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History of Subaltern

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Abstract

The concept of the subaltern in its historical development as it was first used by Gramsci before trying to relate it to the current developments in our post-modern times. So, it became evident that the approach is a historical approach that attempts to excavate the origins of the concept of the subaltern by referring to a genealogical study of the foundational academic theoretical works which dealt with this notion of the subaltern. The concept of the subaltern moved to a further more complex theoretical debate with the intervention of the Indian-American post-colonial feminist critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who was criticized in her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Partha Chatterjee, another great historian in subaltern studies project, who gave a remarkable involvement in this respect which proved fundamental point in time to identified with that engagement with elite themes is not on the whole innovative to the subaltern

Keywords

Subaltern, Domination, History, Women, Identity, Differences

Introduction

The notion of class and equality is not the only Indian concept; history of the West says all these ideas started by the West. But in the modern world these unsuccessful notions are started to be removed from the western notion and unfortunately till in the 21st century, the word 'class' is one of the major issue in the Indian society. From the ancient history this class distinction started. Firstly it appeared in our great Puranas, Shastras through the Chaturvarnya system, where the upper classes Brahmins were made differences among the lower class for their own benefit. Carrying this system in the progressive society can make a revolution. In our society, basically three types of people – the first one is the mainstream, who has full power to fulfill their wish in the society - the upper class, the second one is alternative, who have less power than the mainstream, but have much power than the others, who called as the middle class and the third one is the voiceless or lower class people, who are always dominated and neglected by the those two classes of people. Society gave a name for those voiceless people – as SUBALTERN. According to *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the term 'subaltern' mean 'of inferior rank'. Through this meaning it is seeing that this is related to history and society which means politics, economics and sociology of subalternity with attitudes, ideologies and belief systems – in a very nut shell the culture only can inform about the condition. The word Subaltern came from Italian word *Subaterno*. On the other hand, literally this word is used in the defense where a lower graded army, who has to obey the upper graded officer or their boss, again which shows the picture of subordination.





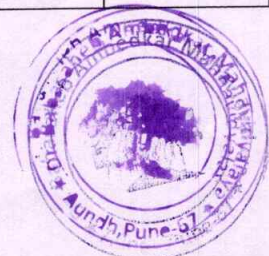
Gramsci an Explorations of the Concept of the Subaltern

The notion of the subaltern was first referred to by the Italian Marxist political activist Antonio Gramsci in his article "Notes on Italian History" which appeared later on as part of his most widely known book Prison Notebooks written between 1929 and 1935. Gramsci's standpoint is fundamentally instrumental to any student who reaches an understanding of the origin of the notion of the subaltern because it tends to detach itself from the mechanistic and economic form that narrowly characterizes most of the Marxist traditional studies. The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. Gramsci's intentions when he first used the concept of the subaltern are clear enough to be given any other far-fetched interpretations. The only groups Gramsci had in mind at that time were the workers and peasants who were oppressed and discriminated by the leader of the National Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini and his agents. Gramsci became interested in the study of the subaltern classes of consciousness and culture as one possible way to make their voice heard instead of relying on the historical narrative of the state which is by the end, the history of the ruling and dominant classes. In this study, Gramsci envisages to carry out the legitimized fact given thus:

"The subaltern classes by definition are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society and thereby with the history of States and groups of States".

Gayatri Chakravorty's Reconsiderations of the Concept of the Subaltern

The concept of the subaltern moved to a further more complex theoretical debate with the intervention of the Indian-American post-colonial feminist critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who was criticized in her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". The complexity of Spivak's stance might be attributed to her erudite and skillful, but sometimes, unclear implementation of structuralist and post-structuralist theories, particularly deconstructionist strategies of reading, in colonial and post-colonial spaces of divergence and inversion. In her seminal essay, Spivak reconsidered the problems of subalternity within new historical developments as brought by capitalistic politics of undermining revolutionary voice and divisions of labor in a globalized world. She disapproved the first place of Gramsci's assertion of the autonomy of the subaltern groups. Her justification of this rejection of Gramscian view is based on her view that this autonomy results in homogeneity of the subaltern group and subaltern subjective identity. Spivak's second criticism of Subaltern Studies Group lies in her belief that no methodology, even the most ambitious Marxist one, can avoid a sort of essentialism in its attempt to define who or what may constitute the subaltern group. Consequently, Spivak chooses to adopt the notion of the subaltern essentially because, "it is truly situational. „Subaltern" began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism Monism, and was obliged to call the proletariat „subaltern." that word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that does not fall under strict class analysis. This is so, because it has no theoretical rigor.





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Guha Explorations of the Concept of the Subaltern

Guha believed that there is some politics in subaltern which is constituted as an autonomous domain and it is also remarkable that this kind of politics neither originated from elite class nor subsistence as a responsible on the concluding. The essays of the next series reflected as the difference of opinion in concentration, motives and theories and also there are some aspects which are not changeable. It is an attempt to observe and imagine history from the point of view of the subaltern and to give them their owing in Historical development. The last two decades of the 20th century have witnessed to emergence of diverse themes within the subaltern historiographical school. In the later parts those historians were noticed that subaltern studies were dominated by the dominant discourse except those parts where 80s and 90s society were described. Guha delivered his speech from the subaltern point of view, that writing history is acknowledge to the 'contamination' of the subject which makes a point to define the historical materials which is according to Edward Said that,

Theirs, the subaltern historians is no history of ideas, no calmly Olympian narrative of gets, no disengaged objective recital of facts. It is rather sharply contesting, an attempt to wrest control of the past from its scribes and curators in the present, since much of the past continues in the present.

Partha Chatterjee Explorations of the Concept of the Subaltern

Partha Chatterjee, another great historian in subaltern studies project, who gave a remarkable involvement in this respect which proved fundamental point in time to identified with that engagement with elite themes is not on the whole innovative to the subaltern. And also he said that there were also main two controversies over the publication of the first series of the Subaltern Studies. The first one was between the politics of elite class and subaltern which also introduced in two separate corners and the question was that is this in reality correct separation? And the second one was on the interpretation of subaltern sensitivity because for the human consciousness in progressive historiography which is not only true for the whole society but on the whole for some different parts of the society. There is also some line-up to write Subaltern Studies as oppositional and critical history writing. It is not for the dominance of the elite class but for the dominance of the social history which has no ending. Many readers had seen the beginning of such an alternative historiography in the initial writings of Subaltern Studies. But it can be said that,

Subaltern Studies is an opposition of traditional history, it is a critical writing of new history because these lower class, dominated, oppressed people have to decide their own fate by themselves, and nobody is there for them. They are not talking about the whole society - it's a part and incomplete.

Conclusion

The huge numbers of research on subaltern subjects which are always run away from Subaltern Studies. Two very recent books provide a good opportunity for controlled comparison of contemporary historical theory and method inside and outside the project as applied to the study of tribal peoples in western India. They wander in particular on questions of self-sufficiency, perception, and colonialism. This indicate rightly towards the historians from the outside of the project and also its tend to locate subalterns more carefully in changing environments that include economic, political, ecological, technological, and social history; and in this perspective,

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colonialism used as a diverse, changing collections of historical forces rather than as a inclusive structures.

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