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Q4(a)

Examine the social background of growth of Indian nationalism.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Impact of colonial rule on Indian society

Impact of colonial rule on Indian society: Social background of Indian nationalism; Modernization of Indian tradition; Protests and movements during the colonial period; Social reforms.

Core demand of the question

- Examine the social background of growth of Indian nationalism
- Use **A. R. Desai** and the roles of class, caste, region, and print

Revision summary

Colonial markets, land settlements and racial rule created a shared political field.

Desai read nationalism as a bourgeois-democratic movement with internal class limits.

Print, law and associations made a pan-Indian public.

Caste and religion organised people and also split the nation.

Peasants and workers entered through material conflicts, not only through elite speech.

Introduction

Indian nationalism grew from a social field made by colonial economy, new classes, print, and associations. It was not a sudden spiritual awakening. **A. R. Desai's** social background thesis remains the clearest sociological starting point.

Body**Colonial material setting**

- Rail, port, plantation, and land settlement created a national market and a shared experience of drain, famine, and racial bureaucracy.
- English education and the professions produced a middle class that could speak a pan-Indian political language.
- Peasants and workers entered later through rent, indigo, mill, and forest conflicts, so nationalism was socially layered, not one mood.

Desai's class reading

- Desai treated the Congress-led movement as a bourgeois-democratic struggle against colonialism, with limits on agrarian radicalism.
- Landlords, rich peasants, and industrialists did not share one interest with landless labour. The national front was real and internally unequal.
- **Caste and religion supplied organisation:** sabhas, akharas, and later communal bodies, which Ghurye would read as civilisational continuity and Desai as ideology.

Culture, print, and region

- Newspapers, novels, and pilgrim networks imagined India, but they also imagined a Hindu majority that minorities had to negotiate.
- Regional linguistic nationalisms, as in Bengal, Maharashtra, and Tamil country, both fed and strained a single Indian nation.
- Social reform, from widow remarriage campaigns to **Ambedkar**'s anti-caste politics, was not a side show. Who counted as the nation was in dispute.

Village and city

- Srinivas's later village India was not the birthplace of the nationalist elite, yet peasant movements gave the movement mass.
- Cities held the press, the bar, and the mill. Villages held the tax and the recruit.

Flow diagram

Colonial economy state -> Educated middle class
Colonial economy state -> Peasant and worker unrest
Print associations -> Indian nationalism
Educated middle class -> Indian nationalism
Peasant and worker unrest -> Indian nationalism
Caste religion ideology -> Indian nationalism

Conclusion

The social background of Indian nationalism is colonial political economy plus new classes, print, caste-religion organisation, and uneven mass entry. Desai is right that it was a class-structured national movement, not a caste-free spiritual unity.

Facts & figures

A. R. Desai

Social Background of Indian Nationalism ties the movement to class formation under colonialism.

New middle class

Lawyers, journalists and officials who first spoke a national constitutional language.

Peasant and mill unrest

Rent, plantation and factory conflicts that widened nationalism beyond the professions.

Ambedkar

Forced the national movement to face caste as a barrier to a people, not a private custom.