



Mapping the Polemics of History: from Marxism to Subaltern Studies

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Abstract: *The paper provides an exhaustive overview of the development of subaltern historiography. It substantiates how there has been a progress in the field of historiography as it has evolved from being a secluded and a separatist representation of the elite into an encompassing mirror of the subaltern as a whole. The paper has addressed the disengagement of subaltern history from the official accounts, which renders the subaltern vulnerable to misrepresentation, and consequent subjugation. From Marxist to Subaltern discourse, history has transited from being a homogenous account of the elite to a multitudinous account of the subalterns. It has also been analyzed how from Marxism to Subaltern studies, History is generally taken at its face value, especially if formulated by the elite authority. Under these circumstances, the subalterns who are misrepresented by the elite remain a scapegoat. It is in consideration of these putative reasons the need to rectify and reclaim subaltern history is paramount.*

Keywords: Subaltern; History; Marxism; Orality; Postcolonialism; Caste

1. INTRODUCTION

History is a powerful medium that serves to articulate one's existence. Historiography, on the other hand, as an independent branch of history does not simply study the past but analyses the various interpretations of an event by individual historians. Historiography which came into being as a part of the epistemological revival of 19th century European Enlightenment encompasses concerns as veracity of sources, credibility of the author and the legitimacy of the text; historiographical tradition; and historical meta narratives which evolved from being a secluded and a separatist representation of elite into an encompassing mirror of the masses as a whole. Historiography, as has been debated by critics ascertains whether its interpretation should be served by a singular artifact or an accumulation of it. Edward Said has vigorously arrested homogenizing of history which has been discrediting the multitudinous histories of the non-western world which are intentionally hence undocumented. Speaking against the universalization of history via master narratives, the critic has assailed the issue by stating:

(. . .) historicism meant that one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West...What...has never taken place is an epistemological critique ... (of) homogenization of histories (. . .). (Young, 2005, p. 2)

This lucid argument over the interpretation of history challenges the Western or the elitist model of historiography and allows the recognition of narratives beyond the confines of the Western canon. Robert J.C. Young informs this debate by referring to history as 'West's greatest myth' (Young, 2005, p. 2). The contention is that European or elitist histories assume a mythical stature hence ennobling themselves as master discourses which apparently cannot be subjected to subversion. This eurocentric dogma perpetuates the interpretation of historiography as the one ordained by the imperial empire which further disengages the subaltern records of tribals, low castes or indigenous communities from the official accounts, implying that the former are not legitimate or authentic or worth classification to begin with.

Theories right from Marxism to Subaltern Studies have attempted to assign history a paradigm. In the academia, there have been questions raised to put forth the attributes of a legitimate history. Various theories including Subaltern Studies have been grappling with inquiries as - Who should history document? Under whose supervision? What is misrepresentation, and what is true representation? What is dominant history, what is subaltern history? The evaluation of these enquiries is primal to recognize the intricate developments of history writing. How an authoritarian model has been attempted to reach and what were the motives, strategies and repercussions of it? These are questions pertinent to the development of historiography from Marxist to Subaltern model. The impetus of subaltern history can be traced back to the roots of Marxist theory, and in this chronological analysis, the development of subaltern historiography can be explored. While Subaltern studies originated from anglophone traditions, the ultimate goal was to look at the repercussions of colonialism. Bill Schwarz (2020), talking about founders of subaltern school of history, writes:

The Subaltern Studies historians, like those active in History Workshop, had been formed by the anglophone traditions of marxist historiography which had prevailed in the postwar years. (p. 92)

(Focus on colonial realities) required a systematic conceptual renovation of the field in its entirety, explicitly driven by the question of what history can (and can't) do, and whom it can address. (p. 92)

The move to adopt western methodologies for studying non-western histories has also been criticized by some scholars. These points will be discussed towards the end of this article.

