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Q4(a)

Discuss Marxist approach to the analysis of Indian nationalism.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Discuss Marxist approach to the analysis of Indian nationalism
- Centre [A. R. Desai](#) and later class readings

Revision summary

Desai treated nationalism as a product of colonial economic change.

The national movement expressed bourgeois aims while mobilising other classes.

The approach explains material stakes better than spiritual histories.

[Ambedkar](#) and subaltern work show caste and the peasant as more than a class shadow.

Communalism remains a limit of a class-only nation story.

Introduction

The Marxist approach reads Indian nationalism as a class project inside colonial capitalism, not as a spiritual awakening. [A. R. Desai](#)'s Social Background of Indian Nationalism is the classic statement.

Body**Desai's core**

- British rule created railways, a bourgeoisie, a working class, and a new intelligentsia. Nationalism grew from these material relations.
- The Congress-led movement expressed bourgeois needs for a national market and office, while drawing peasant and worker energy.
- Caste and religion are real, but class and [colonial economy](#) are the motor.

What it captures

- Why landlords, mill owners, and professionals sat inside the same flag with different stakes.
- Why agrarian radicals such as [Phule](#) and later peasant struggles sit uneasily with a purely cultural nation.

Limits

- [Ambedkar](#) showed that the nation could ignore graded inequality. Culture is not only superstructure.
- Subaltern studies charged that Desai still centred elite politics.
- Partition and communalism need more than a class remainder.

Flow diagram

Colonial capitalism -> Bourgeois nationalism
Bourgeois nationalism -> Congress nation
Peasant worker -> Congress nation
Caste communal -> Critique of class-only

Conclusion

Marxist analysis of Indian nationalism is strongest on colonial capitalism and **bourgeois leadership**. It must be completed by caste, gender, and communal fracture, or the nation looks too much like a class unfolding.

Facts & figures

A. R. Desai

Principal Marxist sociologist of the social background of Indian nationalism.

Bourgeois leadership

The thesis that Congress nationalism served an emerging Indian capitalist class.

Colonial economy

Rail, mill, and land revenue as the soil of modern political community.

Subaltern critique

Later historians argued that elite nationalism was not the whole of popular politics.

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