

# ***The Subaltern School of Historiography***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The Subaltern School of Historiography is an extension of Marxism. With its emergence began the written history of the people who were suppressed and ignored by the statist discourse. The Subaltern historians mainly criticized the Indian Nationalist and Orientalist Schools of history writing as these groups were representing the elitist history alone by ignoring the oppressed and the 'small voices' in India. They focused on the power-knowledge relationship and the marginalized sections of the society which had been ignored throughout the course of history writing. Most of the scholars of this school have their origin in Marxism. The school took its roots from two main names; Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. Gramsci was the founder of Communist Party of Italy. He was of the view that working class should be given importance as revolutionary intellectuals originate from within rather than from above or outside it. Foucault gave importance to power and highlighted that power works through institutions which demand subjugation and obedience. This school was emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the efforts of Ranajit Guha. On the one hand, there are various critiques on this school as well. It gained popularity as it emerged as 'historiography of the protest' but it failed to*

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*play its due share in the writing of effective history of all the suppressed groups of the society. On the other, subaltern studies highlighted a range of themes like the role of indigenous resistance, etc. which had never been discussed earlier. Its significance cannot be denied as it has focused primarily on those who were never given any social status.*

### **Introduction**

The Subaltern School of Historiography emerged in 1980's out of the study of Indian history. Their writings were introduced first in the form of book reviews.<sup>1</sup> It established its own distinctive methodology that deployed Antonio Gramsci's<sup>2</sup> notion of 'the Subaltern' (meaning all those are subordinated) to include other oppressed groups besides the working classes, notably the peasantry and indigenous peoples, within their political analysis. The domain of politics was divided into an elite and subaltern sphere, with the two interacting but maintaining their integrity.

The credit of introduction of 'Subaltern Studies' goes to Ranajit Guha, who along with young historians developed the idea of editing a work on subaltern classes of India. Before going into further details, we should look into the work of Jules Michelet (1798-1874).<sup>3</sup> His primary focus was on the 'people', the ordinary people. Michelet worked on the subordinated section of the society.

The scholars of this group critically analyzed the Indian Nationalist approach of history writing. They analyzed that these Nationalist historians represented only the elitist historiography for securing their political interests and have nothing to do with the subaltern groups of society. The

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1 David Ludden, ed. *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South India* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 1.

2 Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist political activist who mentioned the term 'Subaltern' in his famous *Prison Notebooks*.

3 Jules Michelet was a French Romantic historian who focused on the sentiments of the ordinary people like peasants, factory workers, etc. For further details see, E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography 500 BC to AD 2000* (Hyderabad: Oriental Longman, 2004), 152-55.

Subaltern Studies also criticized the knowledge produced by the Orientalists who through their English system of education dominated the East. Edward Said claimed in his '*Orientalism*' that it was 'a western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.'<sup>4</sup> As a protest against the elite or statist discourse, the Subaltern historiography emerged as a group constituting the mass of population. Michel Foucault has aptly said that our relations and role in society has been shaped by the rulers. History tells us about constant struggle between different powers which try to impose their 'will to truth'.<sup>5</sup>

## **Nature of Subaltern Historiography**

### **1. Critique of Elitist Historiography**

History of Subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented as it is a collection of monographs on diverse topics which are usually not connected with each other. They are always subjected to the activity of ruling groups. They have less access to the means of representation and to social and cultural institutions. The primary focus of this project was to redress the academic imbalance created by focusing on elitist culture in South Asian historiography. The goals of the group stemmed from the belief that the Indian Nationalist historiography had long been dominated by elitism.<sup>6</sup> They do believe that elite and subalterns are two parallel groups in Indian society. The difference between them is the difference between their levels of political mobilization.

The term 'Subaltern' had been adapted to post-colonial studies by the Subaltern Studies group of historians to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in

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4 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage Books, 1978), 3.

5 Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Fifty Key Thinkers of History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 96.

6 Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" in *Subaltern Studies I*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1.

South Asian Studies. This name was used for subordination in South Asia.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Focus on Power/Knowledge Relationship**

History has always been associated with power; it has never been written aimlessly and is always ideological.<sup>8</sup> Subaltern School was developed in a time when liberal democracies were developing worldwide. These democracies could not work with the histories written with groups of people left out, so they started working when the world was passing through the age of pluralism. The Subaltern study was more about their political needs than for their subalternity.