2. THE UNIVERSALISATION OF HISTORY AS A MASTER DISCOURSE

In the study of Marxism, history has been considered as a superstructure determined by an economic base. The usual analysis of proletariat and bourgeoisie is manufactured while discoursing on the dynamics of history. The major drawback to this evaluation has been that it restricted itself to Western discourses of oppression. In other words, it relegated and often discounted the histories of the Third world countries while perpetuating the Western struggles as master discourses. It was an epistemological blunder of this theory which encouraged critics to apprehend this orthodox exclusivity of Marxist theory that had catastrophically failed to include the subaltern histories of non-Western world. The extent of this bankrupted interpretation can be ascertained in Hegel's assertion that Third world countries contain no history. Even Marx has been known to reject the history of Third World by advocating the primacy of Western historiography when he opined:

Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call history is but the history of its successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society. (Muthu, 2012, p. 317)

In examining these assertions, it is evident that histories of the non-western world have been disparaged, and even eclipsed entirely in favour of the Western master discourses. Said's lucid argument, as discussed earlier, over this interpretation of history has challenged the elitist model of historiography to allow the recognition of narratives beyond the confines of Western canon. It is only by putting the elitist renditions of history or the master narratives of the West under the scanner that any space can be created for the subaltern to speak. In attacking the use of master narratives, G.N. Devy in his seminal work *Of Many Heroes* (1998) has pointedly apprehended the application of master-narratives to analyze Indian literature. He intends to revitalize history writing which is devoid of a universalized western style that does not take into account the indigenous methods of history making. According to him, Indian literature is a complex phenomenon which can be addressed only by the tradition of ancient, medieval and modern India. According to him, "...the Western sense of history came to be considered in India as the universally valid sense of history" (Devy, 1998, p. 2). It has been a misconception that Indian historians have not furnished any historical artifact as they apparently lacked historical consciousness. In comparison to Greek or modern historical framework, the historic consciousness of India is invariably different and hence such a mistaken belief came into play. In order to debunk these false claims on Indian history, it is significant to trace the genesis of history-writing with respect to the aim of the paper.

The present paper will trace how universalization of history has been contested in India and will highlight the attempts made to formulate a paradigm of writing an authentic history.

3. HISTORY-WRITING IN INDIA

When the model of history-writing in India is investigated, it has been understood that it followed a dichotomous development. The traditional genres of history-writing in India have had two prime models:

One (model of history-writing) was derived from the cosmic histories of the Puranic or mythological tradition in Sanskrit, in which mythical stories about gods and goddesses merged unproblematically with dynastic histories of earthly kings and queens. The other was the court history tradition written mainly in Persian for the Muslim rulers of India, which chronicled the deeds of kings and dynasties (...). (Lindberg et al., 2003, p. 485)

Nevertheless, these models of history were in time superseded during late nineteenth century through an “interlocution” with British histories of India, and such a step was initiated by the industrious efforts of Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who stated, “We must have our own History!” (Lindberg et al., 2003, p. 485). In further debating on the model of Indian history, we come across the contentious binarism of history as in history defined as a ‘genre of knowledge’ and history expounded as a “national practice”. The well-known historians namely Akshay Kumar Maitra and Bankim Chandra proposed contrasting models on which history-writing had to be based on. Firstly, according to Maitra:

(. . .) the need of a “correct and worthy history” had to be highlighted as “there was as yet no consensus in India on what history was and therefore no correct methodology of doing history...that education should henceforth be oriented towards training in ‘discovering, collecting, preserving and assessing levels of evidence...truth was a greater ideal than patriotism and the ethics of practice.

(Banerjee, 2005, p. 291)

In this model of history as stated by Maitra, emphasis is laid on rigorous scrutiny of facts in order to create a legitimate record of Indian past. And in order to accomplish it, intense training and a methodology has to be framed to ensure history-writing is disciplined as a practice. In contrasting to this view, Bankim Chandra was of the opinion, that history should be “for and by all” suggesting that everyone can pitch in to write history without any regard to whether history being created is following a correct methodology or not. These two opinions of history-writing in India suggest the nuanced development of India historiography. Tracing the development of history-writing in India, further it is discovered that history in India had been a telling of the past, but there had also been a proposal which believed history should also encompass “imagination (kalpana)”. One of the advocates of this vision was Rabindranath Thakur who stated:

