also mentioned by Robert L Carneiro (1970: 733) that the state societies have complex, centralised political structure, which include a wide range of permanent institutions having legislative, executive, and judicial functions, and a large bureaucracy.

The state societies have class stratification with unequal access to economic resources. These societies are generally supported by intensive agriculture. The high productivity of the agriculture presumably allows for the emergence of cities, a high degree of economic and other kinds of specialisation, market or commercial exchange, and extensive foreign trade. The people pay taxes. (Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, 1995: 375)

The rulers may use force but the threats of force alone do not ensure the legitimacy of the rulers. Legitimacy of rulers is said to accrue owing to different factors like divine origin of the rulers, socialisation of children to accept all forms of authority, the perceived advantage of state by the people in ensuring protection, employment, security to property etc. If state fails in its duty, the rulers lose their credibility and ability to control, eventually leading to the fall of state. Nupe kingdom in West Africa and also the Roman Empire are examples of state societies.

1.2.5 Youth Dormitories

Youth Dormitories are important institutions among the tribal society. These institutions are quite common among the tribes of North East India, central India. They are known by different names in different tribes like *Morung* of Naga tribes, *Gothul* of Muria and Gond tribe, *Dhoomkuriya* of Oraon tribe, etc. The youth dormitories are centered in big building of straw and thatch having separate houses for boys and girls. All the members of the dormitories pass their night in the dormitories. If there is no dormitory for girls, they usually sleep in the house of

some old woman. They learn their way of life through their elders. They follow the rules and regulations of the dormitories. They carry out different activities together like construction of house on the occasion of marriage or village festivals, helping the villagers in crisis, construction of roads, etc. The boys and girls stay in their dormitories till they marry. A widow can re-enter the dormitory as its member.

Strictly speaking, youth dormitories are not political bodies. However, youth dormitories serve to train the youth in various socio-cultural, economic, religious and political activities. For example among the Dimasa Kachari of Assam, Hangsao - the bachelor's dormitory is an important institution of the village. The unmarried youths of the village spend night in this house. Unlike Nagas, the Dimasas do not have separate dormitory for maidens. Dormitory youths organise into labour force to carry out several public works in the village (e.g. construction of the village path, water hole, etc.) as well as to help the needy villagers in agricultural works like weeding, harvesting, etc. They also serve as the village defenders. They get trained to become leaders and organisers to undertake public works and community works. In this sense youth dormitories can be regarded as quasi political units.

1.3 SOCIAL CONTROL AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS

Social control and conflict resolution mechanism are those practices such as customary law for reward and punishment, physical coercion, and various sanctions (ostracism, avoidance, denial of favours) which a community of people adopt to safeguard social order and to sustain the behavioural conformity to the accepted norms. Like any other societies, the simple societies also have rudimentary system of providing justice. They have their own social control and resolution of conflict mechanism. Mostly the chief or the elders of the group or kinship take the responsibilities for identifying and punishing the criminals in their society. When they face complex problems, they take advice from the council of elders about the type and nature of punishment to be given to the offenders. They follow the Oath and Ordeals. The offenders have to take an oath, after which they are asked if he or she had committed the offence or not. It is generally believed among the simple society that if the offender tells a lie before their elders, he or she will be a prey to the supernatural anger for taking a false oath. Sometimes, the accused person is asked to dip or put his hand in boiling water or oil to justify his innocence as they believe that the supernatural powers help an innocent person.

1.4 ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

The simple societies of different places in the world passed through various stages of socio-economic development in due courses of time. It can be mentioned that hunting-gathering, horticulture, cattle herding, shifting cultivation, settled agriculture, etc. are different stages of socio-economic development among different tribes in India.

Food gathering and hunting is said to be the oldest type of economic activity. During 2 to 5 million years of human existence on this planet Earth, 99 percent of the time was spent in food gathering, hunting and fishing. Agriculture is said to have originated some 10,000 years ago. Industrial economy is said to have been in existence for the past 400 years only.

