

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Anthropology Optional Religion — Anthropological Approaches

Paper 1 · Unit 7

The four families of theory on religion with the right thinker attached to each, the magic-religion-science problem, the two laws of magic, totem and taboo, myth and ritual, the Azande study on witchcraft, and the rites-of-passage schema from Van Gennep to Turner.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

Anthropological approaches to the study of religion: evolutionary, psychological, functional and structural. Sacred and profane; myths and rituals. Forms of religion in tribal and peasant societies: animism, animatism, fetishism, naturism and totemism. Religion, magic and science distinguished; magico-religious functionaries: priest, shaman, medicine man, sorcerer and witch.

The Four Approaches — a Map Before the Detail

The syllabus names four approaches to religion and the whole unit turns on keeping their thinkers straight. Attribution is the examined skill here: put Durkheim's sacred and profane in Tylor's mouth, or Frazer's magic ladder in Malinowski's, and the answer collapses. Fix the map first, then fill it in.

- Evolutionary approach: religion has a developmental sequence and the task is to reconstruct its earliest form. E.B. Tylor (animism), R.R. Marett (animatism), and J.G. Frazer (magic to religion to science) belong here. All three are intellectualist and armchair theorists, working from other people's travel reports rather than fieldwork.
- Psychological approach: religion answers a need in the individual psyche. Bronislaw Malinowski roots it in anxiety before uncertainty; Sigmund Freud roots it in repressed Oedipal guilt and wish-fulfilment. The unit of analysis is the person, not the society.
- Sociological or functional approach: religion is about the group, not the individual or the cosmos. Emile Durkheim makes religion society worshipping itself; A.R. Radcliffe-Brown makes ritual the maintainer of the sentiments on which social order depends.
- Structural approach: religion is a mode of thought obeying the universal logic of the human mind. Claude Levi-Strauss reads totemism and myth as systems of classification built on binary oppositions, not as beliefs about supernatural power at all.
- A cross-cutting caution: the same thinker can appear under more than one heading. Malinowski is psychological on anxiety but functional on the social charter; Durkheim is functional and, on categories of thought, a founder of the sociology of knowledge. Say which of his claims you are using.
- The distinction that organises the older theory is intellectualist versus emotionalist. Tylor and Frazer make early man a reasoning philosopher who gets the explanation wrong; Marett and later Malinowski make him a feeling creature who acts out of awe or anxiety. Naming that fault line signals command of the unit.

The four approaches and their thinkers

Approach	Core claim	Key thinkers	Unit of analysis
Evolutionary	Religion has an origin and passes through stages	Tylor, Marett, Frazer, Morgan	The mind of early man
Psychological	Religion meets an inner need	Malinowski (anxiety), Freud (guilt)	The individual psyche
Functional / sociological	Religion sustains the group	Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown	Society and its structure
Structural	Religion is a logic of classification	Levi-Strauss, E. Leach	The universal human mind

KEY TERMS

Intellectualist theory — The view (Tylor, Frazer) that religion originates in early man's attempt to explain the world by reasoning, and is therefore a mistaken proto-science.

Emotionalist theory — The view (Marett, Malinowski) that religion originates in feeling, awe or anxiety, rather than in reasoning.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Explain the various anthropological approaches to the study of religion. [2011]
- Critically examine the different anthropological approaches to religion. [2016]

Evolutionary Approach — Tylor, Marett, Frazer

The founding trio each proposed a first form of religion and a ladder rising from it. Learn each man's minimum form, his mechanism, and the one criticism that sank him, because examiners set them against one another almost every cycle.