One of the most prominent features of Foucault's view is that the mechanisms of power produce different types of knowledge which collect information on people's activities and existence. The knowledge gathered in this way further strengthens exercises of power. Foucault counters the idea that he makes the claim 'knowledge is power' and says that he is interested in studying the complex relations between power and knowledge without saying they are the same thing.<sup>9</sup>

## **3. Focus on the Marginalized Sections of Society**

The Subaltern writers want to fill the emptiness provided by the colonial and nationalist historiography. They do believe that anybody who is a product of the hegemony could not be a part of Subaltern as it lacked consciousness of its own. They did not talk about the elite and did not emphasize on the comparison between the two but talked about their subalternity. Gayatri Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

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7 Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," 1-7.

8 Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow, *Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003), xiii.

9 See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-1977)*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

talks about that section of society which has been hegemonized by the elite.<sup>10</sup>

The distinguishing aspect of subaltern activity is its labor orientation.<sup>11</sup> The Subaltern Studies talk about the suppressed and hegemonized groups of society like peasants, workers, women, etc. They talk about those small voices which had been drowned in the noise of statist domination. They have highlighted the role played by English educational set up which was used as a source of dominance and subordination.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Extension of Marxism

On one hand, the Subalterns criticize the colonial and nationalist history writing, and on the other they are influenced by the Marxist School of historiography. We can call it the extension of the Marxist approach of historiography. Most of their scholars have their origin in Marxism for instance Antonio Gramsci<sup>13</sup>, E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>14</sup> They have also been heavily influenced by the post-structuralist like Michel Foucault. They have been working under the large umbrella of post-colonial studies, therefore, post-colonial studies also have its impact on it. In this sense, we can call it post-structuralist, post-modernist and post-colonial historiography.

#### 5. Criticism on Colonialism

The Subaltern Studies historiography challenged the discourse on colonialism. In order to sustain colonialism, the colonial authorities based it on the power of sword. The

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10 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Shahid Amin & Dipesh Chakrabarty (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271-313.

11 Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, 493.

12 Ranajit Guha, "The Small Voice of History" in *Subaltern Studies IX*, eds. Shahid Amin & Dipesh Chakrabarty (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2-3.

13 Subalterns have been influenced heavily by him in developing their general framework dealing with power, dominance and hegemony.

14 E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm have written about the importance and material force of the actors in history.

colonialism was based on dominance without hegemony. In order to justify their rule in India, the colonial powers appropriated the Indian past.<sup>15</sup> The colonial masters supported the landlords in order to exploit the subaltern classes.

The Subaltern Studies historiographers have been largely influenced by the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault.

### **Antonio Gramsci**

Antonio Gramsci was born in the small town of Ales in Sardinia in 1891. He was an Italian writer, linguist and political philosopher. He was hunch-backed and was barely five feet tall accompanied by severe nervous complications which ultimately led to cerebral haemorrhage on April 27, 1937.<sup>16</sup> He was very much influenced by the Marxist ideas and that was the reason that he became the founding member of the Communist Party of Italy. For this very reason, he was imprisoned during most of his life time. During this time, he wrote his most famous *Prison Notebooks* in three volumes.<sup>17</sup>

Gramsci became more important with every passing day and is prominent in most parts of the globe now. Indeed, the Subaltern Studies School suggests that Gramsci's influence is still expanding.<sup>18</sup> For Gramsci, education and culture always played a pivotal role. He stressed that the people of working class could also become intellectually independent. They could lead their own movement without depending on the decision-making intellectuals. Through this particular activity they themselves could become a ruling class. The knowledge produced by the intellectuals help create the

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15 For details see Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

16 David Forgacs, ed., *The Gramsci Reader, Selected Writings 1916-1935* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 24.

17 He wrote first volume in 1929, second in 1931-1934 and third and last volume with deteriorating health in 1934-1935. For details see, David Forgacs, ed., *The Gramsci Reader*, 17-25.

18 Forgacs, *The Gramsci Reader*, 13.

cultural hegemony of the capitalist class. For Gramsci, the revolutionary intellectuals should originate from within the working class rather than being imposed from outside or above it.

He took great interest in popular culture<sup>19</sup> and stressed that there was no form of relationship between the intellectuals and masses. The reason of this type of relationship between the masses and intellectuals was this detachment between them. It created a gap between elite and popular culture and resultantly we found no common language or popular traditions.

