

Block

7**ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS**

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BLOCK 7 ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

The present Block -Economic and Political Organisations aims to introduce the students to the concepts, definitions, perspectives and various forms of two important aspects of human society namely economic and political organisation. Our goal is to place the study of economic and political aspects in the larger social and cultural contexts by exploring the relations of power, kinship, religion and social transactions. Further, it is intended to make the student to understand various forms of these two important aspects in the cross-cultural context. Students, or for that matter any other person who does not know about socio-cultural variation across different human communities, tend to think that political and economic organisations are much the same everywhere just as their own or with the ones with which they are familiar. In this block, we will come to know about the various types of political and economic systems, several curious practices concerning social control, conflict resolution, and different ways of non-monetised exchange of goods and services and, practices of conspicuous consumption and ceremonial exchange of goods. The students will also have an opportunity for an excellent exposition to various traditional societies as examples across the world that have specialised economic and political systems and organisations.

Political organisations are those institutions and /or mechanisms (formal and informal) which perform various activities concerning decision making and conflict resolution in order to create and maintain social order and coping with social disorder. Usually when we hear the word politics or political life, we think of political parties, elections, government, parliament, assembly or panchayat, police, judiciary, several specialised political offices, executive, army, and external political dealings etc. However, in many societies, political sphere is devoid of formal institutions and specialised functionaries. In the two units on political organisation, we will learn more about the traditional form of political institutions. The major argument in the study of political organisations is that politics cannot be isolated from other subsystems of a society. Here we understand how power and law are put to use in social and cultural environment. The important components of political systems and organisations are law, political formations (stateless political societies/formations and state societies/formations), conflict resolution, social control mechanisms.

Economic organisations are universal aspect of culture; they are seen in all cultures of the world. Economic organisation means a set of actions and behaviours surrounding the processes of production, allocation and distribution and the use and consumption of goods. In social anthropology, we emphasise the economic institutions of traditional societies where the systems of production, distribution and consumption are socially regulated, organised and reproduced. However in the recent times, modern economic institutions are also studied applying the concepts of formal economics like marginal utility, economising rationality, demand supply etc. Whatever economic institution we may study, the emphasis is to understand economy as an integral part of the wider social cultural environment. The student will understand various ways of organising production, various ways by which goods and services are circulated, exchanged including market exchange. It is useful to understand various economic institutions with the help of examples.

UNIT 1 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

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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 jajmani 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 regarded 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 return), 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.



UNIT 2 STATE AND STATELESS SOCIETIES: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 State and Stateless Societies and Contribution of Anthropology
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- 2.4 Kinship and Power
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- 2.5 Political System among the Indian Tribes
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 - References
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Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, you would be able to understand:

- the meaning of state and stateless societies and the anthropological contributions to the study of the same;
- relationship between kinship and power; and
- political organisations in some of the Indian tribes.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In anthropology we have studied about social system and its subsystems such as political organisations, economic organisations, religious organisations, etc. In this unit, we will focus on political systems. We must understand that political institutions are not isolated components but they are part and parcel of social system and are interconnected with other subsystems in a society. Thus in any social system, the economic system, the political system or the kinship system and the ritual life are all interconnected. While the study of political system seems more concerned to political science, anthropologists too have studied political system of both state and stateless societies. Anthropologists are interested in studying political institutions and the underlying principles on which these institutions act upon. In anthropology, inductive and comparative approaches are used in studying political institutions and explaining the uniformities found among them and to interpret their interdependencies with other features of social organisation (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940 : 5). Since long anthropologists like Fortes, Evans-Pritchard and

Mary Shepardson have emphasised that both state and stateless political systems are part of social structure through which political action takes place. Southall (1974: 154) has noted that social anthropologists are gradually more interested in studying the political aspects of contemporary times and intensive analysis of local political behaviour and processes. Thus, the interest in studying political pattern, behaviour and processes is gradually expanded with wider attention in both simple and complex societies. However, in this unit we are going to emphasise the political system in simple societies, be it state or stateless societies.

2.2 STATE AND STATELESS SOCIETIES AND CONTRIBUTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology has noteworthy contribution to the study of traditional societies, the tribes or peasant communities. The ethnographic contributions of anthropologists have helped us understand different aspects of social and cultural life and political system of these communities. Studies of tribes in India, Africa or in Australia have recorded the fact that every society has definite norms, values and recognised rules of conduct. Individuals violating such norms or values or breaching rules of conduct are punished or subjected to various sanctions. Within a locally defined community, an individual who commit some act which goes against the norms of the community invites punishment by recognised coercive authority. Political community, whether or not it is organised in the form of state has its own territory (Mair, 1962). Protection of defined territory and its individuals, organising social activities like rituals and religious activities, and organising economic activities entail organised authority. The authority decides over the level of punishment for each defied activity which goes against the societal norms or values. Every society has certain authority, whether centralised, decentralised or lack of centralised authority. Lucy Mair makes the useful remark that ‘there is no society where rules are automatically obeyed’. Anthropologists like Gluckman and others have tried to show that in all primitive societies-ranging from small bands of hunters or fishermen to kingdoms-there exists some basic mechanism of social control which regulates the affairs of the tribe and resolves conflicts arising among its component groups (Eisenstadt, 1959: 201).

The general assumption is that most of these social control mechanisms are in one way or another common to all types of traditional or preliterate societies-whether segmentary, centralised or some other (ibid.). According to Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) the societies which have centralised authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions were labeled as ‘primitive states’. Some groups like the Zulu, the Nguni, the Bemba, the Banyankole and the Kede are regarded as “primitive states”. They observed sharp differences in the distribution of wealth, status and privileges, corresponding to the distribution of power and authority in all ‘primitive’ states.

Stateless societies on the other hand, had no great distinctions between the rank, status, or wealth of their members (Haskell Fain, 1972). But they may not be egalitarian societies. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940: 5) have defined that the societies which lack centralised authority, administrative machinery, and constituted judicial institutions-in short which lack government-and in which there are no sharp divisions of rank, status, or wealth are called stateless societies. They are the Logoli, the Tallensi and the Nuer in Africa. Examples of such tribes in India are some Andaman Islander tribes namely, Jarwa, Sentinelese, etc. Some other hunters and gatherer groups where there is no centralised political system can be included in the stateless societies. Historically speaking, many other tribes in India

were stateless societies. But the evolution of political system from stateless to state has taken place subsequently.

Like state, in the stateless societies, the political activities are supported by group behaviour. In stateless societies, the community members select the leader who possesses dominant characters with strong personalities, well-built physical feature, and may be with possession of wealth. In the study of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard has reported the behaviour of the 'leopard skin chief' who is a dominant character selected from outside the clan group. However, this clan is not necessarily a dominant clan. He stands outside the lineage and tribal system. The leopard skin chief possesses bounty wealth in the form of cattle. He is offered cattle by community members or by the members of the guilty. Murder/killing of a fellow community member is often regarded as a serious offense to the community as a whole. Therefore, the leader takes appropriate action to compensate the kin of the deceased and the community he belongs to. Lucy Mair (1962) pointed out that in the absence of centralised political system if a man was wronged, his lineage supported him in seeking redress by force. When they got tired of fighting they invite an influential man to mediate between the two sides. However, collective action takes place in war or in maintenance of peace. The community members support the leaders in war and feud. This could be for protection of territory or could be for taking on revenge in case of murder of fellow members. While in more complex state societies, the guilty is punished by appropriate court of law or well developed judiciary system. In stateless societies there are no obvious political institutions like that in state. A leader is an institution in these societies. He also possesses ritual power. Appropriate quantum of punishment is decided by the leader. He maintains peace in the community. A leader resolves the disputes between community members both within and outside. In addition, the protection of territory or resolving territorial disputes is significant part of the decision making authority. Allocation and distribution of resources takes place with appropriate leadership. Both state and stateless societies protect social norms and values. Factors like religion, wealth and other socio-economic factors are closely interconnected with and determine political behaviour in stateless societies. In stateless societies, both kinship and politics are often diffused.

Case-1

The Polynesians of the Hawaiian Islands had an exceedingly complex political system based on hereditary rank and classes, and theocracy and divine right.

Among Polynesians, there are three hereditary social classes-commoners, nobles, and inferiors. Agriculturists, fishermen and artisans are the commoners, work under the shadow of nobles. The nobles are warriors, priests and political officials. The hereditary ranking of nobles was based on descent from the gods, genealogically traced. Rank of individuals and segments was traced in terms of birth order. The highest rank traced through first born child. The islands were divided into chiefdoms ruled by a paramount chief. The paramount chief's rule was administered and maintained through a cluster of high ranking nobles who served as priests, counselors and military leaders. The districts of chiefdom were in turn ruled by local chiefs of high rank. The nobles were supported almost entirely by tribute extracted from commoners in local areas which in turn were administered by chosen chiefs and overseers of lower rank. Being of the highest rank and sacredness himself, the chief approached the status of the god who conveyed on him these divine rights. This system was stable and immutable. The paramount chief is however not permanent and is often unstable and flexible. The political fortunes of paramount chiefs coaxed and waned by with their success in holding their chiefdoms together in the face of insurrection and intrigue.

Source: Roger M. Keesing, Cultural Anthropology A Contemporary Perspective (2nd Edition), 1981, CBS College Publishing, New York.

Case-2

A Nuer tribe is the largest group whose members are duty bound to combine in raiding and defense. There is no overarching government. The Nuer maintains a measure of unity and orderly political relations between the territorial divisions. Evans-Pritchard calls tribe to each territorial sub-division. A tribe is sub divided into segments. The relationship between segments is conceived in terms of hierarchies of patrilineal descent. There is fight between territorial divisions but when two neighbouring groups fight with third party both the neighbouring groups fight together against the third party. Disputes begin over many grievances such as damage to property, adultery, rights over resources, to name a few. The Nuers are prone to fighting and many disputes lead to bloodshed. Confrontation between members of different groups or villages can lead to use of spears and bloody war between men of each village. A leopard-skin chief is the mediator who resolves the disputes. Such a chief has ritual powers and a role as mediator and negotiator but he has no secular authority and no special privileges. His performance in peacemaking is possible because he stands outside the lineage and tribal system. The leopard skin chief was also a wealthy leader partly because of the cattle he received for his services as mediator who could mobilise the support of a substantial coalition of followers.

Source: Roger M. Keesing, Cultural Anthropology A Contemporary Perspective (2nd Edition), 1981, CBS College Publishing, New York, pp. 282-285

Contribution of Anthropologists

In this section, we will briefly outline the contributions of anthropologists to the study of state and stateless societies. The contribution of anthropology to political thought has emerged from its apprehension with stateless societies. The growing interest in political anthropology has been observed in the early writings on primitive state and stateless societies by M. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), J. Middleton and David Tait (1958), David Easton (1959), L. Mair (1962) M.L. Perlman (1969), Balandier (1967) and recent studies by J. Vincent (1990) and E. Wolf (2001) amongst others. The series of works by Hegel and Karl Marx and their argument on “state” have also contributed substantially to the study in political anthropology.

Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard are perhaps the first anthropologists who have classified the political systems of African communities as state and stateless societies. The study on ‘*African Political System*’ by Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) is a monumental piece to theoretical contribution in political anthropology. In the beginning of the essay the authors have propounded that in any social system you will find the political institutions, the kinship organisation, the economic institutions and the ritual life which are interlinked and interdependent. One institution influences another. Both Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) have emphasised that the definition of ‘political’ in anthropology has to be marked off clearly. The political institutions with its true meanings should be established to make it distinct from other features of social system. Thus the foundation to theoretical contribution in political anthropology was observed in their writing which was gradually facilitated the emergence of a separate discipline of Political Anthropology. Shepardson (1963) pointed out that in *African Political Systems*, Fortes and Pritchard have clearly defined the type of social structure through which political action takes place and revealed the distinctions of political behaviour whether state or stateless society (kin based, segmentary and state societies). However, some anthropologists like David Easton and Balandier have raised the concern with uncertainties of political anthropology, which they believed had not marked off differently from other areas in anthropology or uncertainties found with definitions of state. For example, Balandier (1967, 1970) in his book *Political*

Anthropology has pointed out that definitions of state or political institution are usually too wide and consequently non specific.

Paige (1974) supported the argument of anthropologists about understanding relationship between systems of kinship and forms of political organisation. He further emphasised that the organisation of kinship and the organisation of the polity are closely integrated in stateless societies. Kinship roles frequently determine patterns of group interests and solidarity and lines of political cleavage and conflict. He derived the Gluckman's (1965) argument that the maintenance of political order in stateless societies depends on a network of cross cutting kinship ties. He has particularly cited Murphy (1957), Van Velzen and Vanwetering (1960) and Otterbein (1968) to argue that matrilineal and patrilineal residence rules produce different patterns of group ties and consequently, different pattern of political conflict. It has been assumed that both matrilineal and patrilineal descent rules should have similar effects on inter-group conflict. Swanson's original findings that patrilineal descent correlates with factional politics and matrilineal descent are consequence of the forms of political organisation has been contrasted by other anthropologists. Paige has, however, concluded that association between rules of descent and the organisation of the polity was a special case of a more general principle underlying patterns of group conflict and cleavage in all political systems.

Hegel and Karl Marx are pioneers in contributing to the study of state and political systems. Their thoughts still found to be very relevant and contemporary to the studies in political anthropology. Hegel starts from describing the state and makes man the subjective aspect of the state. He believed, democracy starts from man and makes the state into objectified man. People make the constitution. Democracy has relation with other forms of state. Democracy is the essence of all constitutions of the state and is considered to be Old Testament in relation to other political forms. Socialised man is the particular constitution of the state. All that exists, law, constitution, democracy and other political forms are for the benefits of man. But it is not that man is there for benefit of law or other political forms. Law has a human existence and in other political forms man has only a legal existence. That is the fundamental character of democracy (McLellan, 1971:215).

For Karl Marx state in many ways is a most characteristic institution of man's alienated condition. State is a negation of man, similar to religion, law and morality, and equally based on a particular mode of production. Meanwhile, he also talked about positive elements of state. The early work of Feuerbach's critique of Hegel's philosophy and his own experience as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* could help him in to elaborate his ideas on the state. He narrated his ideas in a manuscript as a critique of Hegel's political philosophy. Marx provides an idealistic form of government where the state and civil society are not separate, but directly correspond to the 'essence of socialised man'. He called this 'true democracy'. In a democracy the constitution, the law and the state itself are only a self determination of the people and a particular content of them in so far as it is a political constitution (KMSW: 29). He viewed state like religion, as a statement of man's ideal aims and also a compensation for their lack of realisation (McLellan, 1971). He differentiated between state and polity. He pointed out that the more political the state is and the more it constitutes separate sphere, the more incapable it is to solve the society's problems.

While in early writings, Marx emphasised on gap between the state and society in later part he focused on analysis of the function of the state in society. He later

considered state as a part of society. He discussed about origin of the state and other social institutions. The state is a manifestation of interest of certain dominant class by which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests. Sometimes Marx says that the state need not be representative of the whole of a class but only a section of that class. State acts as intermediary among fully developed classes for benefit of one and other classes and sometimes it acts independently where the classes are not fully developed. The state acts as an intermediary in the formation of all communal institutions and gives them a political form. The state in turn modeled other social institutions.

Marx considered America as a modern state. He considered bureaucracy to be the most essential part of this modern state apparatus. His manuscript, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State in 1843 with special focus on Prussia described how the bureaucracy had eventually become a caste which claimed to possess, through higher education, the monopoly of the interpretation of the state's interests. The real aim of the state thus appears to bureaucracy as an aim against the state.

2.3 POLITICAL UNIT

Now let us discuss about what should be the unit of study for political system. While most of the studies have highlighted the tribe as a social unit or as a political unit, we should remember that the political unit is not only confined to one unit, the tribe; it could be a horde or clan as well. In seeking to define the political system, as suggested by Radcliffe-Brown, we have to look for a territorial community which is united by the rule of law. Thus, it could be a tribe, a local horde or clan. Middleton and Tait (1958: 8) have noted that "the basic unit of the political system is also a joint or extended family based on a three or four generation lineage. Its component families are generally the productive and consuming units, but the joint family is the largest purely domestic unit and is under the domestic authority of a single head who may also represent it as a corporate unit in political and ritual situations". The units are distinct in case of defined political system such as state. However, in stateless societies there is no spatially defined distinct political unit. It is noteworthy that the political unit in the societies with a state organisation is numerically larger than in those without a state organisation. The largest political groups among the Tallensi, Logoli, and Nuer cannot compete in numbers with the quarter to half million of the Zulu state (in about 1870), the 101,000 of the Ngwato state, and the 140,000 of the Bemba state. But it is suggested that a stateless political unit need not be very small. But it is probably true that there is a limit to the size of a population that can hold together without some kind of centralised government. Similarly, a political unit with state organisation should not be very large (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940: 7).

While a political unit could be a tribe, local hoard or clan, the political system expands beyond one tribe, a local hoard or a clan. One important point discussed by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) is that societies which have a high degree of general cultural resemblance need not have the same type of political system. Within a single linguistic or cultural area we often find political systems which differ from each other in important features. Conversely, similar political structures are found in societies of different cultures.

2.4 KINSHIP AND POWER

There is a close relationship between kinship and power. Political anthropologists have revealed the complex ties between these two systems. They have analysed and developed the theory of kinship and power relation. There is little differentiation between political functions and kinship institution. In stateless societies, the kinship ties often determine the political behaviour. Balandier (1967, 1970) has cited Van Velsen's case of Tonga of Malawi that the political relations were expressed in terms of kinship and the manipulations of kinship are one of the means employed in political strategy. The relationship between state and kinship often seem to be complimentary as well as antagonistic as discussed by Durkheim. The most important characteristics in centralised chiefdoms such as Zulu, Ngoni, Swazi, etc. are that the political sphere is distinct from that of lineage and kinship relations, and political positions acquire a certain degree of autonomy. In the above said chiefdoms, the relative importance of corporate descent groups, lineages, clans and the like for the definition of the territorial units of society and for the general political life of the tribe is insignificant than among the various segmentary tribes (Eisenstadt: 210-211).

2.4.1 Segmentary Lineage System

Smith (1956) pointed out that 'the lineages are corporate groups of a segmentary character defined in terms of unilineal descent'. An important feature that separates political character of lineage system from kinship association is that the political character of lineage organisation is linked with the corporate character of lineage groups. This feature normally lacks in kinship associations. Lineages are local groups which discharge political functions within their areas. This condition provides a subdivision of the population into territorial segments and the correlation of these territorial segments with the genealogical segments of the lineage units in stateless societies. Segmentary lineage system is common feature of every society. In stateless societies the political authority is often passed through lineage system or internally organised on a lineage basis. Lineage principles provide substitute for governmental organisation. The usages of lineage systems vary across societies with different degree and freedom. This may be used to express and validate forms of common action, such as reciprocal help and protection, joint responsibility in bride wealth and blood compensation, help in feud and war, regulation of inter marriage and observance of responsibility to the dead (Middleton and Tait, 1967: 6). In stateless societies the lineage system possesses key features of political relations and other social relations. The political power and authority are exercised between groups and statuses. External political relations of local groups are often conceived in lineage terms when there is no centralised political authority. The internal political authority could also be attached to lineages while this could be attached to other structures such as age-sets and age classes, ritual congregations, village councils and associations, ritual congregations, secret societies and other associations (ibid.).

Stateless societies do possess lineages or other type of segments. These grow or change through fission, accretion, and fusion of various units (Fortes, 1945, Smith, 1956, Easton, 1959). Depending upon the kind of kinship structure, stateless societies break down into two subclasses. One subclass is characterised by corporate lineage segments. Order is maintained in such societies by means of equilibrium of competing lineage segments. The other subclass is distinguished by a pure kinship structure in which no segmentation takes place. In centralised

primitive states, the segmentation may not be corporate lineages but localised groups, age-regiment, or associations. In complex modern ones there is segmentation and the units of division are quite different and take the form of political parties, interest groups, political leaders with specific followings, etc. (Easton, 1959: 222).

Middleton and Tait (1959) have identified several ways in which descent groups may be linked into a single system. First group, a single all inclusive lineage genealogy, which is sufficient to explain significant political identification of lineage with territorial segmentation, and the political institution is built upon a framework of agnatic lineages which are units into a single pyramidal system. This pyramidal system covers the whole jural community. It need not cover the entire society. Examples: the Tiv. The societies of this type, like the Lugbara and the Nuer, there is continual migration and spatial movement of groups. They are relatively economically and socially autonomous. These societies have little specialised political authority. The functionaries who are politically important are also primary holders of domestic or ritual roles. Second group, the political units of these societies consist of small descent groups, usually of shallow genealogical depth, which are relatively interdependent. They are grouped into overlapping clusters by ritual links of various kinds (often by forming the congregations of earth cults and other cults not based on descent) and by quasi- kinship ties. The internal hierarchical administrative organisation of any single major political units is based upon a single lineage genealogy. At the political level units are not linked by a single genealogy but rather by the recognition of mutual obligations. Exogamy is an essential aspect of ties of clanship where these provide a framework of political importance. They may be explained by the people as resulting from common agnatic ancestry, but they are explained in terms of clanship. Exact genealogical relationship is not reckoned. Examples of these societies are the Konkomba, the Amba, and the Tallensi. In these societies lineages are arranged in a segmentary organisation, but are concerned with inheritance, exogamy and family matters rather than with political relations proper. Third group, it composed of lineages from different clans, a compound structure of lineages which cannot be placed into a single pyramidal system. Relationships between all its territorial segments cannot usually be explained by reference to a single agnatic genealogy. These systems are characterised by the lack of an all inclusive lineage genealogy at any level of organisation except that of the nuclear group itself. They also have chief with certain specialised functions. Example of such type is the Dinka.

