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Q3(c)

Eurocentrism is both the target and the motive force of the post-colonial political theory. Discuss

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 15 marks · Theories of the State

Theories of the State: Liberal, Neo-liberal, Marxist, Pluralist, Post-colonial and feminist.

Core demand of the question

- Eurocentrism is both the target and the motive force of the post-colonial political theory. Discuss. (15 marks)

Revision summary

Eurocentrism treats European political experience as the universal measure.

Post-colonial theory attacks that measure through Said, Fanon, and Chatterjee, and through recovery of Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar.

The same theory is motivated by European problems of the state, nation, and rights that empire made inescapable.

Chakrabarty's formula is that Europe is indispensable and inadequate.

The discussion is of that double relation, not of a simple rejection of all European thought.

Introduction

Post-colonial political theory studies how empire organised knowledge, the state, and the self. Eurocentrism is its target because European experience was treated as the universal measure of the political. Eurocentrism is also a motive force because the theory still works by answering, reversing, and using European categories.

Body

Eurocentrism as target

- Eurocentrism is the practice of taking European state, reason, and progress as the standard, and treating other histories as lack or delay.
- **Edward Said's** Orientalism showed that academic and literary knowledge of the East was a form of power, which meets **Foucault's** power-knowledge thesis in an imperial setting.
- **Frantz Fanon** analysed colonial violence and the colonised mind; political theory that ignored that scene was incomplete.
- **Partha Chatterjee** argued that anti-colonial nationalism often copied the modular European nation and then claimed difference in the inner domain of culture.
- Indian materials that the decline-of-political-theory literature ignored - **Gandhi's** Hind Swaraj, **Aurobindo's** swaraj, **Ambedkar's** constitutionalism - are recovered as theory, not as local colour.

Eurocentrism as motive force

- The questions of sovereignty, rights, the state, and civil society remain **Hobbes**, **Locke**, **Mill**, **Marx**, and **Rawls** questions even when the answer is no.
- **Dipesh Chakrabarty**'s provincializing Europe states the bind: Europe is indispensable and inadequate.
- Post-colonial writers use historicist time, the nation, and the archive that empire built, even while they criticise them.
- Subaltern studies sought a subject outside elite nationalism and still used Gramscian and Marxist tools.
- Motive force here means that without the European canon as antagonist and resource, the field would not have its present shape.

A balanced discussion

- If post-colonial theory only inverts Europe, it remains Europe-centred in a negative form.
- If it ignores rights, **Dahl**'s contestation, and **Ambedkar**'s law, it can romanticise community in the way **Sandel** and **Walzer** warn against when community is uncriticised.
- The productive path is to treat Indian, African, and Caribbean political thought as argument in its own right, and still to use European tools where they explain the colonial state that actually existed.
- Eurocentrism is therefore both what the theory attacks and what continues to organise its problems.

Flow diagram

Post-colonial theory -> Target: Eurocentrism
 Post-colonial theory -> Motive: European categories
 Target: Eurocentrism -> Said Fanon Chatterjee
 Motive: European categories -> Hobbes Mill Marx Rawls
 Post-colonial theory -> Gandhi Aurobindo Ambedkar

Conclusion

Post-colonial political theory targets Eurocentrism as a false universal. It is also moved by European categories of state, nation, and rights that it must answer. Said, Fanon, **Chatterjee**, and **Chakrabarty** show that double relation. **Gandhi**, **Aurobindo**, and **Ambedkar** are the non-European arguments that the field must actually read.

Facts & figures

Said, Orientalism (1978)

Showed that knowledge of the Orient was organised with imperial power, a founding text of the field.

Chatterjee

Nationalist thought and the colonial world: the modular nation is copied, the inner domain claims difference.

Chakrabarty

Provincializing Europe: European thought is indispensable and inadequate for histories elsewhere.

Hind Swaraj, 1909

Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation as a political-theoretical text, not only a pamphlet.

Foucault

Power-knowledge is used by post-colonial writers to read colonial archives and classifications.

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