As a political activist, he spelled out the political techniques more emphatically and asserts that the dominant groups hegemonize the culture of subaltern classes. On the other hand, the subalterns remain in their condition of submissiveness and do not resist by establishing their own worldview. Gramsci viewed the civil society not as the sphere of freedom but of hegemony. In his view, the state was no longer an instrument of coercion and could not impose the interests of the dominant class. Now it was essential to take their consent. The dominant class, in order to legitimize their power, uses ideological materials to consolidate their hegemony in the civil society. He asserts that the common people are not aware of the social and political changes taking place in society, which he called 'passive revolution'.<sup>20</sup>

### **Michel Foucault**

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher, social theorist and literary critic born on June 15, 1926 in Poitiers, France. He viewed social features of madness, gender and sexuality as cultural construction and vary according to its need. His

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19 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Andeng. tr. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 166.

20 Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, Vol. 24 (Boston: Brill, 2009), 147.

prime focus was on how power produces knowledge and resultantly knowledge creates further power.

He had traced the relation of power and knowledge in his writings through 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Century. His most popular works are *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976). Through his works, Foucault argues that power works through institutions, it produces subjugation. No single individual is free from the clutches of power. Power demanded subjection and obedience. He analyzed the techniques of exercising power and argues that its aim was to reform the individuals in order to use them as labour for serving the bourgeois class.

Foucault is hugely influential in shaping understanding of power. He argues that power is everywhere and it comes from everywhere. Power is also a major source of social discipline. In shifting attention away from the sovereign exercise of power, the dominant class uses it to coerce their subjects. He had pointed to a kind of disciplinary power that could be observed in the administrative systems and social services in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, like prisons, schools and mental hospitals. Their systems of surveillance and assessment no longer required force or violence because people learned to discipline themselves in behaving in specific, expected ways.

Foucault studied psychology, medicine and criminology in order to learn the norms of behaviour. He argues that physical bodies are subjugated and made to behave in a certain way. A key point to his approach to power is that it transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon.

While discussing sexuality as a discourse Foucault's interest was not in sexuality itself but in a certain kind of knowledge, a certain perspective and the kind of power we find in that knowledge. Discourse is important to Foucault because he thinks that language and knowledge are closely linked to power. Speech and writing are not simply the communication of facts that occurs in a vacuum. Foucault



develops a complex body of thought of the saying that 'knowledge is power'.

According to Foucault language and knowledge always have a political edge. Discourse, power and knowledge are all linked in his hypothesis. On one hand those who are in power i.e., the bourgeois control discourse. They decide how sex can be spoken about and by whom, so they also control the kind of knowledge the people have regarding sex. On the other hand, this control over discourse is closely linked to their maintenance of power. The bourgeois would want to control and confine sex because it is a dangerous opponent to their work ethics. Their desire to control discourse and knowledge about sex is essentially a desire to control power. Foucault's theory of power has far reaching impact on the Subaltern Studies School of Historiography as his theory has challenged the very domain of knowledge.

### **Prominent Historians of Subaltern School**

Subaltern Studies School has managed to inspire a number of historians who have contributed to this special branch of history.

#### **Ranajit Guha**

Ranajit Guha is a South Asian historian who owes significant place in the Subaltern Studies Group. He was born on May 23, 1922 in Bengal. He edited first six volumes of Subaltern Studies. He had described the term 'Subaltern' in the first volume of *Subaltern Studies* as "the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as 'elite'."<sup>21</sup> His most famous books are; *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963), *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), and *Dominance without Hegemony* (1997).

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21 Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. 1, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 8.

The goals of Subaltern Studies Group stemmed from the belief that the Indian Nationalist Historiography had long been dominated by the elite as a result of British colonialism and colonial discourse. This group of historians suggests that the nationalist consciousness was an elite achievement i.e., colonial administrators or Indian bourgeois. He asserts that there existed two parallel lines in Indian politics; elite and subaltern. Guha is of the opinion that such writings cannot interpret the contribution of the common people. He asserts that such historiography is simply one-sided and discussed the matters related to their own benefit alone. They vary due to their varying aspects of mobilization. Elite politics moves vertically and are more conscious and controlled as compared to the subalterns who work horizontally and are more spontaneous and violent.

*Dominance without Hegemony* is a compilation of three interrelated essays written by Ranajit Guha. The book is based on the philosophical reflections of Antonio Gramsci's ideas of *hegemony* and *domination*. The main theme of the book is that the Indian historiography is based on colonial and nationalist features which are ahistorical, fake and existing in elitism. It represents the power struggle between two elite groups; the bourgeois colonial rulers and the Indian nationalist bourgeois. Guha contends that these elite groups are not aware of the class consciousness of Indian masses. He requested the postcolonial Indian scholars to liberate Indian historiography from the clutches of this dominant group of historiography in order to replace it with anti-colonial and antibourgeois movements.