2.5 POLITICAL SYSTEM AMONG THE INDIAN TRIBES

Many primitive communities in India have transformed their political system from stateless society to state. The process of formation of state has been discussed by Southall (1974) and Sinha (1987) amongst others. The change in management of law and order from family and kinship ties to more centralised authority of the tribal chief is discussed in many studies. Village councils are the intermediary political institutions commonly found among the tribes in the country. However, these village councils have close connection with non-tribals too. F. G. Bailey has discussed about several political institutions in his study in highland village in Kandhamal district of Orissa. Village council and caste council are some of the well defined political institutions by Bailey in his study about political system. He observed that a village council is engaged in formulating new set of rules, allocating responsibility, organising labour, decision making in ritual process and festivals,

judicial process, etc. He found that formal management of the village lies in the hands of the village council (panchayat). The council has judicial, legislative, and executive functions (Bailey, 1957: 192). *Mutha* political institution has significant role in the Kondh tribal villages. A *mutha* consists of several villages. The political units like *mutha* and village councils have also significant role in determining economic behaviour. A creation of state, both *mutha* and village councils are engaged in collection of land revenues.

The study of political system in India has also been extensively discussed by Surajit Sinha and Harmann Kulke. They have discussed about formation of state. Surajit Sinha's study discusses about political system in eastern India as well as in the North eastern region of the country. The edited book on '*Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North-Eastern India*' is a collection of essays by contributors who have discussed different aspects of political systems. Sinha (1987) has primarily focused on the evolution of political system from pre-state to sovereign states in this book. The levels and types of politics described in his book are: Small chiefdoms-Miso chieftaincies, evolved chiefdoms on the hills (mainly following pre-settled agricultural technology): Khasi Siyems, principalities in the forest regions of eastern India: Orissa Princely States, Chhotnagpur Raj and Mallabhum, and Archaic sovereign states in North-east India: Ahom, Jaintia, Manipur and Dimsa State of Sikkim. He stressed that in all the above cases the higher levels of polities were evolved by coagulation of lineage or clan based units of one or more ethnic groups and/or by conquest of segmentary tribes by larger principalities or states. Chiefdoms provide a centralised direction to a higher tribal society. They do not have true government. The chiefdom is a development of the segmentary tribal system to a higher level of integration. A chiefdom is however not a class society (Elman, 1963). Sinha has further mentioned that in the pre state level structures like the Miso Chiefdoms in North-East India are entirely dependent on stratification of clan and lineage segments. But in more complex political formations in Eastern India like Chotnagpur Raj, Mallabhum, Panchkot, Barahabhum and feudatory states of Orissa, it is observed that the controlled terrain of the Raja is surrounded by segmentary clan-lineage based political formations.

2.5.1 Juang

Juang is one of the primitive tribes inhabited in Keonjhar District in Orissa. N. Pattanaik (1989) has reported that a *Pirh* is the village council among the Juang. Each *Pirh* is headed by a Sardar who maintains law and order, collect land revenue, etc. Each *Pirh* is divided into six sub *Pirhs* and each *Sub- Pirh* is headed by a Sardar. Pradhans are the village headmen of the village councils which are governed under Sub-Pirhs. A *Pradhan* takes decision on judicial matters and maintain law and order. A *Pradhan* also calls meeting which is attended by all village council members. Sacerdotal chief is called *Nigam* who takes decision on ritual and religious matters. The *Dangua* acts as messenger to the *Nigam* and the *Pradhan*. The village council consists of the formal leader and the *Barabhai* or elderly man of the village.

2.5.2 Hill Kharias

Hill Kharias are very primitive. The council of the traditional government consists of a headman called *Pradhan* which is mostly hereditary and a sacerdotal head. *Pradhans* are actively held and supported by the family heads. Since the family heads have consanguine or affine relationship with each other, the people under

the *Pradhan* may be considered members of a large family. Decision on disputes at individual level, family level, village level, quarrels, conflicts, contribution for religious and social affairs, marriage, social crimes and so on are taken up by the *Pradhan*. As a rule, the council meetings are arranged in the courtyard or verandah of the offender. It may also be held at times under a shady tree or in the house of the *Pradhan*. *Bhandari* is the village crier (Vidyarthi and Upadhyay, 1987).

2.5.3 Kondhs

N. Pattnaik (1988) mentions that Mutha Organisation is closely akin to centralised authority with marginal administrative and judicial institutions. Among Dongria Kondhs, a Mutha head is called Mandal. Among Dongria Kondhs, a village chief is called Jani who is also the spokesman of the village. Bismajhi and Barika work under the Jani. A sacerdotal leader is called Dishari. Among Kutia Kondhs village chief is called Majhi. Gonda is the village messenger. In the past the *Mutha* was an important socio-political organisation. The functions of *Mutha* organisation are to arbitrate cases like village boundary disputes, land disputes and disputes over bride capture.

2.5.4 Political Organisation in Other Tribal Inhabited Region

The traditional political organisation in Inumanda village in Paderu Block in Vishakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh studied by P. V. Rao (1987) has the similar structure like other tribes. The political organisation is in the hands of the village headman who works with a group of elders in the village who are collectively called Peddala Panchayat. Rich influential persons were recognised by the zamindars and local rulers as their representatives in the village for looking after collection of revenue and law and order maintenance. Such representatives are variously called as Naidu or Pettamdar. Naidu or Pettamdar is usually assisted by a Barika. Chellani acts as attendant to Naidu. Kula Panchayat is the body consists of all important members of the particular tribe. Village level issues and issues concerning persons from different tribes fall under the purview of multi tribal village elder council. Kula Panchayat is absent due to lack of sufficient strength of the tribe.

2.6 SUMMARY

The political system is a part and parcel of social system. Both state and stateless societies are part of political system. State is a dominant political feature with centralised authority, administrative machinery and judicial institutions. The centralised societies maintain some specificity and shares almost similar basic political and administrative structure. The stateless societies on the other hand lack centralised authority and lack well developed administrative machinery or judicial institutions. There are sharp differences in the distribution of wealth, status and privileges, corresponding to the distribution of power and authority, in all primitive states. Kinship is an important constituent of social structure and plays significant role in determining political behaviour in stateless societies. Lineage group is primarily segmentary and an important characteristic of stateless societies. However, lineage connection is also found in non-centralised societies, which is different from stateless societies and centralised ones. In stateless societies it is often difficult to differentiate between kinship and polity. Kinship is also an important political institution in stateless societies. Irrespective of position in both state and stateless societies, the central purpose in both these societies is maintenance of peace, and

stability of the society, protection of territory, values and norms, etc. The state is powerful force under the political system where more organised behaviour is controlled by political institutions.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Mention important characteristics of both state and stateless societies.
- 2) Discuss how lineage segmentation is an important political feature of stateless society.
- 3) Identify important political institutions in stateless societies.
- 4) What are the common features of political organisation discussed among the Indian Tribes?

UNIT 3 PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND EXCHANGE

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Main Theories in Economic Anthropology: A Brief Overview
- 3.3 Key Components of an Economic System
 - 3.3.1 Production
 - 3.3.1.1 Food Collection
 - 3.3.1.2 Food Production
 - 3.3.2 Distribution and Exchange
 - 3.3.3 Utilisation or Consumption
- 3.4 Summary

References

Suggested Reading

Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



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

- understand the two main schools in economic anthropology and the fundamental differences in their approach to the study of economic systems in simple societies;
- describe the main socio-cultural characteristics of hunters-gatherers, pastoralists and intensive agriculturists; and
- define reciprocity, redistribution, market/market exchange, utilisation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Broadly, an economic system may be defined as the one by which goods are produced, distributed, exchanged and utilised or consumed. However, interpreting the same for other cultures is not that simple. There is always a natural inclination towards interpreting the cultures of others through our ethnocentric assertion which is guided by our own values, beliefs and rationality. Therefore, it is important to view economy not in isolation but as part of a larger whole, that is, an integral component of the culture of the people, adopting an emic (insider's) perspective. To cite an example, participation of a large number of community members in *jhum* (shifting or swidden cultivation) in Meghalaya (India) and its associated rituals and community feasting could be viewed as unsustainable, unnecessary, unproductive and a sheer waste of time by someone living in metropolitan cities like Mumbai or Delhi, where neighbours hardly interact or get to interact with each other. But the same practices, developed over generations and influenced by the particular ecological locale and the adaptive challenges faced by the particular community hold great relevance in their economic life.

In this unit, we will learn about some fundamental concepts of *economic anthropology*. Economic anthropology may be regarded as a subfield of cultural anthropology pertaining to the study of human economic systems, across different cultures. When we talk about economic systems, we generally deal with four important aspects: **production**, making goods or money; **distribution** or the allocation of the goods or money between different people, exchange, which refers to the transfer of goods or money between people or institutions; and **utilisation** or **consumption**, which involves the using up of goods or money.

3.2 MAIN THEORIES IN ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Before going straight into the concepts of production, distribution, exchange and utilisation, it will be beneficial to have a broad overview of the main theories and schools of thought in economic anthropology, in order to have a better understanding of these concepts.

Till the 1920s, anthropologists did not pay much attention to the study of what later became ‘economic anthropology’ or the anthropological study of the working of economic systems in human society. The term ‘economic anthropology’ was coined by N.S.B.Gras (1927:10), an economic historian, who defined it as a ‘synthesis of anthropological and economic studies’ dealing with ‘the study of the ways in which primitive people obtained a living.’ Gras made a distinction between economic anthropology and ‘anthropological economics’. According to him, the latter, in contrast to the former, deals with the ‘study of the ideas that primitive people held about economic matters’. He strongly advocated greater research collaborations between anthropologists and economists, as in his view, ‘anthropologists could provide those in the economic field with facts in return for ideas and the fundamental issues involved in getting a living’ (1927:22). Despite his pioneering work, Gras did not have much impact upon later anthropologists working on economic systems.

Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) is regarded as one of the pioneering works in this sub-field. The crux of Malinowski’s argument was that societies like that of the Trobriand Islanders did not fit the classic economists’ model. In such societies, the motive of economic activities was not confined to the satisfaction of material wants but embraced much more such as gains in terms of enhanced social prestige. Further the boundaries between economic activities and other aspects like religion were interlinked and overlapped. Malinowski’s ‘anti-economics’ (Honnigman, 1973) approach continued to profoundly influence anthropologists working in this sub-field till about the late 1930s and then made a reappearance as a basic tenet of the substantivist position of the 1950s.

A different perspective to the issue came about with the publication of some seminal works by Goodfellow (1939), Herskovits (1940) and Firth (1965a). This perspective is basically premised around the belief that anthropologists could stand to gain by studying certain attributes of conventional economics and putting them to application to the economies of simple societies. This evolved into what is known as the ‘formalist’ stance, which centres on the argument that the neo-classical model of economics based on the study of utility maximisation under conditions of scarcity, can be applied to any society, with appropriate modifications. The neo-classical model of economics views material behaviour as an organised way of using means to arrive at certain valued goals or ends. The assumptions are

that man is a self-interested and rational being and that land, labour and capital are scarce and productive components in the economy. According to Burling (1962), all human cultures are, therefore, a collection of 'choice making individuals whose every action involves conscious or unconscious selections among alternatives means to alternative ends', whereby the ends are culturally defined goals. Goals refer not only to economic value or financial gain but to anything that is valued by the individual, be it leisure, solidarity or prestige.

The 1960s witnessed a big controversy in economic anthropology owing to the conflict between the formalists and the substantivists. In the 'substantivist revolution' (Le Clair and Schneider, eds., 1968) of the 1950s, we see the reappearance of a new version of Malinowski's 'anti-economics' position, with substantivism advocating the non-applicability of conventional economic theory to the study of non-western, nonindustrial economies. The so-called substantivist revolution was heralded by the political economist Karl Polanyi in his famous work *The Great Transformation* (1944). According to Polanyi, there are two meanings of economy – the substantive, which refers to a category of observable behaviour, e.g., production, consumption, distribution; and the formal, which refers to the logic of rational choice. In his view, the logic of rational choice occurs only in modern market societies and not pre-market societies. In Polanyi's words (1944: 43), 'the outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, and his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end. Neither the process of production nor that of distribution is linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods; but every single step in that process is geared to a number of social interests which eventually ensure that the required step be taken. These interests will be very different in a small hunting or fishing community from those in a vast despotic society, but in either case the economic system will be run on non-economic motives'. The works of Polanyi's successors like Sahlins (1965) and Dalton (1968) reinforced the substantive position that the economy is merely the process of provisioning society or the sociocultural system and that no social relation, institution, or set of institutions is economic but that it can only serve economic purposes.

Thus, it would not be wrong to state that till the early 1970s, the growth and evolution of economic anthropology has basically revolved around these two schools of thought- formalism and substantivism. On the one hand, there have been the formalists who seek to study social relations as concomitant to the process of resource utilisation. On the other hand, the substantivists have consistently argued that rational choice is only 'instituted' in the socio-cultural and political systems of capitalist societies, and that in other societies, economic behaviour is guided by non-economic principles.

The 1970s witnessed the influence of Marxian thought on economic anthropology. Scholars like Wolf (1982) highlighted the fact that European capitalist expansion had brought about remarkable transformation among traditional economies, which could no longer be studied in isolation, but in relation to the capitalist world systems. This perhaps holds even greater relevance in the present time of globalisation and a world order where market forces reign supreme.

There has also been the growth of other theories in economic anthropology such as culturalism propounded by Gudeman (1986). He argues that the central processes

of making a livelihood are culturally constructed. Therefore, models of livelihoods and related economic concepts such as exchange, money or profit must be analysed through the locals' ways of understanding them.

With this brief introduction to the basic theories of economic anthropology, we will now discuss in detail the concepts of production, distribution, exchange, utilisation and consumption, with examples from across the world.

3.3 KEY COMPONENTS OF AN ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Production refers to the process by which human beings transform, through their work, matter or natural resources into some goods, which is consumable or capable of being used to satisfy their need or want. Distribution is the process of allocation of goods between different individuals or groups while exchange helps an individual or group acquire particular products into which he/she wishes to convert the quantity allocated to him through distribution. Consumption, as the word indicates, refers to the use of the goods or services. As far as the inter-relationship between these components of an economic system goes, Marx (1904a: 274-75) provides a very apt description which is as follows: 'Production yields goods adapted to our needs; distribution distributes them according to social laws; exchange distributes further what has already been distributed, according to individual wants; finally, in consumption the product drops out of the social movement becoming the direct object of the individual want which it serves and satisfies in use. Production, thus, appears as the starting point; consumption as the final end; and distribution and exchange as the middle; the latter has a double aspect, distribution being defined as a process carried on by society, while exchange, as one proceeding from the individual'.

3.3.1 Production

Economic anthropologists, particularly the substantivist scholars, have generally displayed a tendency towards over-emphasising on the study of exchange processes and relations, with the result that study of production modes has not been accorded much priority. To cite Honnigman (1973), 'they do not analyse or theorise about the forces and relations of production or about the creation of commodities, but invariably restrict themselves to the circulation and destination of commodities already produced'. He further opines that Polanyi's tripartite scheme of reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange presupposes production modes but does not link up with them; the social concomitants of transactional modes, not of production modes are of dominant concern to him and his followers.

In economic anthropology, production has been given its due importance by the Marxian anthropologists, with Marx emphasising on the centrality of production to the economy. According to Dalton (1961:6), Marx perceives the economy as a process of interaction between men and their environment, a process through which men as producers 'integrate the use of natural resources and techniques and assure continuous cooperation in the provision of material goods'. Also, according to Marx (1904a:11), the economic base or mode of production in every society is made up of two components: (i) the force of production, the physical and technological arrangement of economic activity, and (ii) the social relations of production, the interpersonal and intergroup relationships that men must establish with one another as a consequence of their roles in the production process.

To state in simple terms, production involves human-nature interaction, with human beings interacting with nature through the means of their culture to wrest their material means of existence. It is perhaps for this reason that Godelier (1967a: 259) argues that production embraces all kinds of production operations regardless of the specific societal context in which they are performed and that economies ranging from the very simple (hunting, gathering and fishing) to more advanced agricultural and industrial economies can be studied within the same analytical framework.

We would now be looking into the various modes of production ranging from the 'simple'-hunting, gathering and fishing, where human beings occupy and wrest from nature their sustenance without transforming it, to the more complex such as animal husbandry and followed by cultivation, which involves the transformation of nature. In the evolutionary scheme of society, cultivation and animal husbandry invariably appear after hunting, gathering and fishing (Lowie 1938:282). Production, for the purpose of simple societies, may be basically studied under the two heads: food collection and food production.

3.3.1.1 Food Collection

Food collection, encompassing the production strategies of hunting, fishing and gathering, refers to all forms of subsistence technology in which food is secured from naturally occurring resources such as wild plants and animals, without significant domestication of either. Food collection is the oldest survival strategy known to man. But in the present day, there are very few communities left in the world who are entirely dependant on hunting and gathering for livelihood such as the Australian aborigines, the Inuits living in the arctic regions of Canada, the Andamanese tribes like the Onge and Jarawa etc. However, a number of communities continue to practice hunting-gathering and fishing to supplement their nutrition from agriculture. For instance, in the state of Assam, many of the tribes such as the Karbis, Tiwas, Mishings, Rabhas etc. are experts in the art of fishing and hunting, which they practice in conjunction with agriculture.

While the study of exclusively hunter-gatherer communities may help us arrive at some understanding of man's life in the past, Ember and Ember (1994) cautions against the excessive use of contemporary observations to draw inferences about the past for a number of reasons. In their view, we must understand that the earlier hunter-gatherers lived in almost all types of environments, including some very bountiful ones and not like the contemporary ones who live mostly in marginal areas and, therefore, are not comparable. Moreover, the contemporary hunter-gatherers are not relics of the past and like us have evolved continuously. Nor in the past did hunter-gathering communities have the opportunity to interact with agriculturists, pastoralists, industrial/capitalist societies.

Contemporary hunters-gatherers live in a variety of geographical locations and climates but mostly in marginalised areas where agriculture is not feasible. Nevertheless, such groups seem to share a number of cultural attributes like the fact that most live in small groups in sparsely populated areas and adhere to a nomadic lifestyle. For them, the camp is the main center of daily activity and the place where food sharing actually occurs. According to Honigmann (1973), the hunter-gatherer society is egalitarian, does not recognise individual land rights and do not accumulate surplus foodstuffs, often an important source of status in agricultural societies. Such communities usually do not have a class system or specialised or full-time political officials. Division of labour is largely on the basis

of age and sex. Ethnographic and archaeological evidence indicate that with few exceptions, such societies generally have a sexual division of labour, where men hunt and usually do the fishing while women gather wild plant foods. Sahlins (1968) calls them the 'original affluent society' despite the fact that hunter-gatherers consume less energy per capita per year than any other group of human beings. According to Sahlins, ethnographic data indicates that hunter-gatherers worked far fewer hours and enjoyed more leisure than typical members of industrial society, and they still ate well. Their 'affluence' came from the idea that they are satisfied with very little in the material sense.

3.3.1.2 Food Production

The origins of food production began about 10,000 years ago in the Neolithic period when man took the first steps from merely utilising to transforming nature through the cultivation and domestication of plants and animals. Archaeological data indicate that various forms of domestication of plants and animals arose independently in six separate locales worldwide during the period from 8000 to 5000 BC, with the earliest known evidence found throughout the tropical and subtropical areas of southwestern and southern Asia, northern and central Africa and Central America (Gupta, 2010). According to anthropologists, on its own, the physical environment has more of a limiting rather than a determining impact on the kinds of subsistence choices made. For instance, according to Binford (1990), further away from the equator, food collectors depends much less on plants for food and much more on animals and fish.

Food production systems may be generally divided into three main kinds: horticulture, pastoralism and intensive agriculture.

i) Horticulture

The term 'horticulture', denotes a simple food production strategy involving the growing of crops using simple hand tools such as the digging stick and hoe, in the absence of permanently cultivated fields. Horticulture generally does not involve any efforts at fertilisation, irrigation, or other means to restore the fertility of the soil once the growing season is over. As far as the cultural attributes of horticulturist societies are concerned, land is generally owned by the community or kin groups.

Horticultural practices are generally of two kinds. The most common one is extensive or shifting cultivation also known as swidden or slash-and-burn (*jhum* in the Indian context). This method of horticulture involves the cultivation of a particular plot of land for a short time, followed by a long fallow period, when the land is left alone to regain its fertility. The process of preparation of a piece of land for shifting cultivation involves clearing the undergrowth and felling of trees which are then left to dry. Just before the seasonal rains are to begin, they are set afire. The ash is also supposed to rejuvenate the soil and immediately after the first shower of the season, a mix of crop seeds such as maize, gourd etc. are sown with the help of the digging stick. Generally, all adults are involved in food production, with a division of labour based on sex. This particular form of cultivation has been derided by many as a main reason for deforestation and decimation of forests, and a number of environmental problems stemming from it. In India, shifting cultivation continues to be widely practiced in many states of the North-East like Assam, Meghalaya etc. and there have been many policy initiatives to wean away communities from this practice.