- E.B. Tylor, in *Primitive Culture* (1871), gave religion its minimum definition: the belief in Spiritual Beings. He kept it deliberately minimal so that no known people would be excluded and religion could be treated as universal.
- Tylor's animism (from Latin *anima*, soul) derives from the reasoning of a savage philosopher on two puzzles: the difference between a living body and a corpse, and the appearance of absent or dead people in dreams and visions. From these he infers a separable soul, then generalises it to a world peopled by spirits.
- Tylor's sequence is animism to polytheism to monotheism, driven by the mind's growing power of abstraction. His doctrine of survivals, customs that persist after the conditions that produced them have gone, is his method for reconstructing that sequence.
- R.R. Marett, in *The Threshold of Religion* (1909), argued that something simpler and earlier than souls precedes animism. He called it animatism, or pre-animism: belief in an impersonal, diffuse supernatural power with no personality and no spirit behind it.
- Marett's evidence is the Melanesian *mana* documented by R.H. Codrington in *The Melanesians* (1891), a potency that can reside in a stone, a chief or a charm. Against Tylor's reasoning savage, Marett insisted religion begins in emotion, in awe before the uncanny, holding that primitive religion is not so much thought out as danced out.
- J.G. Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* (1890), proposed the famous unilinear sequence of magic, then religion, then science. Magic comes first because it is the most self-confident; religion follows when man realises his spells do not compel nature; science follows when he abandons personal powers for impersonal law.
- Frazer called magic the bastard sister of science because both assume a lawful, regular universe, whereas religion assumes a personal deity whose will can be swayed by prayer and sacrifice. This shared assumption of natural law is why he grouped magic with science and set religion apart.
- Criticisms to carry: all three are armchair theorists who never did fieldwork and relied on missionary and traveller reports. Their unilinear ladders assume a single track for all humanity, which the ethnography contradicts. Malinowski's Trobriand data (magic, religion and empirical knowledge coexisting) is the standard refutation of Frazer's ladder, and Durkheim rejected Tylor and Marett alike for grounding a durable social fact on an individual error.

The three evolutionists compared

Thinker	Minimum form	Mechanism	Sequence
E.B. Tylor	Animism (belief in souls)	Reasoning from dreams and death	Animism to polytheism to monotheism
R.R. Marett	Animatism (impersonal mana)	Awe and emotion, the uncanny	Pre-animism, then Tylor's stages
J.G. Frazer	Magic	Man learns magic fails, then religion fails	Magic to religion to science

KEY TERMS

Minimum definition of religion — Tylor's phrase for the least common denominator of all religion, which he fixed as belief in Spiritual Beings.

Animatism — Marett's pre-animistic stage: belief in an impersonal supernatural power (mana) not attached to any spirit or personality.

Mana — Impersonal, transferable supernatural potency documented by Codrington in Melanesia; the core of Marett's animatism.

Doctrine of survivals — Tylor's method: cultural traits that outlive their original function serve as evidence for reconstructing earlier stages of culture.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Distinguish between animism and animatism. [1984]
- Critically examine James Frazer's theory of evolutionism. [2025]

Psychological Approach — Malinowski and Freud

The psychological approach moves the question inward: what does religion do for the individual under strain? Malinowski answers with anxiety and the management of uncertainty; Freud answers with repressed guilt and wish. They are the two names to hold apart here.

- Bronislaw Malinowski located religion and magic where empirical control runs out and anxiety rises. His canonical evidence, from the Trobriand Islands, is that elaborate magic surrounds dangerous open-sea fishing beyond the reef, while none accompanies safe lagoon fishing. The variable is risk, not ignorance.
- Malinowski separated the three domains functionally. Science (practical, empirical knowledge) handles what technique can control; magic supplies confidence and a sense of control where technique fails; religion addresses the great crises of life, above all death.
- On death, Malinowski argued that funerary religion counters the disintegrating impulse to flee the corpse, affirms the continuity of life against the fact of extinction, and reknits the group at the moment its solidarity is most threatened. Religion here is anxiety-reducing and life-affirming.
- Malinowski also treated myth as a social charter, a narrative that validates and justifies present institutions rather than explaining nature. This is a functional, not merely psychological, claim, and it directly attacks Tylor and Frazer's intellectualism.
- Sigmund Freud, in Totem and Taboo (1913), derived religion from the Oedipus complex projected onto the species. In the primal horde the sons kill and devour the tyrannical father, then, overcome by guilt, forbid the killing of the totem animal (the father substitute) and renounce the women they had killed for. Totemism, and later all religion, is the return of that repressed guilt.