Human communities of the world practice various types of economic activities.

When we say economic activity, it includes subsistence technologies, division of labour, organisation of labour, various customary ways of distribution of goods and services and consumption and utility and decision-making at various stages in the processes of production, distribution and consumption. Basing on the subsistence technologies, the economic activities can be broadly categorised into food collection and food production. Under food collection, hunting gathering, intensive foraging and fishing are the major activities. Under food production, we can include horticulture or incipient cultivation, pastoralism and intensive cultivation or plough cultivation.

Many communities studied by anthropologists practice more than one of the above economic activities. Most of the tribes dwelling in the forest and hills like Kadar of Kerala, Birhor and Kharia of Bihar, Nagas of Nagalands, Kukis of Manipur, etc. depend on food gathering, hunting small games, fishing, shifting cultivation activities for their sustenance. These activities form their main source of subsistence economy. In the same way, the Konda Reddy and the Savara of Andhra Pradesh depend on horticulture, shifting cultivation and hunting and gathering. The Todas known for buffalo herding also practice cultivation of crops. The Santals, the Oraon, and the Gonds practice settled agriculture along with hunting gathering. Each type of economic activity is organised more or less systematically so that goods and services are produced, distributed or exchanged and consumed or utilised in order to satisfy a variety of wants.

1.5 TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

According to Hoebel and Weaver (1979: 453), “Economic organisation involves the behaviours that center upon the production, the allocation and distribution, and the use and consumption of goods”. The above authors emphasise culturally defined behavioural networks that operate in various economic activities. Achieving some rhythm and order in the provision of material goods and services for the satisfaction of wants is essential for the survival and continuity of society. In almost all societies, economic organisation exists in one form or the other.

Simple societies have simple mode of production which include simple technology and most of the labour constitute family members or relatives. It varies from society to society. The mode of economic organisation is very simple mostly embedded in direct face to face relationship. Each type of economic organisation ensures some role to all members of the community by means of creating some space in the pursuits related to economic activities. Every member has a purpose to participate in such organised activities.

The major types of distribution of goods and services are reciprocity, redistribution, and market. Reciprocity is further divided into 3 types: generalised reciprocity, balanced reciprocity and negative reciprocity. Let’s examine some of the other components of economic organisation which are very important in understanding the basic concept of economic organisation in anthropology.

1.5.1 Communal Ownership

In every society, simple or complex, property has important functions. Property signifies social or economic status of a person or a group. Property can be either individually owned (private property) or communally owned (communal property). The concept of property keeps changing with the changes of time. Among simple society, communal ownership is more prevalent over land resources, forest

resources, etc. It can be mentioned that these simple society enjoys the available resources from the forest, river, etc. Hunting and gathering societies do not have personal properties of their own except some objects like hunting tools, etc. but the cattle rearing societies consider their cattle as their property.

In some societies, both communal ownership as well as individual ownership of land is present. The Podu or Jhuming land or shifting cultivation land are community owned where as the wet land and horticulture lands are individually owned. The people are issued with *pattas* (a legal document assigning ownership) with regard to the individual lands.

Reflection

Property: A Social Creation

Property in its full sense is a web of social relations with respect to the utilisation of some object (material or non-material) in which a person or group is tacitly or explicitly recognised to hold quasi exclusive and limiting rights of use and disposition

E. Adamson Hoebel and Thomas Weaver. 1979. *Anthropology and The Human Experience*. McGraw-Hill : 262

1.5.2 Division of Labour

Most economic activities, and for that matter any physical activity of some purpose (be it cooking, child rearing ritual etc.), are accomplished by sharing work between a group of workers or participants. Division of labour is a form of “customary assignment of different kinds of work to different kinds of people” (Ember and Ember 1990: 272). Universally men and women, adults and children do not engage in same kinds of work. In our society, it is usual for the man to plough and woman to engage in cooking. Adults perform arduous works whereas children do light works. Division of labour based on age and sex is universal though there is variation across cultures. Further, it must be remembered that as the societies modernise, role reversals and complex specialisations emerge.