To be born in a particular nation was an accident...The territorial nation, therefore, itself could never become the true subject of history. The true subject of history was the nation that one imagined...the nation could never acquire an identity through knowledge of it, however scientific, such knowledge might be (. . .). (Banerjee, 2005, p. 292)

The claim here is that history should not only dictate how a nation was, but how a nation ought to be. An epistemological survey of Indian history cannot serve to declare the true identity of India. It is only by means of incorporating the past and the imagined future, that the real history of India and, thereby, its identity can be established. In only recording the past, and leaving no space for correcting this past and imagining a future, history fails to abide by its role of being a “witness of the past, the director of the future” (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 17). In doing so, it is also pertinent and highly important that history should be irrefutably encompassing with reference to the aboriginals and other marginalised communities. In the light of various critical opinions of history-writing vis-a-vis subaltern history, critics like Benoy Sarkar have further added:

Primitives were ignored by history, at its own peril because by doing so historicism failed to harness the creative intelligence of man...only by incorporating the primitive and the creative temporality that s/he represented, could the nation achieve ‘totality’ – for history is incomplete and quite unable to guess the future of mankind...so long as it (did) not concern itself with the whole of human life and its thousand and one manifestations...(He further espoused) national unity was possible only through the study of “folk culture”. (Banerjee, 2005, p. 293)

As stated by Sarkar, primitives imply the aboriginals, the non-Aryans, and other marginalised communities whose history is preserved in the folk culture as in myths, legends, songs and other media of Orality. When these sources are included within the history of the nation, it is then only the authentic version of history can be created and legitimatised. In doing so, history needs to have an investigation and incorporation of folk culture, memory, oral and written accounts to serve as an encompassing whole. Such a construction of history and such a model of history writing allows for a scrutiny between “popularly fabricated past and professionally constructed histories” (Mayaram, 2005, p. 3). In this paradigm, the indigenous models of history writing as in Orality is hence given credit which otherwise were obscured by the British and native elitist historians. According to prominent subaltern critics, “Regionalist histories were replaced by official elite history; the erasure of non-western models of history-writing facilitated the erasure of (marginalised communities) (Mayaram, 2005, p. 234). In this discussion, it is hence evident that development of history has by definitive strides moved beyond the Western canon. The paper now progresses towards finding how histories contested this homogenization beginning from Marx to Subaltern Studies. In doing so, the paper aims to throw light on the Marxist paradigm of history-writing notably the views of Louis Althusser, Sartre and others to trace how the encompassing model of today’s historiography came into being. Louis Althusser attempted to check the incumbency of an imperialistically designed interpretation of history as ordained in the Marxist model. However his approach according to J.C. Young has been ambivalent as he on the surface recognized the subaltern histories but would still consider the Western Marxist model of imperialist history as legitimate. Taking Althusser as a representative of Marxist model, it can be argued that despite knowing the relevance of non-western histories, critics still legitimized the western model of history. Moreover, Althusser was in contention to Sartre’s sympathy for Third World revolutions and also derided Frantz Fanon who attempted to rewrite the history of the wretched of the world. Consequently, he came across as an advocate of white Marxism and accordingly ignored the non-Western historiography of the indigenous communities of the East. The question which this paper proposes to ask is – how did historiography break away from this rigid structure?

4. USHERING IN THE HISTORY OF THE SUBALTERN

The major impetus to an encompassing history came from the essays of Mao Tse Tun who gave precedent to culture as the determinant of a superstructure than economy. In his activist writings, Mao addressed the cause of the peasants, the agrarian revolutions and anti-imperialistic revolutions of the Third World. This clearly heralded the study of cultures of indigenous populations, subordinated minorities, immigrants etc. and made prominent the issues of racism and other forms of discrimination. It invariably led to an awakening in the history writing of these subaltern cultures, and ushered in the era of Postcolonialism. The latter as a theory emphasized on the cultural composition of a base which stratified the society as high and low. Further it can be said that though Maoist ideology due to its misrepresentation and consequent fragmentation is seen as a symbol of atrocity, dictatorship and violence, however its revolutionary role in addressing the cause of the common people, the subaltern cannot be negated. It invariably spearheaded the disciplines of Postcolonialism and its localized terrain- Subaltern Studies. Sartre further commended the contribution of Maoist ideology, in reforming the paradigm of history-writing as the new model aims to document the history of common people where he asserted:

