Blend: A Tapestry of Multi-Disciplinary Narratives

ENGLISH PART - II, MARATHI & HINDI

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Prof. Dr. Ujwala Vijay Patil
Head, Department of English,
Dr. Patangrao Kadam Mahabidyalaya,
Ramanandnagar (Burli), Sangli.

Mr. D. A. Sasane
Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry,
Dr. Patangrao Kadam Mahabidyalaya,
Ramanandnagar (Burli), Sangli.

AJANTA PRAKASHAN

Rayat Shikshan Sanstha's
Dr. Patangrao Kadam Mahavidyalaya
Ramanandnagar (Burli), Dist.- Sangli. (M.S.)

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AJANTA PRAKASHAN
Jaisingpura, Aurangabad. (M.S.)

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Editor
Prof. Dr. Ujwala Vijay Patil
Mr. D. A. Sasane

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10. Subaltern Movements in India: A Study

Mr. Shinde Santosh Laxman
Mr. S. D. Kamble
Ms. S. N. Lavate
Prof. Dr. U. V. Patil
Ms. Tatugade A. P.
Dr. Patangrao Kadam Mahavidyalaya, Ramanandnagar (Burli).

Abstract

Literature is one of the forms to express our thoughts and voices for the justice and rights in the society. Hence, it may be used to fulfill man's internal and external necessities forever. So, the downtrodden needy, exploited and oppressed people want to express their voices and problems through the different forms of literature. They want to promote fraternity, harmony and equality. They also demand liberty, justice, human's right and dignity. There are number of reformers such as Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedakar have struggled for the voices of downtrodden people in India. There are various movements which struggled for the problems of untouchability, downtrodden people, farmers and Indian women. These movements fight for the rights of downtrodden peoples in the society. They demand the social, cultural and economic equality in the society. Indian English Literature tries to demonstrate the voices of downtrodden and subaltern people with its multidimensional outlooks.

Keywords: Subaltern Studies, Peasants movements, the human rights, injustice, identity, historical development Subaltern Studies, Downtrodden and Dalit people, Indian women, farmers.

Introduction

The term subaltern designates and identifies the colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically excluded from the hierarchy of power of an imperial colony and from the metropolitan homeland of an empire. Antonio Gramsci coined the term subaltern to identify the cultural hegemony that excludes and displaces specific people and social groups from the socio-economic institutions of society, in order to deny their agency and voices in colonial politics. The terms subaltern and subaltern studies entered the vocabulary of post-colonial studies through the works of the Subaltern Studies Group of historians who explored the political-actor

role of the common people who constitute the mass population, rather than re-explore the political-actor roles of the social and economic elites in the history of India.

Karl Marx's theory of history presents colonial history from the perspective of the proletariat. The social class is determined by the economic relations among the social classes of a society. Since the 1970s, the term subaltern denoted the colonized peoples of the Indian subcontinent, imperial history told from below, from the perspective of the colonized peoples, rather than from the perspective of the colonizers from Western Europe. In postcolonial theory, the term subaltern describes the lower social classes and the other social groups displaced to the margins of a society; in an imperial colony, a subaltern is a native man or woman without human agency, as defined by his and her social status.

Ranjeet Guha was an Indian historian, who was one of the early pioneers of the Subaltern Studies group, a methodology of South Asian Studies focused on post-colonial and post-imperial societies, studying them from the perspective of the under classes.

The term "subaltern" in this context is an allusion to the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). The term's semantic range has evolved from its first usage by Ranajit Guha, following Gramsci, to refer solely to peasants who had not been integrated into the industrial capitalist system. Subaltern Studies (1978–2008), a research collective and series of publications, is not typically associated with history writing on social movements in India. The stated aim of the group was to document the politics of the people during the era of British colonial rule in the subcontinent.

The study of the concept of the subaltern deals first with preliminary definitions of this concept as it was initially used by the Italian Marxist political activist, Antonio Gramsci, in his widely known book "Prison Notebooks". It makes more visible the workings of other markers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality, and not just 'across the class spectrum,' but in their mutual interactions, illuminating, in turn, the process of class formation itself. This inclusive definition of subaltern is emphatically not meant to suggest that all oppressions or resistances are equal, and that everyone is a subaltern. It makes more visible the workings of other markers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality, and not just 'across the class spectrum,' but in their mutual interactions, illuminating, in turn, the process of class formation itself. The oppressions can be stacked, doubled, intertwined.

The subaltern is neither as a sovereign- subject that actively occupies a bounded place nor as a vassal-subject that results from the dispersed effects of multiple external determinations, but as an agent of identity construction that participates, under determinate conditions within a field of power relations. The subaltern is a relational and a relative concept. There are times and places where subjects appear on the social stage as subaltern actors, just as there are times or places in which they play dominant roles. Moreover, at any given time or place, an actor may be subaltern in relation to another, yet dominant in relation to a third. Dominance and subalternity are not inherent, but relational characterizations.