- In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud recast religion as a collective wish-fulfilling illusion, a projection of the child's longing for a protecting father onto the cosmos, and therefore a universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.
- Criticisms: Freud's primal-horde event is a speculative myth with no historical or ethnographic evidence, and A.L. Kroeber dismantled it as unverifiable. Malinowski's anxiety theory was inverted by Radcliffe-Brown, who argued that ritual creates the very anxiety it appears to relieve. Both psychological accounts also struggle to explain why religious forms are so patterned and collective if their root is individual emotion.

KEY TERMS

Anxiety-reduction theory — Malinowski's argument that magic and religion arise where knowledge and technique cannot guarantee an outcome, supplying confidence and managing fear.

Mythical charter — Malinowski's term for myth as a validating narrative that legitimates present institutions, rights and moral order.

Primal horde — Freud's hypothesised prehistoric group whose killing of the father produced the guilt he made the origin of totemism and religion.

Functional and Sociological Approach — Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown

For the functionalists religion is not about the cosmos or the psyche but about the group. Durkheim makes society the hidden object of worship; Radcliffe-Brown makes ritual the machinery that keeps social sentiment alive. On one point, whether ritual soothes or produces anxiety, he splits openly from Malinowski, and that split is examinable.

- Emile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), defined religion by the classification of the world into the sacred (set apart, forbidden, approached with awe) and the profane (mundane, everyday). Nothing is sacred by its own nature; sacredness is conferred by the group.
- Durkheim studied the totemism of the Arunta (Aranda) of central Australia, working from Spencer and Gillen's ethnography, on the logic that the simplest society reveals religion's essential elements. His conclusion: the totem is the emblem of the clan, so in worshipping the totem the clan worships itself. The god of the clan can be nothing but the clan divinised.
- The mechanism is collective effervescence: assembled in ritual, the group generates an emotional intensity no individual could produce alone, feels a real force acting on it, and misrecognises that social force as supernatural. Ritual exists to recharge this periodically.
- Durkheim's definition also makes religion inseparable from a moral community he called a Church, which is precisely what magic lacks. This is the origin of his famous line that there is no Church of magic.
- A.R. Radcliffe-Brown carried Durkheim into British anthropology. In *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) he argued that rites express and sustain the sentiments on which the social structure depends, conferring ritual value on objects and occasions and binding the individual to the society that formed him.
- In his 1939 Frazer Lecture, *Taboo*, Radcliffe-Brown directly reversed Malinowski: ritual does not relieve a pre-existing anxiety, it manufactures the anxiety and the sense of dependence, because without the taboo there would be nothing to fear. Both men cannot be right, and saying so is worth marks.
- Criticisms: the functionalist account explains integration but is embarrassed by religious conflict, schism and holy war. Durkheim's Arunta data were thin and second-hand (Evans-Pritchard's charge), and his argument is circular, since society explains the sacred while the sacred is defined by reference to society.

KEY TERMS

Sacred and profane — Durkheim's defining religious classification of the world into two heterogeneous domains, the set-apart and forbidden versus the ordinary.

Collective effervescence — The heightened emotional energy of the assembled group, which participants attribute to a supernatural source; Durkheim's engine of religion.

Ritual value — Radcliffe-Brown's term for the social importance a rite confers on an object or occasion, thereby creating the dependence it appears to serve.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Distinguish between the sacred and the profane in Durkheim's theory of religion and elucidate the role of the totem. [2015]

Structural Approach — Levi-Strauss on Totemism and Myth

Levi-Strauss changed the question. He does not ask what religion does for the group or the psyche; he asks what logic the mind is following. Totemism and myth become classificatory systems built on binary oppositions, and the supernatural drops out of the analysis almost entirely.

- In Totemism (1962) Levi-Strauss dissolved totemism as a religious institution. Totemic species are chosen not because they are good to eat, as the functionalists supposed, but because they are good to think: they supply a code of natural differences with which to map social differences.
- This directly rebuts Malinowski's utilitarian reading, on which totems are simply the economically important species. For Levi-Strauss totemism is a mode of classification, a logic of the concrete, not a stage of religion or a nutritional fact.
- His theory of myth, set out in The Structural Study of Myth (1955), holds that myths are built from minimal units (mythemes) and that their function is to mediate fundamental contradictions a society cannot resolve in life, such as life against death or nature against culture.
- Myths therefore work by pairs of binary oppositions and by figures that mediate between them. His worked example, the Oedipus myth, sets the overrating of kinship against its underrating, and the claim that man is born of the earth against the fact that man is born of man.
- The method reads a myth not as a story with a moral but as a structure whose meaning lies in the relations between its elements, across all its variants at once, rather than in any single telling.
- Criticisms: the analysis is abstract and hard to falsify, it drains myth of history, emotion and social context, and different analysts extract different oppositions from the same myth. Yet the insight that the sacred can be a logic of classification rather than a belief in power is genuinely new and worth crediting.