Maoists understand this and I agree with them...truth comes from the people. It is no longer a question of giving ideas to the masses, but of following their movement, going to search them out at their source and expressing them more clearly, if they consent to it...I wouldn’t dream of writing a book which would determine everything from beginning to end. (Young, 2005, p. 17)

Sartre, thus, highlighted how there has been a rejection of the deterministic, and universalized mode of historiography as this mode of historiography entailed a premeditated record of history which conveniently abandoned the people’s movement and disregarded their consciousness and culture. It was this conviction of Sartre that did not sit well with Althusser who only on the surface rejected the homogenization of history. As discussed above, though Althusser rejected the Hegelian conception of Western history, but in theory he was against an inclusion of non-Western histories. Hence, ambivalent in his approach, he indicted Sartre for his articulation of subaltern histories as it conflicted with the homogenized model of history as ordained by Marxism. In this clash of elitist models of this

and that mode of history, the subaltern was not being abandoned but ignored. What did the subaltern want, was not a concern in this rigmarole of Western and non-Western politics. The consequence as Young points out was, "It was never a case that the subaltern could not speak: rather that the dominant would not listen" (Young, 2005, p. 5). Then it was pertinent to create a space in which the subaltern could be heard, and that space founded itself in Postcolonialism which in India enhanced itself as Subaltern Studies. Young has emphasized on this subaltern space that had been egregiously neglected by the Marxists and which came to be recognized with the beginning of Postcolonialism. He eloquently traces these breakthroughs which confirmed the need for a history of the oppressed:

The shift of the Third-world radical left, following Mao, towards peasant struggle, towards a politics of the subaltern, that is, all constituencies of the oppressed, exploited and disadvantaged on this earth, not simply one specific economic class of the industrialized countries, represents the major innovation of Marxist tricontinental thinking in the second half of the twentieth century, one which continues to inspire peasant movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America today, as well as providing the basics for much postcolonial politics. (Young, 2005, p. 15)

In the light of these insightful breakthroughs, the subaltern critics made a bold and formidable endeavor to seize the agency by which the marginalized community could rectify their identity, existence and history. Tracing, further, the genesis of subaltern historiography, the paper highlights, how its first inception was marked by the deliberations of a group of historians of South Asia whose work appeared in 1982 in a series titled Subaltern Studies. Partha Chatterjee highlights the major progenitors of these series: "Amin and Chakrabarty 1996, Arnold and Hardiman 1994, Bhadra et al. 1999, Chatterjee and Jeganathan 2000, Chatterjee and Pandey 1992, Guha 1982-9" (

Chatterjee, 2013, p. 94). The critic further notes the original implication of the term 'subaltern' as employed by Gramsci who in his rendition of the term subaltern aimed to address the 'history of the subaltern classes'. Subaltern critics in the course of their investigation rather reinvented the implication of the term - subaltern who earlier was used to identify the vassals and peasants and by 1700 denoted the low military ranks. In its contemporary notion, found in the discourses of Antonio Gramsci, the subaltern groups were defined as those masses who are relegated to the margins of the hegemonic structure. It can be further noted how Gramsci confronted this historical subjugation of the subalterns by the ruling class and paved the way for the genesis of subaltern historiography or history of subaltern groups:

The history of subaltern groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (unify the) historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern Groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up' only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. (Bahri, 2003, p. 172)

Here, Gramsci has emphasized on the significance of history which in case of subalterns has been disjointed and lacking an organic unity. The root cause of this social calamity is the interference of the elite class that has dictated the terms of subaltern history. How is one to apprehend this subversion of history? According to Gramsci it is only by means of a permanent resolution of this issue that the historical subordination of marginalized communities can be dealt with. The hijack of history hence is invariably linked to the subordination of subalterns.