In simple society, the division of labour is based on certain factors like sex, age, etc. Men and women carry out different types of jobs. In certain activities, men and women perform the same activities without any division of labour. Though women folk observe certain taboos during times such as menstruation and child birth, etc., they do not take part in the day to day chores, as during such times they are considered impure.

For better understanding of division of labour, let us take an example of the Savara tribe of Andhra Pradesh during their shifting cultivation. In the Savara community both sex wise and age wise division of labour is observed. All the family members work collectively as a unit of production under the guidance of the head of the family. The family functions as an economic and social unit except the small children and aged old members. The pattern of division of labour can be classified on the basis of their age and sex. In their daily activities, children from their early age start helping their parents. From the age of 9-10 years, the parents ask their children to watch the field, fetch water, fetch tools etc. As they enter adulthood they start playing a major role in subsistence by taking up labour intensified works. The men and women have different and corresponding roles to be played in various activities according to their age. The following statement gives sex wise and age wise division of labour among the Savara tribe of Andhra Pradesh:

Sex wise and age wise division of labour

Name of the Activities in the podu field	Associated member in labour division
1. Selection of podu field	Adult male
2. Cutting of large trees	Adult male
3. Cutting of small trees and bushes	Adult female and children
4. Burning of the podu field	Adult male
5. Broadcasting of seeds	Adult male and adult female
6. Weeding operation	Adult male and adult female
7. Watching of crops	Adult male and male children
8. Harvesting of crops	Adult male, female and children

1.5.3 Major Economic Activities

As pointed out earlier, the tribal societies practice various types of economic activities, it must be remembered that each tribe may pursue a major economic activity supplemented by other types of economic activities. The following account gives a brief description of each of the major economic activity.

1.5.3.1 Hunting-Gathering

A hunter-gatherer society is a society whose primary subsistence method of livelihood is based on the direct procurement of edible plant, animals, birds, etc. from their surrounding forest and water bodies. They depend on the nature for their subsistence. The tribes in the dense forests uses bows and arrows, spears, net for catching the animals. They also have customs of hunting in group as a collective activity. They hunt wild birds, fowl, rabbits, deer, rats, etc. During the rainy season, they carry out fishing from the streams and other water bodies. They share the hunt equally among themselves. Some important features of hunting gathering society are; lowest population density; small community size; nomadic or semi-nomadic; infrequent food shortage; minimal trade; no full-time craft specialists; least or no individual differences in wealth; informal political leadership; no domesticated animals except dog; day to day consumption and little storage of food; minimal planning for the future (the last three are not true with some communities who are in contact with pastorals or agriculturists). Surplus foraging is very much limited though some minor forest produce is collected for exchange or sale in the local /weekly markets or government run agencies.

1.5.3.2 Horticulturalists

Horticulture in anthropology means growing of all types of crops with relatively simple tools like hoe and methods like sprinkling of seeds on un-ploughed fields. These fields are cultivated for a few years and then abandoned for new fields. Thus permanently cultivated fields are absent in horticulture. Horticultural communities are said to lie in the transition stage of human communities from nomadic community i.e. hunting-gathering to horticultural communities by domesticating different varieties of crops like tubers, yams, maize, wheat, rice, pulses, vegetables, etc. around their dwelling or in a particular plot for their domestic consumption. They select different useful trees, vegetable crops, etc and

plants for their uses. As discussed under political organisation in such societies land is usually communal property and for horticulture the land is redistributed among the group members. In such a society, women are equally engaged in horticultural activities. In some case, women are more specialised in growing crops. Some important feature of horticultural communities are: low – moderate population density; small - moderate community size; more sedentary but may move after several years; infrequent food shortage; minimal trade; none or few craft specialists; minimal wealth differences; part-time political functionaries and exhibit incipient social differentiation.