KEY TERMS

Good to think — Levi-Strauss's formula for why species become totems: they furnish a system of differences useful for classifying society, not because they are useful to eat.

Binary opposition — A pair of contrasting terms (raw and cooked, nature and culture) that structuralism treats as the basic building block of thought and myth.

Mytheme — The minimal constituent unit of a myth, analogous to the phoneme in linguistics, whose meaning lies in its relations to other units.

Magic, Religion and Science Distinguished — and the Types of Magic

This is the sub-unit UPSC returns to most often, usually as a compare-and-contrast in short-note form. Answer it through the three positions that matter (Frazer, Malinowski, Durkheim) and then classify magic by Frazer's two laws. Getting the two laws named correctly is the examined detail.

- Frazer's distinction is about how each relates to power. Magic and science both assume an impersonal, law-governed universe and try to manipulate it; magic simply gets the laws wrong. Religion assumes personal supernatural beings whose will must be propitiated by prayer and sacrifice. Hence his ordering of magic, then religion, then science.
- Malinowski's distinction is about function and coexistence. All three exist together in every society. Science is the body of empirical knowledge that guides ordinary technique; magic is a pragmatic act aimed at a definite end where knowledge fails, coercive and hedged with exact spells and conditions; religion is expressive, its rites being ends in themselves rather than means to a further purpose.
- Durkheim's distinction is about social form. Religion is collective and binds a moral community, a Church; magic is individual and utilitarian, the magician having only a clientele. This is the sharpest sociological line between the two.
- Frazer's laws of magic. All magic rests on sympathetic magic, the idea of a secret sympathy between things. It divides into two branches. The Law of Similarity gives homoeopathic or imitative magic: like produces like, so an effect resembles its cause. Piercing an effigy to harm an enemy, or pouring water to bring rain, are its type cases.
- The Law of Contact or Contagion gives contagious magic: things once in contact continue to act on each other after separation. Working harm through a victim's hair, nail clippings, teeth, footprints or the severed umbilical cord are its type cases.
- Frazer also split magic another way, by aim. Positive magic or sorcery commands do this so that X will happen; negative magic or taboo commands do not do this or X will happen. This connects magic directly to the taboo material and shows taboo as the prohibitive face of magic.
- The magico-religious functionaries the syllabus names sit along a spectrum from coercion to supplication. The magician and sorcerer coerce impersonal power; the priest is an office-holder who mediates with the gods through routine ritual on behalf of a congregation; the shaman and medicine man are charismatic specialists who enter trance to contact spirits and to heal; the witch harms by an innate power. Priesthood rests on office and tradition, shamanism on personal ecstatic gift.
- Verdict for an answer: the three are not simply successive stages but distinct orientations to the world that coexist. Frazer's ladder is discredited by fieldwork; Malinowski's coexistence and Durkheim's collective-versus-individual line are the defensible positions.

Magic, religion and science compared

Dimension	Magic	Religion	Science
Attitude to power	Manipulates and compels impersonal force	Propitiates and supplicates personal beings	Discovers impersonal natural law
Aim	A specific practical end	Expressive, the rite is an end in itself	Understanding and prediction
Efficacy assumed	Automatic if the rite is exact	Conditional on the will of the deity	Law-governed and testable
Social form (Durkheim)	Individual practitioner with a clientele	Collective, a moral community or Church	A public community of specialists
Frazer's place	Earliest stage	Middle stage	Latest stage
Malinowski's view	Confidence where technique fails	Meets the crises of life, chiefly death	Empirical knowledge guiding technique

KEY TERMS

Sympathetic magic — Frazer's umbrella term for magic resting on a secret sympathy between things; it comprises homoeopathic and contagious magic.