5. THE GENESIS AND RELEVANCE OF SUBALTERN STUDIES

Gramsci's school of thought was appropriated by the scholars of Subaltern Studies to signify the mass of population who are deprived of an agency. In doing so, the binary opposition of bourgeois and the proletariat was transformed under the encompassing terms: elite and subaltern. This reference does not stand in opposition, as the notion of Subaltern Studies is to record both sides of the story than making history a lopsided harangue of one on the other. Consequently the subaltern is reclaimed and the objective is to expose the misrepresentation of the subaltern by the elite. Subaltern Studies, hence, rose as a school of thought deliberated on this new model of history-writing while appropriating the significant observations of Gramsci. Subaltern Studies rather in its development became a space where the discipline of history began to be re-imagined from the context of subaltern classes. It is pertinent to note that Gramsci utilized the term 'subaltern' to imply two senses:

In one, he used it as a code for the industrial proletariat...In the second sense, Gramsci talked of the subaltern classes in (the)... more general relationship of domination and subordination in class-divided societies...he wrote about the subordination of the peasantry. Gramsci was very critical of the negative and dismissive attitude of European Marxists....Positioning himself against this attitude, he wrote of ...the everyday lives and struggles of peasants, and of the need for revolutionary intellectuals to study and understand them... he also highlighted peasant consciousness (which) remained enveloped by the dominant ideologies of the ruling classes. (Budde, 2006, p. 94)

In these assertions, it is the second sense of the term Subaltern which was productively employed by the South Asian historians of Subaltern Studies. Accordingly they deliberated on: the life and struggle of the peasant; secondly, in doing so they countered the superficial assessment of the Marxists towards the peasants; and thirdly the impetus was to highlight the peasant, his consciousness and the peasant uprisings. It is through these dynamic deliberations, that the group began to rectify the fabrications of elitist historiography as spearheaded by Ranajit Guha, who edited the first six volumes of Subaltern Studies, and also claimed, "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism— colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism' (Budde, 2006, p. 95). While an endeavor was being made to rewrite elitist history, the discourse on subaltern historiography was taken up by two groups – one which was located in the Cambridge, UK while the other were based in Delhi, India. The objective of subaltern historiography as propounded by the two groups was:

(. . .) to oppose the two elitisms. The former (group based in UK) argued that Indian nationalism was a bid for power by a handful of Indian elites who used the traditional bonds of caste and communal ties to mobilize the masses against British rule. The latter (group based in India) spoke of how the material conditions of colonial exploitation created the ground for an alliance of the different classes in Indian society and how a nationalist leadership inspired and organized the masses to join the struggle for national freedom. (Budde, 2006, p. 95)

Ranajit Guha contested these critical viewpoints on subaltern historiography as hinging on an elitist view and asserted that:

(. . .) the former representing a colonial elitism and the latter a nationalist elitism. Both assumed that nationalism was wholly a product of elite action. Neither history had any place for the independent political actions of the subaltern classes. (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 288)

While dissecting these elitist views, historians of Subaltern Studies began to address two fundamental issues vis-a-vis subaltern classes. The first focus was to emphasize on the difference between the political methods of colonial/nationalist elites and those of the subaltern classes, while the second area of concern was autonomy of subaltern consciousness. In establishing these claims, Chatterjee notes that the conflict was not only towards the declarations of the colonial historians but also nationalist historians as both believed that subaltern consciousness was something imported and not an integral, and self-formed aspect of the subaltern. Highlighting these issues, Chatterjee opines:

Pursuing the first question, the historians of Subaltern Studies showed that the claim of colonialist historians that the Indian masses had been, so to speak, duped into joining the anti- colonial movement by Indian elites using primordial ties of kinship and clientelism was false. They also showed that it was untrue to say, as nationalist historians did, that the political consciousness of the subaltern classes was only awakened by the ideals and inspiration provided by nationalist leaders.