The other form of horticulture pertains to the planting of long-growing tree crops such as coconut and banana, which after a few years, continues to yield crops for a number of years.

Most horticultural societies, according to Ember and Ember (1994), do not rely on crops alone for food but rely on a combination of subsistence strategies which includes hunting, fishing, the raising of domestic animals like pigs, chickens, goats etc.

ii) **Pastoralism**

Pastoralism is characterised by a heavy though rarely exclusive reliance on the herding of domesticated animals for a living. It is usually practised in areas not particularly amenable to agriculture such as grasslands and other semiarid habitats. A classic attribute of a pastoral society is mobility of all or part of the society as a normal and natural part of life. This mobility might be permanent (nomadism) or seasonal, which is referred to as transhumance. The reason behind the mobile nature of their lives lies in that fact that their territory, by necessity, has to be spread over a large area. Once their herds have grazed in an area to the maximum, it has to be left alone for the grass to renew and they have to move on in search of newer pastures. Pastoral communities are generally small in size. In India, for instance, the Bakarwals are a pastoral nomadic community inhabiting the high-altitude meadows of the Himalayas and the Pir-Panjal ranges. Every year, they take their sheep high into the mountains, above the tree-line to the meadows, which are reachable only after a long arduous journey.

Among pastoral nomads, grazing lands are generally held communally and a chief may be the designated owner of the land. According to Sneath (2000), pastoralist systems are commonly organised into patrilineal clans and lineages that function as corporate livestock owning units, with men being typically the owners of livestock wealth. There is sexual division of labour, with men being in charge of the herding, while women process the herd's products such as milk. Such communities, according to Ember and Ember (1994), often make agreements with settled agriculturalists about rights to graze unused fields or even to clear a harvested field of leftover.

While pastoralism has been an effective and sustainable economic strategy in resource-poor environments, it could lead to overexploitation of the environment when outside forces constrict the available space.

iii) **Intensive Agriculture**

Intensive agriculture enables human beings to cultivate fields permanently by adopting a variety of techniques. It involves the use of fertilizers, both organic such as cow dung and inorganic chemical fertilisers, the use of technologies ranging from the humble plough to the tractor and could also incorporate complex systems of irrigation and water control. Societies practicing intensive agriculture generally have individual ownership of land. Such societies are also likely to be characterised by a higher degree of economic specialisation, more complex political organisation, and disparities in the distribution of wealth and power among different sections of the society. The basic unit of production is the family and division of labour takes place according to gender and age. Women in such a society have a number of duties associated with the food processing stage but they also spend a lot of time in the fields. In fact, apart from ploughing which is a taboo in many communities of rural and tribal India, women have an important role in intensive agriculture,

particularly wet paddy cultivation, including planting of seedlings in nurseries, transplanting them to flooded fields, weeding, harvesting etc.

While most intensive agriculturists particularly in countries like India live at subsistence level, with the produce barely enough to cater to their own needs, others have increasingly grown crops as surplus for the market. In fact, following the Green Revolution of the 1960s, farmers in the state of Punjab in India grew increasingly more to cater to the market. Contemporary Indian agriculture is also characterised by the increased trend of farmers, motivated by the market, to grow more cash than food crops. Such a trend coupled with the fact that intensive agriculturists may rely more often on single crops, subject to the vagaries of the weather, could result in food shortage.

3.3.2 Distribution and Exchange

Distribution and exchange has consistently remained the central focus of anthropologists interested in the study of economic systems and their working in society. While being closely related concepts, the main point of distinction between the two is that while distribution determines the proportion of total output that the individual will receive, exchange determines the specific products into which the individual wants to convert the share allocated to him by distribution (Honigmann 1973). He further opines that distribution implies a reward system in which produce is channeled out among individuals or groups by reason of their control over the factors of production or for the labour they expended in the productive process. Exchange, on the other hand, refers to the various processes by which goods (and services) move or are being transferred between individuals or groups, as, for example, between producer and consumer, buyer and seller, donor and recipient. Firth's (1965a) work among the Tikopia is a seminal study on distribution. In his view, every society has explicit or implicit norms on how the total pool of products is to be shared among its members and that these norms are geared to address the issue of division of a joint product and the compensation of the factors of production, especially labour. His observation of the principles of distribution in the Tikopia economy, which hold equal relevance for many pre-industrial economies, led him to certain conclusions. According to him (1965a:313), there is a 'definite concept that all participants in a productive activity should receive a share of the product, but that social considerations do not make it necessary for this share to be exactly proportionate to the contribution in time, labour, or skill that each individual has made'. Such inequalities in terms of allocation are particularly evident in tribal and peasant societies, where social and/or political achievement entitles some individuals to more than an equal share of material reward. Sahlins' (1968) study indicates that despite these 'inequalities' in distribution, the relationship between a chief and the followers in most tribal societies is not exploitative in nature but based on the principle of generalised reciprocity (we will come to it later in our discussion).

Now, we shall discuss the 'action, or act, of reciprocal giving and receiving' (Gregory, 1998) or exchange. According to Commons (1954), the concept of exchange, from the anthropological viewpoint, embraces two distinct kinds of transfer events: physical transfers and jural transactions. While the former involves locational movement and physical control; the second involves the transfer of culturally defined ownership and use rights. It is the latter aspect which has aroused the interests of anthropologists from the very beginning.

Significant understanding on exchange and the motives for it came from Malinowski's (1922) work on trade and gift giving among the Trobriand Islanders and Mauss's classic essay *The Gift* published in 1922. Malinowski studied the ceremonial exchange system- the *Kula* ring spread over eighteen island communities of the Massim archipelago, including the Trobriand Islands and involved thousands of individuals. Members of the *Kula* ring travelled long distances by canoe to exchange *Kula* items - red shell-disc necklaces (*veigun* or *soulava*) traded to the north in clockwise direction and white shell armbands (*mwali*) traded in the southern or counter clockwise direction. If the opening gift was an armshell, then the closing gift must be a necklace and vice versa. Malinowski (1922: 177) came to the conclusion that exchange among Trobrianders was better seen as a social act than a transmission of useable objects. Exchange, in his view, did not result in economic gain; quite the contrary, it represented a superiority of the giver over the receiver and placed a burden upon the receiver. Similarly, the basic argument of Mauss's essay is that gifts are never free and that they always give rise to reciprocal exchange. According to Gregory (1998), an important notion in Mauss' conceptualisation of gift exchange is 'inalienability' or the fact that the object is never completely alienated from giver; hence, the act of giving creates a social bond with an obligation to reciprocate on part of the recipient. To not reciprocate means not only loss of honour and status, but may also have spiritual connotations in some societies.

Later on, Polanyi and a group of scholars (eds., 1957) tried to distinguish between two kinds of processes involved in exchange among simple communities- goods-handling and goods- receiving, and raised a number of pertinent questions: 'Who passed on goods to whom, in what order, how often, and with what response among those listed under whom?' Based on the answers arrived at after analysing a number of ethnographic cases, they identified three kinds of exchange: (1) reciprocative sequence among fixed partners; (2) redistributive sequence between a central actor and many peripheral actors; (3) random market sequence (1957: vii-ix). In a later work, Sahlins (1965b) reduced these three kinds of exchange into two broad types: (1) 'reciprocity' or 'vice-versa' movements between two parties and (2) 'pooling' or 'redistribution' involving collection from members of a group, and redivision within this group. We will now try to understand the concepts of reciprocity and redistribution with a few ethnographic examples. We will also spend some time understanding market exchange, as in today's monetised economy, almost all societies of the world are coming within its ambit.

i) **Reciprocity**

Reciprocity constitutes the main basis of exchange in most non-market economies. According to Sahlins (1965b:145-49), reciprocity may be defined into three types based on the criterion of the stipulation of material returns, which are as follows:

- a) **Generalised reciprocity**, involving unstipulated reciprocation, is gift giving without consideration of any immediate or planned return. In such a case, the value of the gift is not calculated and the time of repayment not specified. Such type of reciprocity generally occurs only among close kin or people sharing close emotional bonds such as between parents and children, between siblings, close friends etc.
- b) **Balanced or Symmetrical reciprocity** occurs when someone gives to someone else, expecting a fair and tangible return - at a specified amount, time, and place (Bonvillian, 2010). Here, the exchange occurs owing to the

desire or need for certain objects. Giving, receiving and sharing constitute a form of social security and according to Honigmann (1973), it promotes an egalitarian distribution of wealth over the long run. While generally practiced among equals who are not closely related, balanced reciprocity principles may also be evident in gift giving among kin. To cite a particular example, among relatives in many parts of India, it is common practice for kin to give valuable items and even monetary contribution when a relative's daughter is being married off. The implicit expectation being that when their own daughter is married off, similar contributions could be expected from the receivers.

Sometimes there is a fine line between generalised and balanced reciprocity particularly gift giving in urban society, where though it might appear to be generalised reciprocity, there may be strong expectations of balance. For instance, two families residing in the same neighbourhood in Delhi may try to exchange gifts of fairly equal value, say based on calculations of what last year's Diwali gift's cost.

While balanced reciprocity generally operates on egalitarian principles, it could also take on a competitive form. Normally, it might be a means for villagers to 'bank' surplus food by storing up 'social credit' with fellow villagers by giving feasts, with the expectation that the credit will be returned. But affluent villagers might use this mechanism to enhance their social status by throwing lavish feasts and giving costly gifts. This seems to be the primary objective of chiefs among many Native American groups of the Northwest coast in holding a *potlatch* (ceremonial festival), where he would give away gifts, food and even destroy items of value in a spirit of competition with rival chiefs .

- c) **Negative reciprocity** is the exchange of goods and services where each party intends to profit from the exchange, often at the expense of the other (Bonvillian, 2010). Practiced against strangers and enemies, it could range from barter, deceitful bargaining to theft, and finds social sanction among many societies. For instance, among the Navajo, to deceive when trading with foreign tribes is considered morally acceptable (Kluckhohn, 1972). Barter is believed to fall within the realm of negative reciprocity, as it is a means by which scarce items from one group are exchanged for desirable goods from another group. According to Honigmann (1973), relative value is calculated and despite an outward show of indifference, sharp trading is more the rule.