Homoeopathic (imitative) magic — Magic on the Law of Similarity, where like produces like, so acting on an image acts on what it represents.

Contagious magic — Magic on the Law of Contact, where things once joined go on influencing each other, so acting on hair or nails acts on the person.

Shaman — A charismatic religious specialist who enters trance to contact the spirit world, typically to heal or divine; authority rests on ecstatic gift, not office.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Distinguish between religion, magic and science. [2012]
- Write a short note on the difference between religion and magic. [2017]
- Write a short note on the difference between science and magic. [2018]
- Write a short note on shamanism. [2007]

Totemism and Taboo

Totem and taboo are the two most examined tribal-religion terms and they are linked, because a totem almost always carries taboos. Define each with an author, give the competing theories, and remember the critique that totemism is not one thing at all.

- Totemism (the word from the Ojibwa ototeman) is a ritual and classificatory relation between a social group, usually a clan, and a natural species or object that serves as its emblem. Its recurrent features are: the clan is named after the totem, the totem is sacred and marks group identity, there is a taboo on killing or eating it, and clan exogamy usually accompanies it.
- The theories divide sharply. Tylor and Frazer treated totemism intellectually and evolutionarily. Durkheim made the totem the emblem of the clan and hence the elementary form of the sacred. Robertson Smith, earlier, tied totem, sacrifice and taboo together through the idea of communion, the clan periodically eating the totem to renew its bond.

- Radcliffe-Brown offered a sociological reading: totemism expresses the ritual incorporation of natural species into the social and moral order, marking the segments of society by the segments of nature. Malinowski read it utilitarianly, as reverence for the species that matter to survival. Levi-Strauss dissolved the whole category into a logic of classification, the totem being good to think.
- Alexander Goldenweiser's critique is essential: totemism is not a single institution. Its supposed elements, clan organisation, an emblem, a taboo, descent from the totem, exogamy, do not reliably occur together, so lumping them under one law is a mistake. This is why modern anthropology treats totemism as a family of phenomena, not a stage.
- Taboo (from the Polynesian tapu or tabu, brought into English after Captain Cook's Pacific voyages) is a ritual prohibition on contact with what is sacred, dangerous or polluting. Breaking it is believed to bring automatic misfortune, needing no human enforcer.
- The theories of taboo run parallel to those of religion. Frazer made taboo negative magic, the prohibitive twin of positive sorcery. Radcliffe-Brown, in *Taboo* (1939), made it a ritual prohibition whose social function is to attach ritual value to important objects and occasions. Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*, made it the mark of ambivalence, a prohibition against a repressed and still-tempting desire, which is why the tabooed thing is both sacred and forbidden.
- Mary Douglas, in *Purity and Danger* (1966), gave the modern account: pollution and taboo attach to anomaly, to matter out of place that violates a society's system of classification. Her reading of the dietary abominations of Leviticus, unclean animals being those that fail to fit their category, is the standard example. Taboo thus polices conceptual and social boundaries.
- Function to state plainly: taboo works as a mechanism of social control and boundary maintenance, ordering behaviour around sanctity, danger and pollution without courts or police, which is why it is so effective in stateless societies.

KEY TERMS

Totem — A natural species or object standing in a sacred, emblematic and usually taboo-bearing relation to a social group, typically a clan.

Taboo — A ritual prohibition on the sacred, dangerous or polluting, whose breach is believed to bring automatic misfortune.

Exogamy — The rule requiring marriage outside one's own group; commonly attached to totemic clans.

Matter out of place — Mary Douglas's formula for pollution: dirt and taboo attach to what violates a society's classificatory order.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Write a short note on totemism. [2016]
- Discuss taboo as a means of social control. [2013]

Myth and Ritual

Myth and ritual are the spoken and enacted faces of religion, and the theory question is whether one drives the other. Carry the main positions with their authors, and keep Malinowski's charter distinct from the intellectualist reading of myth as failed explanation.