Horticulture includes shifting cultivation and growing tree crops like plantain, coconut, breadfruit tree etc. The latter type of horticulture can be seen among the Samoans.

Reflection

Samoan horticulture involves mostly three tree crops requiring little work except in harvesting. Once planted, and requiring hardly more than a few years of waiting, the breadfruit tree continues to produce about two crops a year for upto half a century. Coconut trees may continue to produce for hundred years. And banana trees make new stalks of fruit, each weighing more than fifty pounds, for many years (Ember & Ember, 1990:249)

Sometimes, horticulture is separated from shifting cultivation as the latter has attracted special attention. In the following section, we will focus on shifting cultivation.

1.5.3.3 Shifting Cultivation

Shifting cultivation is an age old socio-economic practice among many tribal communities inhabiting the world. It is a distinct type of agricultural practice generally practiced on the hill slopes. Since the days of early civilisation several groups of tribal communities in India are practicing this method of cultivation as their primary source of subsistence. The beginning of shifting cultivation goes back to the Neolithic times i.e. 8, 000-10,000 years ago (Hasnain, 1994: 193). This process resulted in a new socio-economic situation for the Neolithic people when they shifted from nomadic way of living to settled way of life. These groups tried to emerge as food producers from food gathering stage.

Shifting cultivation is considered as the natural way of eking out livelihood by some tribal groups. In fact, it is considered as a traditional technique of farming adopted by different tribal communities in many parts of the Indian Sub-Continent. Shifting cultivation is prevalent in other parts of the world, especially Sumatra, North Burma, Borneo, New Guinea, and in many parts of the African continent.

Shifting cultivation is also referred to as *slash-and-burn* or *swidden* cultivation. In India, shifting cultivation is known by different names in tribal regions. In North East India, it is denoted as *jhum*, in Orissa as *podu*, *dabi*, *koman* or *bringa*, in Bastar as *deppa*, in Western Ghats as *kumari*, in South East Rajasthan - the Matra and Maria tribal groups call it *penda*, in Madhya Pradesh as *bewar* or *dahia*, (Bhowmick P .K., 1990: 102).

Shifting cultivation is an impermanent cultivation practiced on hill slopes, often steep, rugged and elevated places. After cutting and burning the vegetation known as slash and burning method, seeds are sown by using the simple digging stick. They raise crops for few years and then abandon the field as the soil loses its fertility due to burning of the vegetation. The people then move on to another

place to begin a new cycle. After some years, they return to the same patch of land for shifting cultivation which they had left fallow for the natural vegetation to grow and also for the soil to regain its fertility. The duration of fallow period depends upon the availability of land with forest vegetation and the size of the group practicing shifting cultivation. At present, on an average, the fallow period by the tribal groups practicing shifting cultivation has come down from few decades to few years.

1.5.3.4 Pastoralism

Pastoralism is a type of subsistence technology in which procuring food is based directly or indirectly on maintenance of domesticated animals. Hoebel and Weaver writes, “Historically this (pastoralism) occurred in the Neolithic Age, at the same time that incipient agriculture was developing in regions more suitable to the raising of crops” (1979: 224). Pastoralist is concerned with the raising of livestock like tending and use of animals such as goats, sheep, yak, buffalo, etc. They are usually found in many variations in different parts of the world with different composition of herds, social organisation and management practices. They move the herds from one place to another in search of fresh pasture and water for their animals. They also tend to adapt to the changing environment due to their frequent movement from one place to another. So, the territory of pastoral nomads far exceed than that of most horticulturalist societies. Pastoralism is quite popular in Africa and Asia.

Some important features of pastoral communities are: low population density; small community size; generally nomadic or transhumant; frequent food shortages; trade is popular; presence of some full-time craft specialists; moderate individual differences in wealth; presence of part-time and full-time political leaders.

