India is a country with a legacy of colonial rule. It is a polity which evolved in stages from a highly centralised and authoritarian government to a quasi-federal parliamentary democracy. The socio-economic order, in correspondence, evolved from a primarily rural, self-sufficient feudal system to a colonial-industrial order, linked to a world market. After independence state-initiated development along capitalist lines is to be found in a country which professes to follow a socialist model of development. The long path of evolution of the Indian polity and society from pre-British to British to post-independence phase makes it a cogent and interesting subject for research.

Understanding the evolution of the Indian State and Society through a particular model provided by A.R. Desai is the principal object of the present study. A.R. Desai—the noted Indian Marxist Sociologist—provided, in a traditional and orthodox manner, the interpretations of Indian State and Society through the methodology of Historical Materialism. The socio-political thoughts of Desai are distinctive because the Marxist paradigm, in his own conception, is the most relevant in comprehending properly the transformation that is taking place in Indian society and its various subsystems.

The complexity of Indian socio-political order is not amenable to simple explanations. There are a variety of approaches to interpret the socio-political developments and the multi-causal problems arising out of them. However, as Desai is of the opinion, these approaches do not transcend the bourgeois matrix of liberal-pluralist philosophical postulates. According to him, in a country where “socialism” is supposed to be the proclaimed ideal of development, but capitalist development is ruthlessly pursued in practice, only the Marxist approach can study the various aspects of specific social-formulations in the context of the specific socio-political situation in India.
The present study, therefore, aims at understanding Desai’s interpretations of Indian polity and society through the Marxist approach which recognises the dialectics of evolutionary as well as revolutionary changes, of the occurrence of breaks in historical continuity in transition from one socio-economic formation to another and the peculiar problems in the context of this transition.

There are a number of works dealing with Indian polity and society, both Marxist as well as non-Marxist. But the distinctiveness of Desai’s dialectical approach has not yet been comprehensively studied. A close perusal of Desai’s works will lead to a comprehensive idea about Indian polity and society. This is the endeavour of this dissertation.

Desai, as a Marxist political sociologist, has analysed the dominant socio-political realities of his time. At one level I have tried to identify, analyse and explain these socio-political realities. At another level, I have noted how Desai’s ideological orientation has helped him to give a comprehensive view about Indian society and polity.

In order to develop a Marxist interpretation of Indian society and polity Desai made important empirical studies. In all aspects he provided a consistently Marxist interpretation of the various issues involved. To make a comprehensive study of his thoughts I have divided the proposed work into several chapters. There is a brief introduction which includes his life and times. It is followed, in the next chapter, by the theoretical orientation and methodological approach of Desai. In the first section I have tried to make a comparative study between some non-Marxist approaches and Desai’s professed methodology of Historical Materialism. In the second section I have projected Desai’s distinctiveness among contemporary Indian Marxist scholars.

The following chapters involve a study of the Indian situation in its various aspects, namely, Nationalism, State, Agrarian Society and Peasant Question, and finally, Protest Movements and Social Change. In the process I
have explored the evolution of Desai's thought from the pre-independence situation to its post-independence manifestations. Finally, in conclusion I have tried to assess Desai's contribution to the development of the dialectical approach to the study of Indian society and polity in the light of criticisms that have rejected the ideological position taken by Desai.

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