- A myth is a sacred narrative, held true within its community, that accounts for origins, cosmos and the present order of things. The theories of myth track the theories of religion. Tylor and Frazer read myth

intellectually, as early man's mistaken explanation of nature; Max Muller read it as a disease of language, in which names for natural forces hardened into gods.

- Malinowski broke with all of them in *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926). Myth is not explanation but charter: a pragmatic narrative that validates present institutions, rights and moral rules by anchoring them in a sacred past. Its function is social justification, not cosmology.
- The myth-and-ritual school (S.H. Hooke, and the Cambridge ritualists Jane Harrison and Gilbert Murray, building on Robertson Smith) held that myth and rite are two aspects of one thing, the myth being the spoken correlative of the acted rite. In its strong form ritual is primary and myth its later verbal rationalisation.
- Mircea Eliade made myth the narration of sacred history, a model of exemplary acts performed by gods or ancestors in a primordial time (*illud tempus*) that ritual re-enacts, abolishing profane time in an eternal return.
- Levi-Strauss, as above, made myth a structure mediating contradictions through binary oppositions, indifferent to any single telling.
- A ritual is prescribed, formal, repeatable action oriented to the sacred. The functional readings again divide: Durkheim makes ritual the generator of solidarity through collective effervescence; Malinowski makes it anxiety-reducing; Radcliffe-Brown makes it anxiety-producing and sentiment-sustaining.
- Edmund Leach added that ritual is a form of communication, a symbolic statement that says something about social relations, so its meaning is to be read rather than its cause sought. Victor Turner showed how a single ritual symbol condenses many meanings at once, spanning an ideological pole of social norms and a sensory pole of bodily desire, which is what gives ritual its grip.
- Types of ritual to have ready: rites of passage (individual transitions), rites of intensification (group crises such as drought or war, the term from Chapple and Coon), calendrical or seasonal rites, and piacular or mourning rites.

KEY TERMS

Myth — A sacred narrative held true by its community that grounds origins, cosmos and social order.

Charter (of myth) — Malinowski's function of myth: a narrative that validates and legitimates present institutions and rights.

Ritual — Prescribed, formal and repeatable action oriented to the sacred, distinguished from ordinary practical behaviour.

Rites of intensification — Chapple and Coon's term for rituals performed when a whole group faces a crisis, restoring collective equilibrium.

Witchcraft and Sorcery — Evans-Pritchard's Azande

This is the unit's classic study and the safest attribution to bank. E.E. Evans-Pritchard's Azande monograph gave anthropology both the witchcraft-versus-sorcery distinction and the demonstration that a belief we call irrational can be perfectly logical inside its own idiom. Learn the granary example verbatim.

- The source is *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), on the Azande of the Nile-Congo divide in what is now South Sudan. Its lasting contribution is a sharp analytic distinction the Azande themselves draw.
- Witchcraft (Azande *mangu*) is an inherited, psychic power seated in a physical substance in the belly, discoverable at autopsy. It acts by an act of will or even unconsciously, needs no spell, rite or medicine, and

the witch may not know he is one. It is a state of being, passed from parent to child.

- Sorcery, by contrast, is a deliberate technique: the sorcerer uses spells, rites and bad medicines to do harm. It is learned and performed, not innate. So the line is being versus doing, an inherited condition versus a purchased skill.
- The famous granary case shows what witchcraft explains. A granary, undermined by termites, collapses and kills people sheltering beneath it. The Azande know termites weakened the props (the how) and do not dispute it. Witchcraft answers a different question: why did it fall on these people at this precise moment. It explains the particularity of misfortune, the coincidence, not the physical mechanism.
- Witchcraft is therefore not a rival to empirical causation but complementary to it, supplying the social and moral why that natural cause leaves open. This is Evans-Pritchard's key methodological point and the reason the study is cited far beyond Africa.
- To detect a witch the Azande consult oracles, ranked by authority: the poison oracle (benge), fed to fowls, is the most trusted; the rubbing-board oracle and the termite oracle are lesser. When an oracle or a cure fails, secondary elaborations of belief explain the failure without ever threatening the system as a whole, which is why the belief is closed and self-confirming.
- The wider argument is that Azande belief is coherent and reasonable within its premises: given the idiom of witchcraft, the reasoning is sound. This launched the long rationality debate in anthropology and philosophy.
- Comparative and Indian extensions to note: Monica Wilson called witchcraft beliefs the standardised nightmare of a group, and much later work (Mary Douglas, Max Marwick) links witchcraft accusations to points of social strain and blocked relationships. In India, witch-hunting, usually of women and often masking land or inheritance disputes, is the live form of the phenomenon, best treated analytically rather than sensationally.