1.5.3.5 Settled Agriculture

Settled agriculture involves use of a variety of techniques like ploughing, bundling, use of draught animals, fertilisation, irrigation, weeding, land parceling, crop rotation etc. that enable cultivation of fields permanently and also to augment productivity. Many communities practice settled agriculture as one of the major economic activities. The production is mostly for their own consumption and whatever surplus production is exchanged for other goods and services. Basically, the unit of production and consumption in their society is the family. Most of the family members are engaged in the process of cultivation especially during the period of weeding and harvesting.

General features of settled agriculture are presence of high degree of craft specialisation, well developed technology, complex political organisation, marked social differentiation in terms of wealth, power, status etc. Societies practicing settled agriculture are prone to food shortage. This is paradoxical because compared to other subsistence technologies, settled agriculture is more productive. Then why do frequent food shortages occur in communities professing settled agriculture? Two possible answers are : (1) in settled agriculture, growing a single crop as staple crop and /or as commercial crop is a common practice though other minor crops may be essentially used as supplement to the main staple crop. If such crops fail due to pests, drought, failure of seasonal rains, food shortage results; (2) in settled agriculture, it is quite likely to grow commercial crops. If market demand is very feeble or inadequate, losses are incurred leading to food shortage. Earlier, the paddy cultivation in settled field was less productive due to

the dependence of rain fed irrigation. The situation has improved considerable with irrigation system, use of pesticides and high yield varieties of paddy.

1.6 TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Traditional economic system is usually associated with the simple societies like the tribal societies, rural societies, etc. It is chiefly characterised by subsistence mode of production with little surplus production. This economy is usually supplemented by other minor occupations like collection of forest produce etc. However the most important features of the traditional economic system is that of various modes of exchange.

Let us now discuss different mode of exchanges prevailing among different societies.

1.6.1 Barter System

Barter system is the direct exchange of goods and services i.e an exchange may be goods for goods, goods for services, service for service etc. It is considered to be the earliest form of exchange in Human society. Barter usually replaced money as the method of exchange during crisis like war, natural calamity, etc.

1.6.2 Silent Trade

Silent trade (also known as silent barter or trade and dumb barter) is a peculiar form of exchange where the exchanging parties do not come into face to face interaction during the process of exchange. The exchanging partners could be enemies or antagonised. One group of people leaves certain quantity of products at a customary place to be taken by another group, who in turn leaves back some other products. The pygmy Semang and Sakai of Malaya and the Vedda and Sinhalese of Sri Lanka practice silent trade.

1.6.3 Jajmani System

William H Wiser (1988) has introduced the term Jajmani system in his book, *The Hindu Jajmani System: A Socio-Economic System Interrelating Members Of A Hindu Village Community In Services*, where he described in detail how different caste group interact with each other in the agriculture based system of production, distribution and exchange of goods and services. In different parts of India different terms are used to describe this economic interaction among the castes, for example in Maharashtra the term *Balutadar* or *bara batute* and *mera* or *mirasi* in rural Rayalaseema of Andhra Pradesh, *jajmani* in North India, *mirasi* in Tamil Nadu and *adade* in Karnataka.

Jajmani system, (Hindi: deriving from the Sanskrit yajamana, “sacrificial patron who employs priests for a ritual”) is reciprocal (usually asymmetrical and some scholars term it non-reciprocal) social and economic arrangements between families of different castes within a village community in India for the exchange of goods and services. Here, one family exclusively performs certain services for the other, such as ministering to the rituals or providing agricultural labour, or some goods such as agricultural implements, pots, baskets etc in return for payment, protection, and employment security. These relations are supposed to continue from one generation to the next, and payment is normally made traditionally, in the form of a fixed share in the harvest rather than in cash.

Speaking about the composition of villages Williams 1988 stated that each village

is composed of a number of jatis/castes each having its occupational specialty. Through jajmani relations these occupational jatis get linked with the land owning dominant caste. The jajmani system operates around the families belonging to the land owning dominant caste the members of which are called jajmans and the occupational/artisanal and service castes called *Kameens* in North India and *panollu* in Andhra Pradesh. The term *Kameen* or *panollu* means one who works for somebody or serves him.

