

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

B.A and B.SC SEMESTER II PAPER- 3

TOPIC- Social order in stateless political systems

Every society, be it a simple or traditional society or complex or modernized 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.

TYPES OF POLITICAL SYSTEM

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 organization 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 system 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 system 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 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.

The band level organisation barely qualifies as a form of political organization 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).

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.

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).

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.

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, centralized 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, socialization 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.