(Chatterjee, 2013, pp. 290-91)

Understandably, the second question progressed towards asking, "What was the source of its (subaltern politics) autonomy (if it was different from elite politics)? (Further) What were the principles of that politics?"(Chatterjee, 2013, p. 291). In revisiting these moot enquiries, the analyses led to the generally ignored aspect of a subaltern – subaltern consciousness. According to Chatterjee, subaltern consciousness is the realization of the subaltern of his exploitation at the hands of the elite and it is this consciousness which is manifested in a subaltern insurgency, say, a peasant revolt. It can hence be said, " (subaltern) consciousness evolves out of the experiences of subordination—out of

the struggle, despite the daily routine of servitude, exploitation and deprivation, to preserve the collective identity of subaltern groups” (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 292). In further, speaking about subaltern and subaltern consciousness, Gayatri Spivak has also highlighted how subaltern consciousness has been the major thematic concern of Subaltern Studies project. She has averred:

Reading the work of Subaltern Studies from within...I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and “situate” the effect of the subject as a subaltern. (Spivak, 2012, p. 205).

In light of these arguments, the question that hence, arose was which sources, historical records and papers should be researched to identify the authentic evidence of this consciousness as asserted by Chatterjee:

Where was one to look for the evidence of this autonomous consciousness? It could not be found in the bulk of the archival material that historians conventionally use, because that material had been prepared and preserved by and for the dominant groups. For the most part, those documents only show the subaltern as subservient. It is only at moments of rebellion that the subaltern appears as the bearer of an independent personality. When the subaltern rebels, the masters realize that the servant too has a consciousness, has interests and objectives, methods and organization. If one had to look for evidence of an autonomous subaltern consciousness in the historical archives, then it would be found in the documents of revolt and counterinsurgency.

(Chatterjee, 2013, p. 292)

Realizing that official records as scripted by the dominant groups, were suppressing the notion that subaltern could have a consciousness, the only record of it could be found in the documents of revolt and counterinsurgency. It was this realization of discovering and scrutinizing the authentic documents of subaltern revolt, that the first phase of Subaltern Studies found its establishment. In tracing the development of subaltern historiography, it has been found that this first phase of Subaltern Studies was resplendent with the theme of peasant revolt which was firmly inaugurated by Ranajit Guha's seminal text *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983). This project faced many obstructions due to lack of verified sources, nevertheless a sincere attempt was being made to rewrite and reclaim the history of peasant revolts from various regions of the India. A scrutiny of the widely available official documents of peasant revolt was hence taken up by the historians to attack the vicious eclipse of subaltern history vis-a-vis the peasants and peasant revolts. It was discovered that elite historians had given a hyperbolic or metaphorical representation of the peasant revolt while severely ignoring the subaltern consciousness of the peasant as something which was real than metaphysical. Hence, it can be said that the first phase of Subaltern Studies which embarked on the rectification of official history paved the way for creating a space for the subaltern to speak. Chatterjee notes the seminal contribution of subaltern historians in this area to trace the aspects which together formed an encompassing model of subaltern historiography:

Writing about peasant revolts in British India, Ranajit Guha (1983) and Gautam Bhadra (1994) showed how this powerful strand of anticolonial politics, launched independently of bourgeois-nationalist leaders, had been denied its place in established historiography. Gyanendra Pandey (1984, 1990), David Hardiman (1984), Sumit Sarkar (1984) and Shahid Amin (1995) wrote about the two domains of elite and subaltern politics as they came together in the nationalist movement led by the Congress. Dipesh Chakrabarty (1989) wrote about a similar split between elite and subaltern politics in the world of the urban working class. Partha Chatterjee (himself) (1986, 1993) traced the development of nationalist thought in India in terms of the separation of elite and subaltern politics and the attempts by the former to appropriate the latter. (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 293)

