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Q1(a)

Highlight the significant features of A.R. Desai's 'Dialectical Perspective' to study Indian Society

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · 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

- Highlight the significant features of **A. R. Desai's** dialectical perspective to study Indian society
- Keep the method, the class reading of caste and **village**, and the critique of harmony sociology in view
- Stay within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Desai studies Indian society as historical materialism, not as a harmonious **village**.

Caste and custom are read as ideology over agrarian class.

The colonial and planning state are part of the contradiction, not neutral umpires.

Village studies of consensus are criticised as incomplete.

The method is strong on land, labour, and struggle.

Introduction

A. R. Desai read Indian society through historical materialism, not through a timeless **village** or a pure caste ideology. His dialectical perspective treats social life as a field of contradiction between classes, the state, and changing forces of production.

Body

Method

- **Desai used Marx's dialectic:** every social form contains opposing interests, and change comes from those contradictions rather than from slow cultural drift.
- He studied India as a historically produced formation of colonialism, landlordism, and later planned capitalism, not as a frozen civilisation.
- Texts, caste rules, and **village** custom are treated as ideology that can hide surplus extraction, not as a full map of society.

Class, caste, and the **village**

- **Caste, for Desai, is a ranked covering over agrarian class:** landlords, rich peasants, tenants, and landless labourers.
- The **village** is not a little republic of harmony. It is a unit of rent, usury, and labour control, which is why he wrote rural sociology as political economy.

- Nationalism and the post-independence state are class projects as well as freedom struggles; planning can serve industrial capital while leaving rural inequality in place.

Contrast with other Indian sociology

- Against a functional **village** ethnography that stresses consensus, Desai stresses conflict, peasant struggle, and the colonial land settlement.
- Against a purely Indological reading of hierarchy, he asks who owns land, who pays rent, and who supplies cheap labour.
- The perspective remains useful for Operation Barga, farm laws debates, and displacement, because it keeps production and the state in the same frame.

Flow diagram

Forces of production -> Class contradiction
Caste custom ideology -> Class contradiction
Colonial and planning state -> Class contradiction
Class contradiction -> Social change and struggle

Conclusion

Desai's dialectical perspective is a class-and-history method for Indian society. It does not deny caste or culture; it locates them inside changing property and power.

Facts & figures

A. R. Desai

Social Background of Indian Nationalism and Rural Sociology in India apply a Marxist dialectic to Indian structure and change.

Dialectic

Change is explained through contradiction in production and class, not only through values.

Caste as covering

Rank and ritual are treated as a social skin over landlord, tenant, and labourer relations.

Village

Not a self-sufficient republic; a site of rent, credit, and labour control.

Contrast

Stands against functional harmony models and against a purely textual hierarchy.