



Organic Intellectuals and Capitalist Hegemony

For Prelims: Organic Intellectuals, Capitalist Hegemony, Marxist Ideology, Capitalist Hegemony

For Mains: Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis

Why in News?

In a recent development that has **caught the attention of social and economic observers**, a growing wave of **organic intellectuals is emerging as a formidable force in challenging capitalist hegemony**.

- **Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci** introduced the **concept of the "organic intellectual"** in his **Prison Notebooks**, highlighting **their significance in understanding his philosophy of praxis**.
- Gramsci emphasised the **complex relationship between class power, ideology, organic intellectuals, [hegemony](#)**, and the state in capitalist society.

What is Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis?

- Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is a way of thinking about **Marxism** that focuses on the **importance of culture, ideas, and people's choices in bringing about historical change**.
 - Instead of seeing economic factors as the only driving force behind history, **Gramsci believed that individuals are active participants in shaping their own destiny, rather than just passive victims of their circumstances**.
- According to Gramsci, in **modern [capitalist societies](#)**, **there are different social groups with varying interests and levels of awareness**.
 - The dominant class holds power not only through economic means but also by influencing culture and morals.
- Gramsci's philosophy of praxis seeks to **understand how the ruling class maintains its control over the lower classes through cultural and moral leadership**.
 - It also aims to understand **how the dominant class maintains its hegemony, or cultural and moral leadership**, over the subordinate classes and how the latter can develop a **counter-hegemony** that challenges the existing order.

Who are the Organic Intellectuals?

- According to Gramsci, **intellectuals are not a separate category of people who possess a special quality of mind** or a superior level of education. Rather, **intellectuals are defined by their function and role in society**.
 - Gramsci distinguishes between two types of intellectuals: **traditional and organic**.
- **Traditional intellectuals** are those who **claim to be independent and autonomous from any class or social group**.
 - They present themselves as the bearers of universal values and knowledge, such as **priests, teachers, artists, scientists, etc.**

- However, Gramsci argued that **traditional intellectuals are actually aligned with the dominant class** and serve its interests by legitimising its worldview and values.
- **Organic intellectuals are those who emerge from within a specific class or social group** and articulate its interests and aspirations.
 - They **are organically linked to the masses and mediate between their common sense and the ruling ideology**. They also help to organise and mobilise their class or group for political action.
 - Gramsci argued that **every class or social group produces its own organic intellectuals, but not all of them are equally developed or effective**.
 - He pays special attention to the **role of organic intellectuals in challenging capitalist hegemony** and building a counter-hegemonic bloc.

How do Organic Intellectuals Challenge Capitalist Hegemony?

- **Capitalist hegemony is not only based on coercion and violence, but also on consent and persuasion.**
 - The dominant class uses various institutions and practices, such as **education, media, religion, culture, etc.**, to spread its ideology and values among the subordinate classes and to incorporate them into its worldview.
- However, **hegemony is never complete or stable**. It is **always contested and resisted by alternative forms of consciousness and culture** that express the needs and demands of the oppressed classes and groups.
 - This is where organic intellectuals play a crucial role. **They help to articulate these alternative forms of consciousness and culture into a coherent and comprehensive worldview that challenges the dominant one.**
 - They **also help to connect different classes and groups that share common interests** and goals into a historical bloc that can act as a collective agent of historical change.
- Organic intellectuals **do not impose their ideas on the masses, but rather engage in a dialogical process with them.**
 - They respect their common sense, but also critique its limitations and contradictions. They educate them, but also learn from them. They inspire them, but also follow them.

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