

RECONSTRUCTION ON THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUBALTERN STUDIES: A NEW APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

In the present research scenario, subaltern theme has become prominent that it is regularly used in various fields of disciplines such as Sociology, History, Psychology, Anthropology and Literature. The word 'subaltern' is a German word which means 'inferior rank' or 'secondary importance'. Subaltern studies prioritize only the oppression taking place in the south Asian countries which, in turn, holds it back from achieving its complete aim. This paper "Reconstruction on the perspective of subaltern studies: A New Approach" will focus on the reconstruction of the fixed perspective of the subaltern studies. The main aim of the paper is to make it a broader term focusing on the problems confronted by the oppressed people worldwide, not only the people of South Asian Countries. This paper highlights the problems faced by the oppressed people of Canada, New Zealand and especially Australia because of class discrimination and domination of mainstream people over the indigenous and the reason why they should be included in the subaltern studies.

keywords:Oppression, Domination, Indigenous, Discrimination, Mainstream.

A field whose methodology varies with time and culture is subaltern studies. The researcher expounds the concept of subalternity by scrutinizing how history, caste, culture, and women, in particular, are considered subaltern from colonial, hegemonic and cultural points of view. Subaltern studies started

in the early 1980s as an intrusion in South-Asian historiography. It can be stated that it gained its popularity into a vigorous postcolonial critique.

Ashok Sen says in his essay, 'Subaltern studies: Capital, Class, and Community,' "The term subaltern is used to denote the entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way." Thus, subaltern is a term applied to the suppressed people who suffer because of the dominants and they do not resist against this oppression all the time. These subalterns are subjugated and received heartless treatment at the hands of the upper castes. Gautam Bhadra says in his essay, "The Mentality of Subalternity: Kantanama or Rajdharmā" that defiance and submissiveness have become the mentality of subaltern people. So, they obey the orders of the dominant people in many situations and they have also revolted in the past and they do raise voices in the present too, through various media. The term 'subaltern' was first used by an Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci in his 'Prison Notebooks' to represent peasants in southern Italy. "Subaltern", meaning "of inferior rank". Later it was adopted by many writers to represent the inferior rank in our society. Gramsci was interested in the historiography of the subaltern 'classes'.

In Notes on Italian History (1934), he outlined a six-point plan for studying the history of the subaltern classes, which include: 1) their objective formation; 2) their active and passive affiliation to the dominant political formation; 3) the birth of new parties and dominant groups; 4) the formations that the subaltern groups produce to press their claims; 5) new formation within the old framework that asserts the autonomy of the subaltern classes, and other points preferring to trade unions and political parties.

The dominants did not allow the works of Gramsci to be published so he had to use the word 'subaltern' as a substitute for 'proletariat,' so that his books can escape the prison of fascists. In the essay, 'The Poetics of Subalternity,' Michelle Cahill states subalternity in Marxian chassis, "Subalternity is about the division of Labour and which side of that divide you happen to stand." The word was later adopted by Asian Subalternists to refer to the suppressed class. Initially, the idea of subalternity was attributed to the class struggle, and the Subalternists used it only for the analysis of the class struggles. Later, Ranajit Guha was dissatisfied with the idea of using the term in the Marxian framework. He brought a change in the usage and exhausted the word 'subaltern' by using it to refer to the condition of the oppressed people in the name of gender, caste, age, and in many other ways.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is remembered in post-colonial criticism for her rhetorical and political contributions in the field of post-colonial literary texts which shakes the foundations of colonial narratives. The notion of the subaltern became an issue in post-colonial theory when Gayatri Spivak critiqued the assumptions of the Subaltern Studies group in the essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' This question, she claims is one that the group must ask. Her first criticism is directed at the Gramscian claim for the *autonomy* of the subaltern group, which, she says, no amount of qualification by Guha — who concedes the diversity, heterogeneity and overlapping nature of subaltern groups — can save from its

fundamentally essentialist premise. Secondly, no methodology for determining who or what might constitute this group can avoid this essentialism. The 'people' or the 'subaltern' is a group defined by difference from the elite. This has been explained by Ashcroft et al. that Spivak's target is the concept of an unproblematically constituted subaltern identity, rather than the subaltern subject's ability to give voice to political concerns. Her writings clearly exhibit the experience of social and political oppression in postcolonial societies such as India cuts across difference in class, region, language, ethnicity, religion, generation, gender, and citizenship.

In the opinion of Gayatri Spivak, that the term 'subaltern' is flexible and it can have room for struggles in society and social identities such as women and the colonized that do not plummet under the reductive expressions of stern class analysis. She includes a new dimension to the term 'subaltern' for the colonized people, oppressed generations, working classes, blacks, and muted women. She was the one who insisted on giving importance to the struggles of women who had been suffering since time immemorial. B.K. Das opines that "Gayatri Spivak has expanded the meaning of subaltern who laid the stress on gendered subaltern-that women who are doubly oppressed by colonialism and particularly in the Third World countries". Yet their sufferings were ignored and went unnoticed even by the subaltern studies group. In her essay 'Deconstructing Historiography', Gayatri Sk says, "Indeed, in a collective where so much attention is rightly paid to the subjectivity or subject-positioning of the subaltern, it should be surprising to encounter such indifference to the subjectivity, not to mention the indispensable presence, of woman as a crucial instrument." It shows that Gayatri Spivak has given prominence to the plight of women. Even the struggles of indigenous people of south Asian countries were included in the subaltern studies to preserve their culture and identity. Therefore, there was a shift in the choice of the subject of the subaltern studies group. It moved from a Marxian framework to the cultural, gender and other forms and aspects of oppression.