The Subaltern people are not the being of a subject, but a subjected state of being. Yet because enduring subjection has the effect of fixing subjects into limiting positions, a relational conception of the subaltern requires a double vision that recognizes at one level a common ground among diverse forms of subjection and, at another, the intractable identity of subjects formed within uniquely constraining social worlds. While the first optic opens up a space for establishing links among subordinated subjects including the analyst who takes a subaltern perspective, the second acknowledges the differentiating and ultimately unshareable effects of specific modalities of subjection. This relational and situational view of the subaltern may help anti-colonial intellectuals avoid the polarity underlying Spivak's analysis and listen to subaltern voices that speak from variously subordinated positions.

Subaltern studies analyze and advocate for the "bottom layer of society". Prominent subaltern historians are Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, Antonio Gramsci and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule focused on Subaltern studies. Subaltern studies analyzes the "binary relationship" of the subaltern and ruling classes, and thus studies the interplay of dominance and subordination in colonial systems, most notably India, though the methods of the movement have since been applied to other nations, spaces, and historical moments. Subaltern means the 'bottommost ranks' and subaltern history developed from the idea that history should be written from the bottommost rank of people in the society.

It observes the possible clash between self and society, transcendence and secularism, unity and diversity and between holistic understanding and individuality. This approach is an important to the study of tribal peasant movement. The term 'subaltern' means someone of inferior rank by virtue of their class, race, or gender. The term 'subaltern' could refer to basically three social groups: 'tribal and low-caste agricultural laborer and share-croppers; landholding peasants,

generally of intermediate caste-status in Bengal together with their Muslim counterparts and labors in plantations, mines and industries.

It was widely used to denote inferior rank in army, but nowadays, the term subaltern implies people of inferior rank for his/her various attributes such as economic condition, race, ethnicity, gender, caste, sexual orientation and people are marginalized for such attributes. The 1970s, the term subaltern denoted the colonized peoples of the Indian subcontinent, imperial history told from below, from the perspective of the colonized peoples, rather than from the perspective of the colonizers from Western Europe.

The Dalit movement in Maharashtra is one if the important highlight in the history of the state. It marks the social and political awakening of the Dalits and depressed classes in the state. One of the most influential personalities in shaping the Dalit movement in Maharashtra was Dr Babasaheb Ambdekar. Non Brahmin movement in Maharashtra played a very important role in the social reform of Maharashtra. It also focused on important issues like abolishing caste and discrimination, educating all, and promoting intercaste marriages. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, a Dalit himself, strongly advocated for abolishing the caste system and supported Dalit struggles. He is known as the Father of the Constitution. He is still revered as a hero for Dalits today. The time, and place determine who, among the marginalised peoples, is a subaltern; in India, women, Shudras and Dalits (also known as Untouchables), and rural migrant labourers are part of the subaltern social stratum.

Thus, the term 'subaltern' refers to the marginalized or oppressed people, whether in terms of class, caste, age, religion, ethnicity and gender. In the constitution of India, social subalterns are a heterogeneous group of people who have been marginalized for a long time. These include the dalits, the tribals, the deprived and distressed women, and the rural and migrant workers who are endowed with resources much lesser than their requirement for a minimum quality livelihood.

In the history of the non-Brahmin movement, in the first decade of the twentieth century when Shahu Chhatrapati, the ruler of Kolhapur and a descendent of Shivaji, became its acknowledged leader, he struggled or the rights of the subaltern people and gave them justice. The subaltern concept is related to socio-cultural and historical facets of the society which studies about the people who are subordinated and subjugated in terms of class, caste, gender, religion and sex. Diaspora is also related to subaltern themes such as alienation and identity crisis in an alien land. Postcolonial theory studies the power and the continued dominance of Western ways of intellectual

enquiry, the methods of generating knowledge. In the book 'Orientalism' (1978), Edward Said conceptually addresses the oppressed subaltern native to explain how the Eurocentric perspective of Orientalism produced the ideological foundations and justifications for the colonial domination of the other.

Conclusions

This research paper has been an attempt to trace the development of theories of historiography as exposed by Subaltern Studies. I have analyzed how power and hierarchy permeate everything in the interface among Indians. I have included as well controversies about the subalterns' agency and the ways to empower silenced groups through the power. Thus, subaltern approach in studying the peasants and tribal movements in India is an important milestone because it examines the politics of the people and in opposition to the politics of the elites. A subaltern study tries to give justice to the oppressed people.

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