Witchcraft and sorcery after Evans-Pritchard

Feature	Witchcraft	Sorcery
Nature	Inherited psychic power, a substance in the body	Learned technique using medicines and spells
Intent	May be unconscious, a state of being	Deliberate act of doing harm
Apparatus	None needed, no rite or spell	Materials, rites and spells required
Transmission	Hereditary	Acquired and taught
Detectable by	Oracles and post-mortem examination	The act and its paraphernalia

KEY TERMS

Witchcraft (mangu) — In Evans-Pritchard's Azande, an inherited psychic power lodged in the body that harms without rite or spell, sometimes unconsciously.

Sorcery — The deliberate use of spells, rites and harmful medicines to injure; a learned technique, not an innate condition.

Poison oracle (benge) — The most authoritative Azande oracle, in which poison administered to fowls answers questions about witchcraft.

Secondary elaboration — Ad hoc explanations that account for a magical or oracular failure without discrediting the underlying belief system.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Write a short note on witchcraft and sorcery. [1998]
- "Witchcraft accusation results from strained interpersonal relations." Discuss. [2005]

Rites of Passage and Liminality — Van Gennep and Turner

Van Gennep found the universal grammar of transition rituals; Turner opened up its middle phase and drew from it a general theory of anti-structure. Together they are among the most reliably examined items in the unit, so learn the three phases and the two Turner terms exactly.

- Arnold van Gennep, in *The Rites of Passage* (*Les rites de passage*, 1909), showed that rituals marking any change of place, state, social position or age share a single tripartite structure. He is the origin of the phrase and the schema.
- The three phases are: rites of separation (preliminal), which detach the person from a previous status; rites of transition or margin (liminal, from Latin *limen*, a threshold), the ambiguous in-between; and rites of incorporation (postliminal), which install the person in the new status. Birth, initiation, marriage and death all fit the pattern.
- Van Gennep's insight was that the same three-part form underlies rituals that look completely unlike one another, so the schema is comparative and universal, not tied to any one culture or content.
- Victor Turner, in *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) and *The Ritual Process* (1969), took up the neglected middle phase. Liminal persons are betwixt and between, neither here nor there, structurally invisible: stripped of rank, property and insignia, secluded, often subjected to ordeal, and treated as raw material to be reshaped. His fieldwork was among the Ndembu of Zambia.
- Out of liminality Turner drew *communitas*: an unstructured or minimally structured bond of equal, undifferentiated human beings, standing outside the ordered, hierarchical, norm-bound world he called structure. *Communitas* is the spontaneous fellow-feeling of those who pass through the threshold together.
- Turner set structure and *communitas* as a permanent dialectic in social life. *Communitas* appears not only in initiation but in pilgrimage, millenarian movements, monastic orders, and among the structurally weak or marginal (the mendicant, the jester) who embody the values structure suppresses. He later coined *liminoid* for the quasi-liminal experiences of modern leisure.
- The convergence with Mary Douglas is worth stating: the liminal and the marginal are both anomalous, and the anomalous is at once dangerous and powerful, polluting and sacred. This ties the section back to taboo.
- Function to name: rites of passage manage the disruption that any status change causes both to the individual and to the group, publicly relabelling the person and rehearsing the whole community in the new arrangement.

Van Gennep's three phases and Turner's elaboration

Phase	Van Gennep	What happens	Turner's addition
Separation	Preliminal rites	Detachment from the old status	Symbolic stripping of rank and identity
Transition	Liminal rites	The ambiguous threshold, betwixt and between	Liminality and <i>communitas</i> , anti-structure
Incorporation	Postliminal rites	Installation in the new status	Return to structure, transformed

KEY TERMS

Rites of passage — Van Gennep's category of rituals marking a change of place, state, social position or age, structured in three phases.

