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Q1(a)

Elaborate A. R. Desai's perspective to the study of Indian society.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · 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

- Elaborate A. R. Desai's perspective to the study of Indian society
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Desai reads Indian society through class and colonial capitalism.

Nationalism is bourgeois-led and incomplete for labour.

Land reform strengthened rich peasants more than mazdoors.

Caste is real as it organises exploitation, not as India's essence.

Subaltern and gender critiques say consciousness is more than class party.

Introduction

A. R. Desai studied Indian society as a historically formed class structure, not as a timeless caste temple. His Marxist perspective asks who owns land and capital, and how the state serves that bloc.

Body**Core of the perspective**

- **Social Background of Indian Nationalism** read the national movement as bourgeois-led, with peasants and workers as a mass that elites did not fulfil.
- Rural sociology, for Desai, is malik, kisan, and mazdoor after Thorner, recast as class struggle, not as Srinivas's functional village.
- **The state, planning, and land reform are incomplete bourgeois change:** intermediaries fall, rich peasants thicken, labour stays insecure.

Against other Indias

- He rejected Ghurye's Hindu civilisational whole and Dumont's purity ideology as the first key.
- Caste and religion matter as they organise exploitation, not as the essence of India.

Limit

- Later subaltern work, after Ranajit Guha, said peasant consciousness is not only class-as-party.
- Gender and tribe need more than a class footnote.

Flow diagram

Desai Marxist India -> Class land capital
Class land capital -> Bourgeois nationalism
Class land capital -> Incomplete land reform

Conclusion

- **Desai's perspective is historical materialism applied to India:** class, colonial capitalism, and an unfinished bourgeois republic. It is strongest on land and nationalism, and thin if culture is treated as a mask only.

Facts & figures

Social Background of Indian Nationalism

Desai's book tying the national movement to class formation.

Bourgeois path

His name for planning and reform that stop short of labour's power.

Thorner classes

Malik-kisan-mazdoor map Desai politicises as struggle.

Village studies critique

Harmony language underplays landlord and state power.

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