

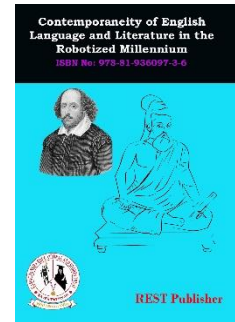
## Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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## A Comprehensive View of Subaltern ‘Consciousness’

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In the academic and scholarly realm, the word ‘Subaltern Studies’ has attracted widespread interest for discourses on South Asian and the post-colonial world few decades ago. The major motif of subaltern studies has been to challenge the conventional metanarratives in history by hegemonic communities and goes hand in glove with post-colonial discussions of the empire writing back to the imperial power centers. One comes across the dominance of the subaltern in the master- slave relationships of Hegel, the blacks’ rebellion in Frantz Fanon, the east-west polarities in Edward Said, and the duality of ‘otherness’ of Homi Bhabha, and the voiceless subaltern in Spivak. In this process, the rise of ‘new’ subaltern comes into play and means one who resists or revolts.

Antonio Gramsci, Marxist and Communist Party Leader, employed the word ‘Subaltern’, in the context of ‘of inferior rank’. The word designates people of elite or aristocratic culture dominating the people hailing from a lower stratum of society who are in one way or the other suppressed just because of their domicile. Colonization is one of the major causes of hegemonies prevailing in the society. The white people from Britain and other European countries exercised a strong supremacy over the less superior countries by colonizing their land and people. In this process there evolved a variety of hegemonies across the globe particularly underdeveloped countries such as India, Africa, etc-countries which encountered subaltern problems. Eventually, the word ‘subaltern’ has come to be used in literature by authors to project the problems, challenges and struggles faced by indigenous people.

In literature, the term came to be utilized by writers to mean people having no specific ethnic identity power and those communities usually taking refuge and shelter under a dictator who is a tyrant. British Historian, E.P. Thomson in ‘The Times Magazine’ opined statement about Subaltern in the following words: ‘History from Down Below’. Antonio Gramsci described ‘subaltern’ to designate ‘minor, poor, and the downtrodden people’.

Historically, there in literary writings, there existed two types of people: the Superior ones and Inferior ones in the society. The superiors were always the more fortunate ones and enjoyed all rights and privileges to the utmost and they have been given due importance. The other category, the inferior ones are the suppressed and dominated communities who have been deprived of their minimum privileges. Hence it is the need of the hour to ‘revision’ or ‘retell’ or ‘rewrite’ history to ensure equality and justice to all irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex, race or ethnicity. Eventually, the concept of ‘inclusion’ came to be accepted and authors began producing works projecting and portraying the ‘Subalterns’ in their works. Prominent writers from Africa, India, Canada, Australia began writing about the struggles and excruciating pain of the bonded laborers, workers, scavengers, underdogs, less privileged people, child workers, and women. Through their narratives, authors have created ‘consciousness’ and awakened the giant spirit of the self-identity of both the individuals and the subaltern communities. Thus, the ideologies of various writers in history about subaltern consciousness had raised individual and group consciousness to make their voice heard and attain their ideologies to earn their livelihood.

‘Subaltern studies’ is a new trend of thoughts which is found in the writings of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci explained Marxist theory in terms of the changed conditions of world. “The process of production is the foundation of social development and change, economical transactions determine the direction of social development, thoughts and culture. Gramsci makes argument regarding this theory of Marx and says, “Though financial transaction is the foundation of social life, the cultural building on it is of the same importance. Social change

gives speed and direction to culture”. Gramsci says, ‘Be an Integral Historian and join the ranks of organic intellectuals in recognizing every trace of independent initiative on the part of the Subaltern group, rather than reproducing, the minds and analyzing the actions of the dominant group’. Through the thoughts of Gramsci, the trend of Subaltern studies became conventional.

The sources of subaltern studies, the social group on which the history has to be written, are not available in large quantity because these groups at the low level of society is not capable of expressing their thoughts and opinions like the superiors or leading people. Therefore, the literature expressing their revelation is not made. We don’t have documents and sources of written correspondence. Therefore, Governmental documents, Govt. Reports, Reports of Revenue Department, Census Report, Documents of Police Department, Judicial Documents, Folktales, Folksongs, Folk-recollection, Interviews etc. are used as sources and material to express subaltern consciousness. The meditation of all the above sources and the help of different branches of knowledge like Economics, Sociology, Census, Anthropology, Archaeology, Psychology, Linguistics etc. have become necessary to create subaltern history.