*In Elementary Aspects of Peasants Insurgency in Colonial India*, Guha talks about as how the peasants insurgency should be represented. He asserts that our understanding of it remains trapped colonial and nationalist historiography. This is an extraordinary wide-ranging work. He takes recourse to the history of several insurrections which took place in India between 1783 and 1900. This book is a striking summation of 'behind the scenes' events that triggered a plethora of peasants rebellions in India.

Guha also talked about women subalternity as he critically analyzed the Hindu patriarchal society through his essay '*Chandra's Death*'. He showed the merciful condition of Indian women through the case of Chandra Chashani. She had an illegal sexual relation with a man of high caste landed elite. Later, she was forced to abort the fetus by that man and she had done the same on the cost of her life. Guha used the Foucault's assertion that the sexual issues had been strongly influenced by the very notion of power. If the lower classes would be unable to suppress their sexual desires, they would be punishing severely.<sup>22</sup>

### **David Arnold**

David Arnold was born in London in 1946. He was one of the founding members of *Subaltern Studies*. He had contributed seven articles in total to the publication. He is also a co-editor of eighth volume with David Hardiman. He had discussed and highlighted the long series of disturbances and rebellions in Andhara (1839-1929) and Madras Famine (1876-78). He had highlighted the peasant consciousness and their actions. He complains that plethora of material is available on Indian famine but it does not treat it in the terms of human experience but had been discussed under the description of state policies and relief administration.

Arnold has analyzed how the power apparatus operated in colonial India through the lens of Foucault's writings. He had focused on the deprived section of the society and that how the British had exploited the common people through the institutions which had been established for the consolidation of power. The Subaltern classes were believed to be an inferior class and low born creature. The British supported caste system so as to continue their rule over India by employing the policy of divide and rule.<sup>23</sup>

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22 See Ranajit Guha, "Chandra's Death," in Ranajit Guha, ed. *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. 6 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

23 Tayyib Mahmud, "Colonialism and Modern Construction of Race: A Preliminary Inquiry" *University of Miami Law Review* 53 (1998-1999): 1227.

Arnold highlighted the condition of Subalterns in colonial prisons. The colonial masters used prisons as a site for the application of power using various techniques. The Subaltern classes were treated with discrimination even in prisons and caste division was maintained there. The upper castes were treated in a better way. The aim of the punishment was to reach beyond the body and 'to strike the soul'.<sup>24</sup>

The Subaltern voices were raised in 1877 Jail Conference against the corrupt officers and were held responsible for the violence, extortion and sexual harassment in prison. But this misuse of power was not registered in the prison official investigation records.<sup>25</sup> These prisons were linked from its beginning and were meant to be an instrument like barracks, hospitals or schools to transform the individuals.<sup>26</sup> The power was enforced to discipline them in order to make the body of the prisoners habitual to works.<sup>27</sup> The aim of the power imposition was to make the prisoners productive laborers and they must be taught work ethics.<sup>28</sup>

The European prisoners were given special privileges and were treated in more humane way as they were believed to belong to the superior race that were unable to bear the hardships like the subalterns. So, the Europeans enjoyed privileged status in prison even.<sup>29</sup>

### **David Hardiman**

David Hardiman was born in Rawalpindi in Pakistan in October, 1947. He is a professor at the Department of

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24 David Arnold, "The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth-Century India" in *Subaltern Studies, Vol. 8*, eds. David Arnold and David Hardiman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 149.

25 Arnold, "The Colonial Prison," 154.

26 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings (1972-1977)* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 39-40.

27 Arnold, "The Colonial Prison," 162.

28 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

29 Arnold, "The Colonial Prison," 170.

History in the University of Warwick, England. He co-edited Vol. 8 in the series of *Subaltern Studies* and continues to be a member of the editorial group of *Subaltern Studies* collectively. As a historian he specializes in the history of modern India. His main focus is on the colonial period in South Asian history and during this period he has spent over a decade in all actually working in India. He concentrated mainly on the effects of colonial rule on rural society, relationships of power at various levels, and the Indian Independence Movement.