The thrust of these deliberations was to underscore how the subaltern despite being a cardinal part of India's history was but detached from its making and allotted only a meager space. It is in this early phase of Subaltern Studies, that model of ‘history from below’ was established. Further, realizing that subaltern consciousness could not be recovered as the plethora of documents available on it were elitist in production, Subaltern Studies entered a new phase. This progress was launched by the understanding that subaltern histories due to the elitist interference and intrusions were “fragmentary,

disconnected, incomplete, that subaltern consciousness was split within itself, that it was constituted by elements drawn from the experiences of both dominant and subordinate classes,” hence the major impulse of this project shifted from “what is the true form of the subaltern” to “How is the subaltern represented” (*Empire* 295). Philipp Zehmis writes:

The fragmentary aspect of this consciousness becomes evident from the practices of subaltern actors who both contextually participate in the state as well as retreat from it. Chakrabarty points out that reflecting about the fragmentary 'nature' of subaltern politics radically changes our idea of political actors and counters totalizing ways of thinking the state (2010: 109). In this notion of the political, the subaltern is not a full-fledged citizen, but someone who expects that the state's technologies and instruments of rule will always belong to someone else. For this reason, they do rarely demand access to the state, but actively try to survive without it. (Zehmis, 2018, p. 13)

It is in this new phase that Subaltern Studies experienced new changes and transformations. To add more, the emphasis on peasant revolt was then opened up to include more subjects and the entire realm of knowledge production in colonial India was placed under the scrutiny of subaltern history. Chatterjee notes these defining shifts in subaltern history-writing where the institutions which otherwise were hidden from the scrutiny of history-writing were hence put under the radar of subaltern history:

Much studied subjects such as the expansion of colonial governance, English education, movements of religious and social reform, the rise of nationalism—all of these were opened to new lines of questioning by the historians of Subaltern Studies. The other direction of research concentrated on the modern state and public institutions through which modern ideas of rationality and science and the modern regime of power were disseminated in colonial and postcolonial India. In other words, institutions such as schools and universities, newspapers and publishing houses, hospitals, doctors, medical systems, censuses, registration bureau, the industrial labor process, scientific institutions—all of these became subjects of subaltern history-writing. (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 296)

While analysing the discourses on knowledge production which were elitist in nature, and in further examining them as carrying an official sanction, the project of Subaltern Studies hence found a mutual link with Postcolonialism. Postcolonialism highlights the discrimination faced by the Orient due to the unaccountable power of the elite. It is concerned with the Orientalist model of colonizer/colonized as spearheaded by Edward Said in his phenomenal book *Orientalism* (1979). It attacks the false rendering of knowledge about the native communities and their codification as inferior races. To challenge this colonial epistemology, Said and other post colonial critics such as Cesaire, Fanon and Memmi confronted the binary opposition of elitist colonizers and native colonized. This same concern has also been shared rather amplified by the Subaltern Studies group in subverting the elitist prejudice against the aboriginals of India. Subaltern Studies localized this struggle to address the racial conflict in India. If post-colonial critics discourse on the repercussions of colonial-colonized dichotomy, then the Subaltern critics investigate the cause and consequence of elite-subaltern bifurcation primarily in South Asia.

Throwing light on this affinity, David Ludden in the Introduction to *Reading Subaltern Studies* (2002) has also remarked on this affinity between the analysis of post-colonialism and Subaltern Studies. According to his claim, “Subaltern historians and post-colonial critics stand together against colonial modernity to secure a better future for subaltern people, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalize them, documenting their past” (Ludden, 2003, p. 20). Gayatri Spivak, the co-editor of *Subaltern Studies* volume in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* meticulously attempted to invest the subaltern with a historical agency. It is in speaking out against the victimization that according to Spivak, the subaltern can address their situation. This protest however shouldn't be fragmented or episodic rather if it is to persevere then the demand is for a collective action. This collective action is what Homi Bhabha reiterates in regard to subaltern resistance. He has emphasized the importance of social power relations in defining subaltern social groups. This point is also highlighted in the critical reading of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Graham Riach. Riach states:

The most important [reason for the lack of subaltern agency/consciousness] is that more powerful people academics, religious leaders, or people who are otherwise privileged in society--always speak for them. When they do this, the elite rob subalterns of their own voice. If subalterns could both speak and have a forum in which to be heard (the "speak" of the essay's title), Spivak hopes these people would achieve an effective political voice. (Riach, 2017, p. 11)

Homi Bhabha declares that the presence of the subaltern minority group serves to define the majority and that the former have the command to undermine those in power (Kridel, 2010, p. 823). Bhabha also affirms to the Gramscian notion that, "subaltern classes are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a State" (Beverley, 1999, p. 133).