Williams further delineated the characteristics of the jasmani system as stated below:

- Unbroken relationship: Under the jajmani system the kameen remains obliged to render the services throughout his life to a particular jajman and the jajman in turn has the responsibility of hiring services of a kameen.
- Hereditary relationship: Jajmani rights are enjoyed hereditarily. After the death of a man his son is entitled to work as kameen for the same jajman family or families. The son of a jajman also accepts the son of the kameen as his kameen.
- Multidimensional relationship: Due to the permanency of relationship both the jajman and kameen families become mutually dependent on each other. They often take part in the personal and family affairs, family rituals and ceremonies.
- Barter exchange: Under jajmani system the payments are made mainly in terms of goods and commodities. The kameen gets his necessities from the jajman in return for his services. [William H Wiser (1988)]

The system has been regard as essentially exploitative, characterised by a latent conflict of interest which could not crystallise due to the prevalent social setup.

The jajmani system has gradually decayed in modern society due to many reasons. Modern economic systems measure everything in terms of its monetary value. The decline of belief in caste system and hereditary occupation has given a strong blow to the system. Growth of better employment opportunities outside the village and introduction of new transport options have also led to the downfall of jajmani system.

1.6.4 Ceremonial Exchange

It is a kind of social system in which goods and services are given to relatives, friends and neighbours on various social occasions like birth ritual, marriage, death rituals, etc. The basic initiative of this exchange is to establish good relations between the various social groups in the society.

1.6.5 Reciprocity

Reciprocity consists of giving and taking goods and services in a social medium without the use of money, which ranges from pure gift giving to equal exchange to cheating or deceitful. Under reciprocity, there are again three forms: general reciprocity (the gift giving without any immediate or planned returned), balanced reciprocity (the exchange with the expectation of return that involves a straightforward immediate or limited-time span) and negative reciprocity (an attempt to take advantage of another or something for nothing).

1.6.6 Redistribution

It involves the accumulation of wealth or labour or goods by a particular individual for the purpose of subsequent distribution. This type of accumulation for redistribution is seen in societies having political hierarchies with specialised or privileged political positions or political agencies. Centralised accumulation and redistribution require a suitable political organisation. Such a system was reported among the Creek Indians, the Buniyaro of Western Uganda, the Buin of Melanesia. Here, certain amount of agricultural produce is deposited in the community granary by each family. Such accumulated grains can be redistributed to those who lack food or during lean seasons or famines or on special occasions. The chief or the king is responsible to oversee redistribution though in some cases the chief may get benefitted. Besides grains, labour services and crafts are also redistributed.

1.6.7 Market or Commercial Exchange

A market is any one of a variety of systems, institutions, procedures, social relations, and infrastructure whereby parties engage in exchange. While in some cases goods and services are exchanged by barter, most commonly these exchanges take place through the medium of money. It may also involve the transaction of labour, land, rental and credit and also other services. A transaction becomes a market or commercial exchange, if the factors of supply and demand determine the price or nature of exchange. Market exchanges develop when trade increases and barter becomes increasingly inefficient; when the level of economic development becomes higher; surplus production is specifically meant for exchange; external trade develops; kin based reciprocal relations become weak and difficult to operate in situations of dense population size and complex societal arrangements etc.

Modern trade exchange provides a trading platform system for its members or clients. The member companies within the network participate in buying and selling of their products and services to each other using an internal currency. For an effective method of increasing sales, conserving cash, moving inventory, and making use of excess production capacity for businesses around the world, markets have evolved as an arrangement to become a common platform for them. They deposited into their account as they have the purchasing power of goods and services from other members utilising their trade credit, etc. Such an exchange plays an important role by providing the record-keeping, brokering expertise, and so on.

