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Q3(c)

Give an account of Ranajit Guha's approach in studying 'subaltern class'

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 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

- Give an account of Ranajit Guha's approach in studying 'subaltern class'
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Guha refused histories that make peasants mere followers of elites.

Subaltern names the subordinated who still have political consciousness.

- **Peasant insurgency has structure:** symbols, rumour, inversion.

Nationalism left a vast unrepresented domain.

Later critiques warn against freezing subaltern as a cultural essence.

Introduction

Ranajit Guha studied the subaltern as a people with their own political consciousness, not as a shadow of elite nationalism. Peasant insurgency is history from below, not a riot without reason.

Body

The approach

- **Subaltern Studies** began by criticising both colonial and nationalist elite histories that made the peasant a follower.
- **Elementary Aspects** of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India reads rebellion as a structured politics: rumour, inversion of symbols, destruction of the lord's signs.
- The subaltern class is defined by subordination in the colonial social formation, yet it is not a mute class.

Against elite capture

- Guha argued that Indian nationalism had a vast unrepresented domain. The Congress elite did not exhaust the people's politics.
- **This sits beside, and sometimes against, A. R. Desai's class analysis:** both refuse a harmony village, but Guha stresses autonomous peasant culture.

Limit

- Later critics said 'subaltern' could become a cultural essence and underplay gender or ongoing class organisation.

- The approach still teaches that **Tebhaga**-type struggles have their own grammar.

Flow diagram

Elite nationalist history -> Guha critique
Guha critique -> Subaltern insurgency
Subaltern insurgency -> Peasant political consciousness

Conclusion

Guha's approach studies the subaltern class as makers of politics through insurgency, symbols, and a domain beyond elite parties. It restored peasants as historical subjects of Indian society.

Facts & figures

Subaltern Studies

Collective Guha launched to write Indian history from below.

Elementary Aspects

His book on the grammar of colonial peasant insurgency.

Autonomous domain

Peasant politics not fully absorbed by Congress or colonial state.

Tebhaga

A sharecropper struggle that fits a subaltern, not only an elite, script.

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