This paper aims at making this term into a broader one than it is now. So, a major shift has to take place in addition to the changes that had taken place in the earlier phases of its development. The subaltern studies group must address the suppression taking place in countries other than the South Asian countries. The series of volumes on subaltern studies have addressed only the problems of the subaltern people of South Asian countries. The indigenous people of Asia do not have the same recognition as indigenous people in North America, Australia, or New Zealand. The term should be treated with a broader perspective, so as to address the oppression and ostracization taking place around the world. According to the UN DESA report 2010 on indigenous people around the world, the indigenous people are subjected more to poverty and unemployment. The report also says that the indigenous people face the major threat of losing their culture, language and identity and in the next hundred years, the ninety percent of languages spoken by indigenous people will be extinct. Thus, these indigenous people too face threats and stand powerless like the subaltern people of the South Asian countries. The suppression had been there for ages. It is ranging from the 'indigenous' of Australia, Canada and the Maoris of New Zealand to the Native Americans in America. Although they have different customs, traditions, and

cultures, they face the same harsh realities: eviction from their own ancestral lands, being denied the opportunity to express their culture, physical attacks, and treatment as second-class citizens.

Voting is a basic fundamental right of any citizen that enables them to choose the leaders of tomorrow. Although the Maori were given the right to vote from the early 1850s they couldn't vote based on laws on land ownership and the fact that a Maori couldn't vote in their own land. As the report says, In the first general election, only 100 Maori voted out of a total electorate of 5849. White New-Zealanders didn't accept that Maori were civilized enough to exercise such an important responsibility of choosing their leaders. Unlike many countries, New Zealand is blessed with abundant freshwater. Therefore, Maori claimed a special relationship with New Zealand's freshwater, based on their historical use of its rivers for drinking water, spiritual beliefs, fishing and shellfish harvest, transport and trade, among other things. But the present day scenario, on an average, the Maori have less access to clean water than the white new Zealander and many rural Maori suffer from resource exploitation. Until the 1980s the government gave no aid to the preservation of the Maori language and the language would have gone extinct if it had not been for the resilience of the Maori people

To speak of Australia and Canada, in particular, the law had authorized many crimes against the Aborigines, such as the Stolen Generation of Australia and Canada had pushed many people of the indigenous lineage into a world of forgetfulness about their own culture. Yet, there are also people who still follow the traditions and live in small communities in the same countries. In Australia, there are laws that had been created for the equal rights of the aborigines, but it's only in the documentation. The British deluded the Aborigines to believe they had their rights, freedom and were free to seek justice against any crimes committed against them. Yet, in reality, only the whites were able to give evidence and the Aborigines thus remained helpless. The aborigines are still being discriminated by the dominants. Aborigines in Australia have suffered since the very beginning of European settlement (AIATSIS 2014). In the 1950s, in an attempt to redress the problems indigenous Australians faced, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal activists came together to campaign for the rights for indigenous Australians and to abolish the laws that deprived Aboriginal Australians of civil rights (Australia Government 2013). The grief and loss experienced by Aboriginal people can never be compensated. The racial division, abuse, and violence committed against them had caused a loss in the identity, heritage, spirituality, and knowledge of Aboriginal culture (AIATSIS 2014). The aborigines are still not allowed to get into the swimming pools in many hotels as the whites refuse to swim along with the aborigines. This is just an instance of the continuous harassment prevailing in Australia. It is believed that Aboriginals suffered in other ways due to British invasion. The initial, most direct impact was the introduction of foreign diseases; for example, an outbreak of smallpox in Sydney in 1789 spread over the region causing the death of half of the Aboriginal population. The colonists also introduced the Aborigines to vices that they had never witnessed, vices such as alcohol and drugs. Until 1788 they lived a life of simplicity and non-violence but were later influenced by European behavior that caused revenge, murder and inter-community violence (Gray 1998). The British colonials in Australia were also destroying the spirituality of Aboriginal culture

and belief that had been present for thousands of years. Sacred sites and land that was fundamental for Aboriginal identity were no longer their own. It was a process of ‘cultural genocide upon their tradition, culture, and race’ (Gray 1998, 170). Resistance is the key factor in the subaltern studies group which is exhibited both by the subaltern group of the South Asian countries and also by the indigenous people of many countries. So, it is unfair to take only the suppressed people of south Asian people into account. Researches and Surveys indicate that Indigenous women are less likely to use health care facilities when during pregnancy because of discrimination and mistreatment which leads to malnutrition; and so, they are more likely to die giving birth. For example, in Panama and Russia, Indigenous women are about six times more likely to die in childbirth than women from the non-Indigenous population. In reality, the birth rate for Amerindian adolescent girls is twice that of the general Guyanese population. In Kenya, Maasai women are twice as likely to have had no antenatal care, and in Namibia, San women are ten times more likely to give birth without skilled attendance. Gayatri Spivak says, “This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility to possibility.” She appreciates the Subalternists who deconstruct the subaltern theory. Vinayak Chaturvedi in his essay ‘ A critical theory of Subalternists: Rethinking class in Indian Historiography’ says, “The longevity of the project can be explained in part, by its ability to expand its own theoretical and methodological approaches to the understanding of Subalternity, but clearly no longer within a Gramsci or Marxist framework.” Similarly, it provides an increase in the lifespan of the theory of Subalternity if we give it a new theoretical approach of taking the indigenous people around the world into account. As David Harriman says, let us consider the lack of any clear ‘subaltern theory’s as a strength rather than weakness and give recognition to the indigenous people by bringing them into the subaltern category instead of alienating them by categorizing them under different terms.

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