Hardiman has studied a movement of assertion by *adivasis* (tribal people) against liquor dealers who had been granted a monopoly right of supply by the British and enriched themselves at the expense of the *adivasis*. In *Adivasis Assertion in South Gujarat: The Devi Movement of 1922-23* (1984), he had discussed the role of a goddess who was believed to have commanded the people to give up liquor and boycott the dealers. Hardiman had employed the anthropological methods for collecting material. He has also written a book on Gandhi and his legacy in India and in the world.

### **Dipesh Chakrabarty**

A Bengali historian was born on December 15, 1948 in Kolkata. He made valuable contributions to the post-colonial and *Subaltern Studies* literature. Currently he is a professor of History, South Asian languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. He made great contribution by highlighting the major differences between the *Subaltern Studies* and the history-from-below in his article *A Small History of Subaltern Studies*. He studied the condition of Calcutta Jute Mill workers between 1890 and 1940 and in another essay between 1920 and 1950. He worked on the deprived condition of labor in industries during colonial India. The managers of the factory exercised power over the working classes.

In 'On Deifying and Defying Authority: Managers and Workers in the Jute Mills of Bengal (circa 1890-1940)' he

made us understand the apathetic condition of working class who were at the mercy of the bourgeois who used to exploit them through their corrupt power. They used to harass and punish them if workers waged strikes for their rights. He analyzed the deprived condition of the working class who were being subjected to authoritarian power mechanism. The working classes were made slaves to the violent power of the masters. They viewed the working class as cheap raw labor to be utilized for production purposes. The power was exercised over the working classes through the managers, *babus* and *sardars*.<sup>30</sup>

### **Partha Chatterjee**

Partha Chatterjee is a Bengali multidisciplinary scholar born in 1947. He is currently a professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at Columbia University in New York. He is among the founding members of *Subaltern Studies* Collective. His most influential books are *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1986) and *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse* (1993).

Chatterjee had discussed the nature of Indian historiography which has been developed by the Indian nationalist intellectuals during colonial period. These nationalists were supported by the colonial masters in order to produce statist discourse in which the king was the central figure. He critically analyzes the discourse on Indian past produced by English educated Bengalis. They are the pioneers of the nationalist and statist discourse and their approach has been adopted by later nationalist intellectuals for political purpose. They had borrowed the concepts of statehood, sovereignty, country from European historiography in order to appropriate the past.<sup>31</sup>

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30 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "On Deifying and Defying Authority: Managers and Workers in the Jute Mills of Bengal (circa 1890-1940)," *Journal of Past and Present*, 100 (Aug, 1983), 124-46.

31 Partha Chatterjee, "Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal," in *Subaltern Studies*, Vol.8, eds. David Arnold and David Hardiman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25-26.

The European Indologists with a specific aim of power, stereotyped Muslim period as bigoted and fanatic. They labelled the Muslim period of India as the 'night of medieval darkness'<sup>32</sup>, whereas the colonial period was considered as the period of revival which could achieve modernity and enlightenment.

### **Assessment/Critique of Subaltern Studies**

The Subaltern Studies School of Historiography has categorized the subaltern class as a separate domain. It is a sub-history or local narratives. They supplemented the mainstream historical accounts. The Subaltern historians rewrite history mainly for two objectives.

- a. The deconstruction of elitist historiography by interpreting their biases and judgments in the narratives of ruling elite (including foreign and local).<sup>33</sup>
- b. The restoration of 'subaltern agency' and highlighting their role in history as 'subjects' with their independent ideology and political agenda.
  1. Colonialist historiography is loaded with biases about the colonized and the nationalist historiography blurs the contributions made by the people through using umbrella terms like 'masses' which deprive them of their political consciousness. The Subaltern Studies historiography restored these individuals who were considered too low for elite. So, the Subaltern Studies historiography is believed to be the historiography of the protest.
  2. It has reopened the long-believed historical events and brings historical inquiry to the foundations of Indian society. It has disagreed especially with an established political system, organization or belief. In contrary, it had failed to recognize the diversity of Indian society and has ignored the differences in power and status that were present prior to colonization. Sumit Sarkar has criticized it by saying that Subalternists romanticize

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32 Chatterjee, "Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal", 34.

33 Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," 1.

the past as they held the view that pre-colonial communities knew nothing of power relations and communal conflict.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the scope of Subaltern Studies School of historiography is also narrow in character.