Liminality — The ambiguous middle phase of a rite of passage, in which the person is betwixt and between statuses; elaborated by Turner.

Communitas — Turner's term for the unstructured bond of equal, undifferentiated persons that arises in liminality, opposed to structure.

Structure — In Turner, the differentiated, hierarchical, norm-governed order of ordinary social life, against which communitas is defined.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- What is understood by 'Rites of Passage'? Describe the various phases of the rites of passage and their significance. [2014]

Last-mile revision

- Four approaches, four thinkers: evolutionary (Tylor, Marett, Frazer), psychological (Malinowski, Freud), functional (Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown), structural (Levi-Strauss). Attribution is the whole game.
- Tylor: animism, minimum definition is belief in Spiritual Beings, sequence animism to polytheism to monotheism. Marett: animatism, impersonal mana, pre-animistic, religion is danced out not thought out. Frazer: magic to religion to science.
- Malinowski: magic where risk is (open-sea, not lagoon); religion manages death; all three coexist. Freud: Totem and Taboo, primal horde, guilt, religion as collective neurosis.
- Durkheim: sacred and profane, the totem is the clan's emblem so worship of the totem is worship of the clan; collective effervescence; no Church of magic. Radcliffe-Brown: ritual creates the anxiety it relieves, reversing Malinowski.
- Levi-Strauss: totems are good to think, not good to eat; myth mediates binary oppositions. This rebuts Malinowski's utilitarian totemism.
- Frazer's magic: sympathetic magic splits into homoeopathic/imitative (Law of Similarity) and contagious (Law of Contact). Positive magic is sorcery, negative magic is taboo.
- Magic manipulates impersonal power, religion propitiates personal beings, science discovers natural law. Durkheim's line: religion is collective (a Church), magic is individual (a clientele).
- Totemism is not one institution (Goldenweiser): emblem, taboo, exogamy and descent do not always co-occur. Taboo is negative magic (Frazer), ambivalence (Freud), and matter out of place (Douglas).
- Myth: Malinowski's charter (validation, not explanation) versus the intellectualist reading (failed explanation). Myth-and-ritual school: myth is the spoken part of the rite.
- Evans-Pritchard's Azande: witchcraft (mangu) is inherited and needs no spell; sorcery is a learned technique with medicines. The granary explains why this man, this moment, not how it fell.
- Van Gennep: separation, transition (liminal), incorporation. Turner: liminality (betwixt and between) generates communitas (anti-structure) against structure. Ndembu.

Common errors to avoid

- Swapping the evolutionists' minimum forms: Tylor is animism (souls), Marett is animatism (impersonal mana), Frazer starts from magic. Confusing animism with animatism is the single most common slip in this unit.
- Attributing sacred and profane to anyone but Durkheim, or the magic-religion-science ladder to anyone but Frazer. These attribution errors cost the whole sub-question.
- Naming Frazer's two laws wrongly. Homoeopathic or imitative magic runs on similarity (like produces like); contagious magic runs on contact. Reversing them, or forgetting that both are branches of sympathetic magic, is a classic error.
- Treating Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown as one functionalist voice. They contradict each other on whether ritual relieves or produces anxiety, and the contradiction is examinable content.
- Presenting Frazer's magic-religion-science sequence as accepted fact. It is a discredited unilinear scheme; Malinowski's finding that all three coexist is the standard refutation.
- Blurring witchcraft and sorcery. In Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft is an inherited psychic condition needing no apparatus; sorcery is a deliberate technique using medicines and spells. The distinction is the study's whole point.
- Retelling the Azande granary as proof that the Azande do not understand physical causes. They understand the termites perfectly; witchcraft answers the separate question of why this person at this moment.
- Reducing rites of passage to initiation only. Van Gennep's schema covers any change of state, birth, marriage and death included, and its power is that one three-part form fits them all.
- Attributing liminality and communitas to Van Gennep. Van Gennep named the three phases; Turner developed the liminal phase and coined communitas and structure. Keep the credit split correct.
- Reading myth as mere primitive science across the board. Malinowski's charter theory expressly denies this, making myth a social validation rather than a failed explanation; a good answer names both readings.