While talking about the kinds of reciprocity, Sahlins (1965b: 149-74) points out that reciprocity leans toward generalised extreme on the basis of close kinship and that it moves towards the negative extreme in proportion to a diminution in kinship propinquity, and that it varies with other factors such as social rank, relative wealth and need, and type of goods.

ii) **Redistribution**

Redistribution refers to a kind of economic exchange characterised by the accumulation of goods (or labour), with the objective of subsequent distribution within a social group according to culturally-specific principles. While, redistribution exists in all societies within the family where labour or products or income are pooled for the common good, it emerges as an important mechanism in societies with political hierarchies. In the latter, it requires a centralised political mechanism to coordinate the collection and distribution of goods. While it serves as a mechanism for dispensing goods within a society, it could also be a means for a chief to

consolidate his political power and gain in prestige. This seems to be an objective of the *potlatch* where chiefs compete with each other to give away and destroy goods of value.

In less centralised societies that do not have formal chiefs, the economic entrepreneur or the ‘big man’ may carry out such acts. In modern market economies, redistribution takes place through taxation by the state, whereby resources are allocated back to individuals or groups within society, either through the provision of public services or directly through welfare benefits.

iii) Market/Market Exchange

In very broad terms, a market/ market exchange involves the buying and selling of goods, labour, land, rentals, credit etc. by persons, using an intermediary token of common exchange value. According to Honigmann (1973), such a two party market transaction could very well become a form of negative reciprocity, unless some sort of arrangement has been made to ensure at least an approach to balance. Although market exchange need not necessarily involve money, most commercial transactions, particularly nowadays do involve money (Ember & Ember, 1994). Again, while most of such transactions take place in a specifically designated market place, a market may exist without a designated physical place. This is more so in the contemporary world, where significant market transactions take place on the internet. On the other hand, in simple societies, a market place may signify much more than a place where economic transactions are performed. In rural and tribal India, even today, weekly *haats* or markets provide an opportunity for people to renew friendships, exchange local gossip, arrange marriages, while some may also have deep cultural significance. Reliance on the market and the use of general purpose money is increasing universally, with traditional subsistence giving way to commercialisation due to factors like demand, increased interaction with other societies etc. According to Plattner (1985), the substantivist stance in economic anthropology is rendered redundant in the context of markets in the present day. In his words, ‘the pretense that theories of markets and marketing were irrelevant became less viable’ in a world that increasingly resembles a market system. At the same time, according to Dilley (1992), over-simplistic notions of economic man as individual maximiser of economic value, as enunciated by the formalist position, have now receded in the face of theoretical criticism that such assumptions provide few convincing explanations of socio-economic status.

3.3.3 Utilisation or Consumption

The third component of the economic system following from production, distribution and exchange is utilisation or consumption. If we go by what Herskovits (1952: 298-309) says, then, utilisation has to be considered to be broader in scope than consumption. According to him, the process of utilisation involves two aspects: those leading to further production by employing the resources obtained as ‘capital’; and those involving direct, immediate consumption to satisfy current wants.

While scholars like Dalton (1969) and Sahlins (1969) have been critical of extending the capital concept to pre-industrial societies, scholars like Firth (1965a) have argued that many simple societies do use capital in the economic process either as a productive asset or as a means of facilitating control over purchasing power; or as a fund for investment. However, the comparatively high liquidity or ease of convertibility of many goods in primitive and peasant economies from one use to another, creates problems in this. Firth (1965a: 237-38), for instances observes

that pandanus mats, on which the Tikopians slept, and bark cloth used for blankets and clothing, were also utilised in the manufacture of objects like canoes, troughs and sinnet cord, thereby serving both production and consumption purposes.

Coming to the issue of consumption in simple societies, a key concept is that of the consumption unit which is a kin-based income-pooling or household unit that typically incorporates males and females of varying ages and is found in all preindustrial societies (Lee 1969). According to Firth (1965a:33-35) and Epstein (1967:160-61), variation occurs in consumption within the unit, on the basis of status and occupational differences. For instance, in many poor rural households of India, men's consumption needs may get priority over that of women; on the other hand, an expectant mother might be given better nutrition than the other women etc. The patterned way in which a consumer in a simple or peasant economy makes his consumption decisions over time ultimately represents his standard of living.

3.4 SUMMARY

From the above unit, we have thus learned that an economic system in simple societies cannot be studied in isolation but must be understood as part of the larger culture. Production, distribution, exchange, utilisation and consumption are not dependant only on pure economic gain, but on a host of social factors. The formalist school in economic anthropology led by scholars like Raymond Firth believes that anthropological studies of economic systems could benefit from the application of the neo-classical model of economics based on the study of utility maximisation under conditions of scarcity, with appropriate modifications. However, substantivists led by Karl Polanyi firmly maintain that conventional economic theory cannot be applied to the study of non-western, non-industrial economies. While this remains one of the enduring debates on the study of economic systems, it needs to be borne in mind that the modern world is a global village and simple societies are increasingly experiencing the impact of globalisation and the market economy. Modern day anthropologists going to study such societies are bound to encounter situations where many of their notions gleaned from books and theories might be challenged. But it is for them to rise to the occasion, document and maybe, propound new theories on the changes occurring in simple economies under the impact of modernisation and the market.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What are the two main schools in economic anthropology? What are the fundamental differences in their approach to the study of economic systems in simple societies?
- 2) What are the main socio-cultural attributes of hunters-gatherers, pastoralists and intensive agriculturists?
- 3) What is the primary motive, according to anthropologists, for exchange in simple societies? Elaborate with examples.
- 4) Is consumption different from utilisation? Do simple societies have the concept of 'capital'?



UNIT 4 POLITICAL POWER AND DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Contents

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 - 4.2 Political Power: Some Definitions
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 - 4.2.3 Big-man and Big-woman System
 - 4.2.4 Chiefdoms
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Learning Objectives



The main objective of this unit is to make the students understand the:

- different types of political organisations existing in human society and their basic features;
- distribution of power and social control mechanisms in simple society;
- different types of conflict resolution systems;

- allocation and utilisation of natural resources in human society;
- distribution of goods and services; and
- marketing exchanges.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Political organisations refers to groups that exist for the purpose of public decision making and leadership, maintaining social cohesion and order, protecting group rights, and ensuring safety from external threats. Political organisations have several features:

- Recruitment principles: Criteria for determining admission to the unit.
- Perpetuity: Assumption that the group will continue to exist indefinitely.
- Identity markers: Particular characteristics that distinguish it from others, such as costume, membership card, or title.
- Internal organisation: An orderly arrangement of members in relation to each other.
- Procedures: Prescribed rules and practices for behaviour of group members.
- Autonomy: Ability to regulate its own affairs. (Tiffany, 1979:71-72)

Social anthropologists cluster the many forms of political organisations that occur cross-culturally into four major types. The four types of political organisations (given below) correspond, generally, to the major economic forms. Societies in the ethnographic record vary in level of political integration- that is, the largest territorial group on whose behalf political activities are organised- and in the degree to which political authority is centralised or concentrated in the integrated group. When we describe the political authority of particular societies, we focus on their traditional political systems. In many societies known to anthropology, the small community (band or village) was traditionally the largest territorial group on whose behalf political activities were organised. The authority structure in such societies did not involve any centralisation; there was no political authority whose jurisdiction included more than one community. In other societies political activities were traditionally organised sometimes on behalf of multilocal groups, but there was no permanent authority at the top. And in still other societies political activities were often traditionally organised on behalf of multilocal territorial groups, and these have been incorporated into some larger, centralised political system (Ember, 2007: 420). Elman Service (1962) suggested that most societies can be classified into four principal types of political organisations: bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. Although Service's classification does not fit for all societies, it is a useful way to show how societies vary in trying to create and maintain social order. We often use the present tense in our discussion, because that is the convention in ethnographic writing, but the reader should remember that most societies that used to be organised at the band, tribe, or chiefdom level are now incorporated into larger political entities. With a handful of exceptions, there are no politically autonomous bands or tribes or chiefdoms in the world any more.

4.2 POLITICAL POWER: SOME DEFINITIONS

4.2.1 Band

Band is the form of political organisation found among foragers and hunters comprising anywhere between twenty people and a few hundred people, who are related through kinship. Because foraging has been the most long-standing form of political organisation, these units come together at certain times of the year, depending upon their foraging patterns and ritual schedule (Barbara D. Miller, 2002).

Band membership is flexible. If a person has serious disagreement with another person, one option is to leave that band and join another. Leadership is informal, and no one person is named as a permanent leader. Depending on events, such as organising the group to relocate or to send people out to hunt, a particular person may come to the fore as a leader for that time. This is usually someone whose advice and knowledge about the task are especially respected. (ibid)

There is no social stratification between leaders and followers. A band leader is the “first among equals”. Band leaders have limited authority or influence, but no power. They cannot enforce their opinions. Social leveling mechanisms prevent anyone from accumulating much authority or influence. Political activity in bands involves mainly decision making about migration, food distribution, and resolution of interpersonal conflicts. External conflicts between groups are rare because the territories of different bands are widely separated and the population density is low (ibid).

The band level organisation barely qualifies as a form of political organisation because groups are flexible, leadership is ephemeral, and there are no signs or emblems of political affiliation. Some anthropologists argue that “real” politics did not exist in undisturbed band societies. The Guayaki (Amazon basin), the Semang (Malaya peninsula), Iglulik Eskimo, the Kung (Africa), the Cholanaikans (Kerala), Andaman tribes are some examples of Band organisation (ibid).

4.2.2 Tribe

A tribe is a political group comprising several bands or lineage groups, each with similar language and lifestyle and occupying a distinct territory. Kinship is the primary basis of tribal membership. Tribal groups contain from a hundred to several thousand people. They are usually associated with horticulture and pastoralism. Tribal groups may be connected to each other through a **clan** structure in which members claim descent from a common ancestor. Tribal political organisation is more formal than band-level organisation. A tribal headman or headwoman (most are males) is formally recognised as a leader. Key qualifications for this position are being hard working and generous and possessing good personal skills. A headman is a political leader on a part-time basis only, yet this role is more demanding than that of a band leader. Depending on the mode of production, a headman will be in charge of determining the times for moving herds, planting and harvesting, and setting the time for seasonal feasts and celebrations. Internal and external conflict resolution is also his responsibility. A headman relies mainly on authority and persuasion rather than on power (Barbara D. Miller, 2002).

Pastoralist tribal formations are sometimes linked in a confederacy, with local segments maintaining substantial autonomy. The local segments meet usually at an annual festival. In case of an external threat, the confederacy gathers together.

Once the threat is removed, local units resume their autonomy. The equality and autonomy of units, along with their ability to unite and then split, are referred to as a segmentary model of political organisation. This form of tribal organisation is found among pastoralists worldwide. The Tiv (Nigeria), the Nuer (Sudan), the Oran, the Santal, the Bhil, the Gond are examples of Tribal political organisations (ibid).