The founder of the subaltern studies is Ranjit Guha (an Indian) and the trend of ‘Subaltern studies’ has prevailed in India, for the last twenty years of the 20th century. This new trend gave a way to new challenges by going against the traditional notions of writing history. It provided a new direction, new amplitude and helped to begin a new chapter. Indian point of view of Subaltern history like the trend of writing in England, became famous as ‘History from Below’. The ‘Centre of South Asian Cultural Studies’ was established with the assumption that without knowing the work of downtrodden people, it is not possible to obtain the true insights of the contemporary history. Ranjeet Guha played a vital role in the establishment of this institute. He discussed about this viewpoint of history with some of the Indian scholars. The historians, who experienced the need to study the new perspective regarding the revolt movement during the British rule in India, came together and deliberately started new experiments in the field of history. In 1982, a collection of articles edited by Dr. Guha “Subaltern Studies” was published.

This first issue of Subaltern Studies can be called a concrete invention of the new trend of thoughts. Guha tried to write history of subaltern from the subaltern perspective. Then alone would it be possible to notice the kind of role that most of the population, the silent majority played in directing the course of history. Inevitably, the issue is who was dominating whom and who revolted against the domination and in what kind of manner came to be central points of deliberation in these studies. The philosophical base of Dr. Guha’s ‘Subaltern Studies’ is found in the writing of Gramsci. Eight issues of ‘Subaltern Studies’ were published. Through these issues Guha gave an outline of common people’s history. He also wrote “Elementary Aspects of Peasant Emergency in Colonial India” In this book he wrote about the main parts of peasant’s revolt “A farmer is the creator of his own history”, says Dr. Guha.

Dr. Shahid Amin, a close associate of Dr. Guha, has made remarkable contribution to the writing of ‘Subaltern Studies. He was the founder; editor and worked as teacher in History in Delhi University. He has analyzed the effect of Mahatma Gandhi on the minds of farmers who participated in non-cooperation movement. He has tried to know the intention of different elements of society related to “ChauriChaura” incident. He wrote an article ‘Making the Nation Habitable’ and a book, ‘Remembering the Mussalmans’.

Dr. Sumit Sarkar is another interesting author who has dealt with Subaltern Consciousness. He explains the term ‘subaltern’ for tribal and low-caste agricultural laborers and sharecroppers, landholding peasants, generally of intermediate –caste status in Bengal. He studied Marxism and his important writings consist of the history of common people in national movement, history of neglected group, leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in national movement and the dominant nature of foreign colonial government. In 1977 he discussed with Dr. Ranjeet Guha and turned towards this new trend. He wrote book like: Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1973), Popular Movements and Middle-Class Leadership in the late Colonial India, Perspectives and problems of History from Below (1985), Writing Social History, Modern India 1885-1947 and 1983-1985. He wrote articles on, Limits of Nationalism, Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern studies, Beyond Nationalist frame.

Dr. Sumit Sarkar, closer to the concept of “History from Below’ by Edward Thomson in the introduction to his book, ‘Popular Movements and Middle-Class Leadership’ exclaims: “History from Below being by concentrating on local and regional developments, encompassing various groups in the word popular-tribal, Peasant, artisan, labor protests and in the middle class a class which started asserting some kind of regional on national leadership and which had a totally different composition from Princes and Zamindars.” Dr. Sumit Sarkar says, ‘Subaltern studies with its critique of all varieties of elitisms, whether colonist, nationalist or even Marxist has its focus on lower class indicatives, its pioneering efforts do represent a major breakthrough in our history writing’. In his

article 'Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern studies' Dr. Smith states that the 'social history' of the downtrodden should not be deserted when writers focus on their psychology.

Sumit Sarkar criticized the theory for moving towards post colonialism. Gradually a shift took place in the approach towards subaltern studies. In his essays, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies and 'Orientalism Revisited', Smith states there could be various reasons for this shift and there is an attempt to have the best of both worlds.

Sarkar argues that many problems arise with the histories produced by the subaltern writers, which emerged because of their restrictive analytical frameworks such as a swing from an emphasis on subaltern autonomy to western colonial cultural domination. Such criticism of the Subaltern Studies is continuing, and the Subaltern historians have responded to it with their own justification of the project and counterattacks on critics. The central aim of the Subaltern Studies is to understand the 'consciousness' which informs political actions taken by the subaltern classes on their own, independently without any elite initiative. In the course of nationalist struggles involving the mobilization, the masses often have their own analysis on the aims of these movements and proceeded to act them out.

Thus, subaltern studies were affirmed as a radically new form of history-writing. The History of certain nations written till date is one-sided, partial and unrealistic, yet has created History. Superior people or intellectual communities cannot create history because it is not true history. But real history is shaped from the struggles and lives of common people and naturally Subaltern studies became an original location/space/limbo for 'retelling', 'rewriting' and 'reversioning' of a new kind of history from below, a people's history free of national constraints, a post-nationalist reimagining of nations at the margins, outside nationalism. Subaltern Studies brings together all historians to seek justice and equality and thereby success only when narrating true history.

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