3. Subaltern Studies emphasized the subordinated class consciousness. The 'Subaltern consciousness' is a significant but controversial concept. It means the consciousness about oneself and realizing that they had been dominated by the other. The subaltern consciousness will replace the dominant culture by a living culture of the majority in the history of the Indian society. According to Gayatri Spivak, the subalterns can never speak for themselves and had always been dependent on elite to talk about their rights,<sup>35</sup> because the subalterns are not conscious of their status in society.
4. Subaltern Studies has its roots in Marxism. It encompasses cultural, social, political aspects into Marxism. Ironically, though Gramsci himself was a Communist activist, the scholars outside or opposed to communist parties have most ardently embraced his *Prison Notebooks*.
5. The contextual factors of Subaltern Studies have been changed in post-1988 period i.e. after Ranajit Guha's retirement from the editorial team of Subaltern Studies. Subaltern Studies School has been actively engaged in post-colonial discourse and stepped out of Indian nationalism and moved into the cultural history of colonialism. There has been a shift in intellectual focus. It now paid total attention to British colonial discourse and failed to study discourse of Hindus, Muslims and other colonized subjects though it emerged out of Indian history. It is now an interdisciplinary project, the goals of which have been changed along with its

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34 Hannah Altern, "Subaltern Studies: 'From Writing with (Socialist) Passion to Following the (Postmodern) Fashion,'" *History in the Making* 1, 2 (2012), 58-64.

35 See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 271-313.



contributors as not a single historian has contributed in *Subaltern Studies XI* (2000).

### **Conclusion**

Subaltern School of Historiography gave a new perspective and a new life to old stories. Nationalism and colonialism emerged as two major research areas in the field of modern Indian history in 1960's and 1970's. It has endeavoured to record the lost history of the past and to give the voice to those 'small voices' who have been deprived of their rights and who have been drowned since long. It has tried to recover the lost picture of the common masses, who had been subjected by the elite. The Subaltern Studies' historians have been greatly influenced by the theoretical discourses of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. Their discourses helped the subaltern studies' historians to focus on the suppressed condition of the common masses through the lens of power/knowledge theory presented by Foucault. Ranajit Guha had critically analyzed the Indian colonialism. He applied the power/knowledge relationship theory and made a strong argument that British colonial powers were treating the colonized (Indian masses) as an inferior race. In order to legitimize their rule, the British colonizers had appropriated the Indian past for the sake of their political-cum-economic interests. In order to serve these interests, they introduced various theories like Whiteman's burden, civilizing mission and through the autocratic and oppressive rule over the Indian masses.

The British, in order to rule over the subalterns, empowered the indigenous elite groups including the feudal lords and other powerful groups of India. The indigenous elite on the other hand prospered under the British and never wanted the termination of the British rule in India. They joined hands with the colonizers to enhance their influence over the masses.

David Arnold discussed the institutions of colonial period through the lens of power/knowledge theory of Michel Foucault. The British colonizers had established various institutions in India to enforce power on the common

masses. He explored the role of institutions of prison and police in colonial India. For the maintenance of law and order situation they had established the institution of police, which secured the interests of the British Raj. Arnold has elaborated the miserable and wretched condition of the subalterns in colonial prisons. On the other hand, the indigenous elite groups were enjoying all the privileges of the society. The British in order to generate labour for their industries used power to discipline the Subaltern classes.

Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak analyzed the deprived condition of women in Hindu society which is primarily patriarchal in its nature. She had specifically focused on the practice of *satti* and showed that it was exploited by the colonizers and the indigenous elite for their political objectives. Spivak has mentioned that women have been kept in silence throughout the history; they belonged to the marginalized sections of society. Ranajit Guha had also highlighted the women subalternity and the oppressed condition by using the role of Chandra. He used the Foucault's theory which shows that how sexuality has been controlled by the power generating groups of the society.

Dipesh Chakrabarty elaborated the deprived condition of the working classes of jute mills. The labour had been subjected to the oppressive powers of *babus*, *sardars* and managers of the mills. Whenever the oppressed groups tried to protest for their rights, their voice was crushed through power.

The Subaltern School of Historiography has highlighted a range of themes. They portrayed the marginalized sections of society and provided a different approach and criticized the statist discourses. They highlighted the role of indigenous resistance and promoted the role of those who have talked about the marginalized sections of society. The importance of subaltern school cannot be denied as it has given primary focus to those who had rarely been given due significance in society. The declared aim of the subaltern studies was to produce historical analyses in which the subaltern groups were given primary importance.