4.2.3 Big-man and Big-woman Systems

In between tribe and chiefdom is the big-man system or big-woman system. Certain individuals develop political leadership following through a system of redistribution based on personal ties, generosity and grand feasts. Research in Melanesia, and Papua New Guinea established the existence of the big-man type of politics, and most references to it are from this region. Personalistic, favour-based political groupings are found in other regions too.

Unlike a tribal headman, a big-man or big-woman has a wider following across several villages. A big-man tends to have greater wealth than his followers. Core supporters of a big-man have heavy responsibilities in regulating internal affairs-cultivation-and external affairs-intergroup feasts, exchange of goods, and war. In some instances, a big-man is assisted by a group of respected men hailing from big-man's different constituencies.

4.2.4 Chiefdoms

Chiefdom is a form of political organisation with a central leader encompassing several smaller political units. Chiefdoms have larger populations, often numbering in thousands, and are more centralised and socially complex. Hereditary systems of social ranking and economic stratification are found in many chiefdoms, with social divisions existing between the chiefly lineage or lineages and non-chiefly groups. Chiefs and their descendents are considered superior to commoners, and intermarriage between two strata is forbidden. Chiefs are expected to be generous, but they may have a more luxurious lifestyle than the rest of the people. The chief ship as "office" must be filled at all times. When a chief dies or retires, he or she must be replaced. This is not the case with a band leader or big-man or big-woman. A chief regulates production and redistribution, solves internal conflicts, and plans and leads raids and warring expeditions. Criteria for becoming a chief are: ascribed criteria (birth in a chiefly lineage, or being the first son or daughter of the chief), personal leadership skills, charisma, and accumulated wealth. Chiefdoms have existed in most parts of the world.

Anthropologists are interested in how and why chiefdom systems evolved as an intermediary units between tribes and states and what are its political implications. Several political strategies support the expansion of power in chiefdoms: controlling more internal and external wealth and giving feasts and gift exchanges that create debt ties; improving local production systems; applying force internally; forging stronger and wider external ties; and controlling ideological legitimacy. Depending on local conditions, different strategies are employed. For example, internal control of irrigation systems was the most important factor in the emergence of chiefdoms in prehistoric southeastern Spain; whereas control of external trade was more important in the prehistoric Aegean region (Gilman 1991).

An expanded version of the chiefdom occurs when several chiefdoms are joined in a **confederacy** headed by chief of chiefs, "big chief", or paramount chief. Many

prominent confederacies have existed- for example, in Hawaii in the late 1700s and, in North America, the Iroquois league of five nations that stretched across New York State, the Cherokee of Tennessee, and the Algonquins who dominated the Chesapeake region in present-day Virginia and Maryland. In Algonquin confederacy, each village had a chief, and the regional council was composed of local chiefs and headed by the paramount chief. Confederacies were supported financially by contributions of grain from each local unit. Kept in a central storage area where the paramount chief lived, the grain was used to feed warriors during external warfare that maintained and expanded the confederacy's borders. A council building existed in the central location, where local chiefs came together to meet with the paramount chief to deliberate on questions of internal and external policy.

4.2.5 States

State is a form of political organisation with a bureaucracy and diversified governmental institutions with varying degrees of centralised control. The state is now the form of political organisation in which all people live. Band organisations, tribes, and chiefdoms exist, but they are incorporated within state structures.

Powers of the state: socio cultural anthropologists ask how states operate and relate to their citizens. In this inquiry, they focus on the enhanced power that states have over their domain compared to other forms of political organisation. (Barbara D. Miller, 2002)

- *States define citizenship and its rights and responsibilities.* In complex societies, since early times, not all residents were granted equal rights of citizens.
- *States maintain standing armies and police* (as opposed to part-time forces).
- *States keep track of the number, age, gender, location, and wealth of their citizens through census system that are regularly updated.* A census allows the state to maintain formal taxation systems, military recruitment, and policy planning, including population settlement, immigration quotas, and social benefits such as old-age pensions.
- *States have the power to extract resources from citizens through taxation.* All political organisations are supported by contributions of the members, but variations occur in the rate of contributions expected, the form in which they are paid, and the return that members get in terms of services. In bands, people voluntarily give time or labour for “public projects” such as a group hunt or a planned move. Public finance in states is based on formal taxation that takes many forms. **In-kind taxation** is a system of mandatory, non-cash contributions to the state. For example, the Inca state used a labour tax, to finance public works such as roads and monuments and to provide agricultural labour on state lands. Another form of in-kind taxation in early states required that farmers pay a percentage of their crop yield. Cash taxes, such as the income tax that takes a percentage of wages, emerged only in the past few hundred years.
- *States manipulate information.* Control of information to protect the state and its leaders can be done directly (through censorship, restricting access to certain information by the public, and promotion of favourable images via propaganda) and indirectly (through pressure on journalists and television networks to present information in certain ways).

Symbols of State Power: Religious beliefs and symbols are often closely tied to the power of state leadership: the ruler may be considered a deity or part deity, or a high priest of the state religion, or closely linked with the high priest, who serves as advisor. Architecture and urban planning remind the populace of the power of the state. In pre-Hispanic Mexico, the central plaza of city-states, such as Tenochtitlan was symbolically equivalent to the center of the cosmos and was thus the locale of greatest significance. The most important temples and the residence of the head of state were located around the plaza. Other houses and structures, in decreasing order of status, were located on avenues in decreasing proximity to the center. The grandness and individual character of the leader's residence indicate power, as do monuments-especially tombs to past leaders and heroes or heroines (Barbara D. Miller, 2002).

4.3 SOCIAL CONTROL IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES

Anthropologists distinguish between small-scale societies and large scale societies in terms of prevalent forms of conflict resolution, social order, and punishment of offenses. Because bands are small, close-knit groups, disputes tend to be handled at the interpersonal level through discussion or one-on-one fights.

Group members may act together to punish an offender through shaming and ridicule. Emphasis is on maintaining social order and restoring social equilibrium, not hurtfully punishing an offender. Ostracising an offending member (forcing the person to leave the group) is a common means of formal punishment. Capital punishment is rare but not nonexistent. For example, in some Australian Aboriginal societies, a law restrict access to religious rituals and paraphernalia to men who had gone through a ritual initiation. If an initiated man shared secrets with an uninitiated man, the elders would delegate one of their groups to kill the offender. In such instances, the elders act like a court.

In non-state societies, punishment is often legitimised through belief in supernatural forces and their ability to affect people. Among highland horticulturalists of the Indonesian island of Sumba, one of the greatest offenses is to fail to keep a promise which lead to supernatural assault from the ancestors. The punishment may come in the form of damage to crops, illness or death of a relative, destruction of the offender's house, or having clothing catch on fire. When such a disaster occurs, the only recourse is to sponsor a ritual that will appease the ancestors.

Village fission (breaking up) and ostracism are mechanisms for dealing with irresolvable conflict. The overall goal in dealing with conflict in small-scale societies is to return the group to harmony. Data on conflict resolution from nonhuman primate groups also demonstrate the importance of re-establishing peaceful interactions between former opponents as a way of promoting small-group harmony.

4.4 SOCIAL CONTROL IN STATES

In densely populated societies with more social stratification and more wealth increased stress occurs in relation to the distribution of surplus, inheritance, and rights to land. In addition, not everyone else, and face-to-face accountability exists mainly in localised groups. Three important factors of state system of social control are the increased specialisation of roles involved in social control, the formalised use of trials and courts, and the use of power-enforced forms of

punishment, such as prisons and the death penalty. Yet informal mechanism also exists.

4.4.1 Specialisation

The specialisation of tasks related to law and order-police, judges, lawyers-increases with the emergence of state organisation. Full-time professionals, such as judges and lawyers, often come from powerful or elite social groups, a fact that perpetuates elite bias in the justice process itself. Police carry out the duty of surveillance, maintain social order, book cases against the culprits and implement the judgments pronounced in the courts.

4.4.2 Trials and Courts

In societies where misdoing and punishment are defined by spirits and ancestors, a person's guilt is proved simply by the fact that misfortune has befallen him or her. If a person's crops were damaged by lightning, then that person must have done something wrong. In other instances, the guilt may be determined through **trial by ordeal**, a form of trial in which the accused person is put through some kind of test that is often painful. For example, in certain cases, the guilty person will be required to place a hand in boiling oil, or to have a part of the body touched by red-hot knife. Being burned is a sign of guilt, whereas not being burned means the suspect is innocent.

The court system, with lawyers, judge, and jury, is used in many contemporary societies, although there is variation in how cases are presented and juries constituted. The goal of contemporary court trials is to ensure both justice and fairness. Analysis of actual courtroom dynamics and patterns of decision making in the United States and elsewhere, however, reveals serious problems in achieving these goals.

4.4.3 Prisons and Death Penalty

Administering punishment involves imposing something unpleasant on someone who has committed an offence. Socio-cultural anthropologists have examined forms of punishment cross-culturally, as well as the relationship between types of societies and forms of punishment. In small-scale societies, punishment is socially rather than judicially managed. The most extreme form of punishment is usually ostracism and is rarely death. Another common form of punishment, in the case of theft or murder, especially in the Middle East, is the requirement that the guilty party pay compensation to members of the victim's family.

The prison, as a place where people are forcibly detained as a form of punishment, has a long history, but it probably did not predate the state. In Europe, long-term detention of prisoners did not become common until the seventeenth century.

4.5 RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

Apart from formulation of policies, their administration, and their enforcement, political life also involves the resolution of conflict, which may be accomplished peacefully by avoidance, community action, mediation or the negotiation of compromises, apology, appeal to supernatural forces, or adjudication by a third party. The procedures used usually vary with degree of social complexity; decisions by third parties are more likely to exist in hierarchical societies. But peaceful solutions are not always possible, and disputes may erupt into violent conflicts. When violence occurs within a political unit in which disputes are usually settled

peacefully, we call such violence *crime*, particularly when committed by an individual. When violence occurs between groups of people from separate political units- groups between which there is no procedure for settling disputes- we usually call such violence *warfare*. When violence occurs between subunits of a population that had been politically unified, we call it *civil war*.

4.5.1 Peaceful Resolution of Conflict

Most modern industrialised states have formal institutions and offices, such as police, district attorneys, courts, and penal systems, to deal with various types of disputes and conflicts. All these institutions generally operate according to **codified laws**- that are, a set of explicit, usually written, rules stipulating what is permissible and what is not. Transgression of the law by individuals gives the state right to take action against them. The state has monopoly on the legitimate use of force in the society, for it alone has the right to coerce subjects into agreement with regulations, customs, political edicts and procedures.