1.7 THE DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS AND SERVICES: TWO CASE STUDIES

As we learnt in the above account, there are different practices of the distribution of goods and services. Two important cases are discussed below:

1.7.1 Kula

According to Malinowski (1922), Kula is a ceremonial exchange among Trobriand Islanders of New Guinea. Kula is also known as kula exchange or kula ring. It is a complex system of visits and exchange of two kinds of ornaments as well as trading of food and other commodities with the people of other (nearby or far-off) islands. Because the islands are differentially endowed with different natural resources, each island could produce only a few specialised products or commodities and have to depend upon other islands for other essential things and objects. Because trading involves visiting distant and strange islands which may be risky,

the Trobrianders have worked out *kula* for a safe and secure trade by establishing trade partnership by means of exchanging *kula* ornaments and also gift giving. The essence of such trade relations is not the trade in itself but it is subdued or embedded in a ceremonial exchange of valued shell ornaments.

The Kula ornaments are of two types. One consists of shell-disc necklaces (*veigun* or *Soulava*) that are traded to the north (circling the ring in clockwise direction) and the other are shell armbands (*Mwali*) that are traded in the southern direction (circling counter-clockwise). *Mwali* was given with the right hand, the *Soulava* given with the left hand, first between villages then from island to island. If the opening gift was an armband, then the closing gift must be a necklace and vice versa. These are exchanged in a ceremonial ambience purely for purposes of enhancing mutual trust relationships, securing trade, and enhancing one's social status and prestige. The Kula ornaments are not in themselves remarkably valuable. However, these ornaments are loaded with folklore, myths, ritual, history etc which generate a lot of enthusiasm and bind together the trading partners. Exchange of these ornaments facilitates trading of goods with ease in the island visited as the trading partner in the host island helps the visitor(s). However, people participating in the Kula ring never indulge in any bargaining on the objects given and taken. Individual members trade goods while circulating the *Soulava* and *Mwali* in a cordial atmosphere. (Malinowski, 1922 Sixth Impression: 1964)

1.7.2 Potlatch

Potlatch is an elaborate feast among the American Indian groups of Northwest Coast at which huge quantities of food and valuable goods (such as blankets, copper pieces, canoes, etc.) are pompously and competitively distributed to the guests in order to humiliate them as well as to gain prestige for the host. Burning huge quantities of goods is also common. Potlatches are organised by individuals like village chiefs or a group of individuals or villages. The chief of a village invites a neighbouring village to attend the potlatch which the latter invariably has to accept. The guests in turn invite the hosts to attend the potlatch to be given by them. Though such distribution of gifts take place in a competitive way, it also serves as a leveling mechanism where food and gifts get equally distributed among various villages in a wide area in the long run.

Similar feasts are organised among the Melanesian societies (New Guinea) wherein large number of (in hundreds) pigs are slaughtered. Several villages attend these feasts. It appears that such large scale feasts are a waste. But these feasts serve the mechanism of 'storing' surplus food produced during good seasons, not by storing in bins, but by feeding the pigs. Thus pigs become food-storing repositories which can be used as food during lean seasons. If successive years are also good, there will be over production of food that goes to pigs. As a result, the size of drove grows into an unmanageable proportion, pigs destroy crops. In order to reduce the drove size, a large number of pigs are slaughtered and a huge feasts is organised by inviting guests from other villages. As a result, the pig population gets drastically reduced and their menace on the fields also gets reduced. Such feasts take place between villages reciprocally and the excess food (pigs) gets redistributed. These feasts are not necessarily competitive but in a few cases, in order to keep up one's status, some 'Big men' of Melanesian societies organise such huge feasts.

1.8 SUMMARY

In summing up this unit, we can say that every society (be it a simple or complex society) has a political organisation that provides the ways of living as a social being by maintaining social order and resolve conflicts. The level of the organisation and its structure differs from society to society. In addition to political organisation, every society has economic organisation that involves different customary or traditional ways of transferring economic exchange of goods and services, and also the customs for distributing them.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What are the similarities and differences between tribal society and band societies?
- 2) Compare and contrast the Chiefdoms and State societies?
- 3) What are the different form of distribution of goods and services among the simple society? Describe their components briefly.