Many societies lack such specialised offices and institutions for dealing with conflict. Yet, because all societies have peaceful, regularised ways of handling at least certain disputes, some anthropologists speak of the *universality of law*. E. Adamson Hoebel (1968), for example, stated the principle as follows:

Each people have its system of social control. And all but a few of the poorest of them have as a part of the control system a complex of behaviour patterns and institutional mechanisms that we may properly treat as law. For, “anthropologically considered, law is merely one aspect of culture- the aspect which employs the force organised society to regulate individual and group conduct and to prevent redress or punish deviations from prescribed social norms.” (Hoebel, 2006: 4)

Law, then, whether informal as in simpler societies, provides a means of dealing peacefully with whatever conflicts develop. That does not mean that conflicts are always resolved peacefully. But that also does not mean that people cannot learn to resolve their conflicts peacefully. The fact that there are societies with little or no violent conflict means that it may be possible to learn from them; it may be possible to discover how to avoid violent outcomes of conflicts.

4.5.2 Avoidance

Violence can often be avoided if the parties to a dispute voluntarily avoid each other or are separated until emotions cool down. Anthropologists have frequently remarked that foragers are particularly likely to make use of this technique. People may move to other bands or move their dwellings to opposite ends of camp. Shifting horticulturalists may also split up when conflicts get too intense. Avoidance is obviously easier in societies, such as band societies, that are nomadic or semi nomadic and in which people have temporary dwellings. And avoidance is more feasible when people live independently and self sufficiently (for example, in cities and suburbs). But even if conditions in such societies may make avoidance easier, we still need to know why some societies use avoidance more than confrontation as a way of resolving conflict (Ember et. al, 2007).

4.5.3 Community Action

Societies resort to various methods, to resolve disputes in an amicable way. One such way involves community action in simpler societies that lack powerful authoritarian leaders. Among the Inuit, disputes are frequently resolved through community action. The Inuit believe that spirits, particularly if displeased, can

determine much of a person's fate. Consequently, people carry out their daily tasks within a complex system of taboos. This system is so extensive that the Inuit, at least in the past, may have had no need for formal set of laws.

Nevertheless, conflicts do arise and needs to be resolved. Accordingly, principles act as guides to the community in settling trouble cases. An individual's failure to heed a taboo or to follow the suggestions of a shaman leads to expulsion from the group, because the community cannot accept a risk to its livelihood. A person who fails to share goods voluntarily will find them confiscated and distributed to the community, and he or she may be executed in the process. A single case of murder, as an act of vengeance (usually because of the abduction of a wife or as part of a blood feud), does not concern the community, but repeated murders do (Ember et. al. 2007: 432). The killing of an individual is the most extreme action a community can take- we call it *capital punishment*. The community as a whole or a political official or a court may decide to impose such punishment, but capital punishment seems to exist nearly in all societies, from the simple to the most complex. It is often assumed that capital punishment deters crime. If it did, we would expect the abolition of capital punishment to be followed by an increase in homicide rates. But that does not seem to happen. A cross-national study indicated that the abolition of capital punishment tends to be followed by a *decrease* in homicide rates.

4.5.4 Negotiation and Mediation

In many conflicts, the parties to a dispute may come to a settlement themselves by **negotiation**. There aren't necessarily any rules for how they will do so, but any solution is "good" if it restores peace. Sometimes an outsider or third party is used to help bring about a settlement between the disputants. We call it **mediation** when the outside party tries to help bring about a settlement, but that third party does not have the formal authority to force a settlement. Both negotiation and mediation are likely when the society is relatively egalitarian and it is important for people to get along.

4.5.5 Ritual Reconciliation-Apology

The desire to restore a harmonious relationship may also explain ceremonial apologies. An apology is based on deference- the guilty party shows obeisance and asks for forgiveness. Such ceremonies tend to occur in chiefdoms. Among the Fijians of the South Pacific, there is a strong ethic of harmony and mutual assistance, particularly within a village. When a person offends some one of higher status, the offended person and other villagers begin to avoid, and gossip about, the offender. If the offender is sensitive to village opinion, he or she will perform a ceremony of apology called *soro*. One of the meanings of *soro* is "surrender". In the ceremony the offender keeps her or his head bowed and remains silent while intermediary speaks, presents a token gift, and asks the offended person for forgiveness (Ember, 1993:241).

4.5.6 Oaths and Ordeals

Still another way of peacefully resolving disputes is through oaths and ordeals, both of which involve appeals to supernatural power. An **oath** is the act of calling upon a deity to bear witness to the truth of what one says. An ordeal is a means used to determine guilt or innocence by submitting the accused to dangerous or painful tests believed to be supernatural control (Ember, 1993:241).

4.5.7 Violent Resolutions of Conflict

People are likely to resort to violence when regular, effective alternative means of resolving a conflict are not available. Some societies consider violence between individuals to be appropriate under certain circumstances; which we generally do not consider, and call it **crime**. When violence occurs between political entities such as communities, districts, or nations, we call it **warfare**. The type of warfare, of course, varies in scope and complexity from society to society. Sometimes a distinction is made among feuding, raiding, and large-scale confrontations (Ember et. al. 2007:435).

4.5.8 Individual Violence

Although at first it may seem paradoxical, violent behaviour itself is often used to control behaviour. In some societies it is considered necessary for parents to beat children who misbehave. They consider this punishment and not criminal behaviour or child abuse. Violence between adults can be similarly viewed. If a person trespasses on one's property or hurts someone, some societies consider it appropriate or justified to kill or maim the trespasser. Is this social control, or is it just lack of control? Most societies have norms about when such "punishment" is or is not appropriate, so the behaviour of anyone who contemplates doing something wrong, as well as the behaviour of the person wronged, is likely to be influenced by the "laws" of their society (Ember et. al. 2007: 436)

4.5.9 Feuding

Feuding is an example of how individual self-help may not lead to a peaceful resolution of conflict. **Feuding** is a state of recurring hostilities between families or groups of kin, usually motivated by a desire to avenge an offense- whether insult, injury, deprivation, or death- against a member of the group. The most common characteristic of the feud is that responsibility to avenge is carried by all members of the kin group. The killing of any member of the offender's group is considered an appropriate revenge, because the kin group as a whole is regarded as responsible. Nicholas Gubser told of a feud within a Nunamiut Inuit community, caused by a husband's killing of his wife's lover that lasted for decades. Feuds are by no means limited to small-scale societies; they occur as frequently in societies with high levels of political organisation (Ember et. al 2007: 436).

4.5.10 Raiding

Raiding is a short-term use of force, planned and organised, to realise a limited objective. This objective is usually the acquisition of goods, animals, or other forms of wealth belonging to another, often neighboring community. Raiding is prevalent in pastoral societies, in which, cattle, horses, camels, or other animals are prized and an individual's own herd can be augmented by theft. Raids are often organised by temporary leaders or coordinators whose authority may not last beyond planning and execution of the venture. Raiding may also be organised for the purpose of capturing persons either to marry or to keep as concubines or as slaves. Slavery has been practiced in about 33 percent of the world's known societies, and war has been one way of obtaining slaves either to keep or to trade for other goods (ibid).

4.5.11 Large-scale Confrontations

Both feuding and raiding usually involve relatively small numbers of the persons

and almost always an element of surprise. Because they are generally attacked without warning, the victims are often unable to muster an immediate defense. Large-scale confrontations, in contrast, involve a large number of persons and planning by both sides of strategies of attack and defense. Large-scale warfare is usually practiced among societies with intensive agriculture or industrialisation. Only these societies possess a technology sufficiently advanced to support specialised armies, military leaders, strategies, and so on (Ember, 1993: 494).

4.6 DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

As Ember (1993, 2007) states when one thinks of economies, we think of things and activities involving money. We think of the costs of goods and services, such as food, rent, haircuts, and movie tickets. We may also think of factories, farms, and other enterprises that produce the goods and services we need, or think we need. All societies have customs specifying how people gain accesses to natural resources; customary ways of transforming or converting those resources, through labour, into necessities and other desired goods and services; and customs for distributing and perhaps exchanging goods and services.

4.6.1 The Allocation of Resources

Herein, we would not go into much depth as this part has been discussed in length in the earlier unit. Thus, a quick recapitulation will be done through an activity. If help is required please refer to the earlier unit.

Activity

Enumerate with examples how the allocation of resources varies between the a) food collectors, b) horticulturalists and c) pastoralists.

4.6.2 The Conversion of Resources

In all societies, resources have to be transformed or converted through labour into food, tools and other goods. These activities constitute what economists call production. In this section, after briefly reviewing different types of production, we examine what motivates people to work, how societies divide up the work to be done, and how they organise work. As we shall see, some aspects of the conversion of natural resources are culturally universal, but there is also an enormous amount of cultural variation (Ember et. al 2007: 307).

4.6.3 Types of Economic Production

Most societies that anthropologists study had domestic – family or kinship based – mode of production. People laboured to get food and to produce shelter and implements for themselves and their kin. Usually families had the right to exploit productive resources and control the products of their labour. Even part-time specialists, such as potters, could still support themselves without that craft if they needed to. At the other extreme are industrial societies, where much of the work is based on mechanised production, as in factories and mechanised agriculture. Because machines and materials are costly, only some individuals (capitalists), corporations, or governments can afford the expenses of production. Therefore, most people in industrial societies work for others as wage earners. Although wages can buy food, people out of work lose their ability to support themselves, unless they are protected by welfare payments or unemployment insurance. Then there is the tributary type of production system, found in non-industrial societies

in which most people still produce their own food but an elite or aristocracy controls a portion of production (including the products of specialised crafts). The feudal societies of medieval Western Europe were examples of tributary production, as was czarist Russia under serfdom (Ember et. al, 2007:307).

4.7 SUMMARY

The main functions of political organisation in simple societies are maintaining social order, promote resolutions for conflicts, to fulfill these functions it has to be organised and should have hierarchical society to give head position to one, whom the rest of the dwellers of that particular society will obey. However, the modern political system has become a threat for the sustenance of the traditional political system. Being dominant the modern political system is attracting the attention of many people in the simple societies. But traditional political system has not become extinct, though there is a possibility that they too might become extinct. When we talk about traditional economic system of simple societies we observe the exchange of goods and services not the money that is being transacted as in modern economic system and in market. These exchanges in simple societies are not merely the exchanges of goods and services but it is to maintain the human relations by the exchanges especially to strengthen the kin relations and inter tribe relations. But again modern market which has more monetary interest rather than maintaining human relations has become a threat to traditional economic system.

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) Briefly discuss the different types of political organisations and its main features in human society?
- 2) Examine the various forms of punishment and conflict resolution mechanism practiced in human society?
- 3) Write an essay on distribution of goods and services in simple society?