It is in these discourses by major postcolonial critics such as Said, Spivak and Bhabha that Subaltern Studies has become a major element of Postcolonial Studies. So much so, according to Dipesh Chakraborthy (2000), "Subaltern Studies could be seen as a postcolonial project of writing history" which further attests to the common ground between Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies (pp. 9-32). Hence, in appreciating the affinity between Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies, it can be claimed that both intend to expose the epistemic stratagems which justify elitism. Hence, if race was seen as a sanctioned tool of discrimination, in the Indian context, Subaltern Studies began to investigate the social malaise of caste, for instance, to expose the complicity between high caste and knowledge production. Further, Subaltern Studies or subaltern historiography began to delve into the arena of — "religious minorities, caste and gender" in order to destabilise the institutions of power and highlight how they have and continue to relegate the subaltern to the fringes (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 239).

In the light of this development of Subaltern historiography, it is pertinent to note, that though Subaltern Studies is credited to have employed the Gramscian notion of subaltern, before its inception it is to E.P. Thomson's work *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) that the recognition is given for pioneering the trend of writing about the neglected histories of low classes. Thereafter, Eric Stokes's book *The Peasant and the Raj* (1978) revisited the peasant struggle in the colonial history. In India this movement of writing on histories of below began at the end of 1970. Edward Said, in the foreword to *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988) embraced this project by stating, "(its) a self conscious part of the vast post-colonial cultural and critical effort" which aims to retrieve the subaltern history, a history that is, "in literal fact...a narrative missing from the official history of India" (Guha & Spivak, 1988, pp.vii-viii). In deliberating on the aspect of official history, it is clearly evidential that there has been a supremacy of elitist account of past. It hence can be inferred that official history needs a re-visioning to rehabilitate the history of the subaltern. Edward Said has further espoused this aim of the project and has acknowledged the role of the subaltern critics in, "understanding the need of a new historiography ...Indian history has had been written from a colonialist and elitist point of view, whereas a large part of Indian history had been made by the subaltern classes..." (Guha & Spivak, 1988, p. v).

Reiterating the findings of this paper, it has been observed how the narrative representing the subaltern emerged in the second half of the 20th century making inception of subaltern history a fairly recent phenomenon. The primal step in its expression has been abstaining from the Western and elitist depiction of subaltern communities and embracing the oral lore immersed in the fabric of rural, or rustic, or otherwise mainstream India. Hence, subaltern has become an epithet for a person or a community that has been denied its existential voice, and subaltern has emerged as a voice to forge a dialogic base between the elitist factions and the subaltern communities. In radical contrast with Marxist models, subaltern history has emphasized on the mode of history from below which is seen as a progressive advancement on the erstwhile models. The endeavor has been to record the voice common people who were but most insidiously deleted from official documents. It is this eclipse that gave an impression that subalterns do not have a history to begin with. The subaltern, for instance, the peasants of India have recurrently raised their voice against the elitist factions, and have consciously executed insurgencies for the freedom of the masses yet the organic struggle of these subalterns find no mention in the official history. It is in the inclusion of these histories that the model of subaltern history was formulated that hence follows 'history from below'.

An exhaustive overview of the development of subaltern historiography shows that there has been a progress in the field of historiography as it has evolved from being a secluded and a separatist representation of the elite into an encompassing mirror of the subaltern as a whole. The paper has addressed the disengagement of subaltern history from the official accounts, which renders the subaltern vulnerable to misrepresentation, and consequent subjugation. From Marxist to Subaltern discourse, history has transited from being a homogenous account of the elite to a multitudinous account of the subalterns. It has also been analyzed how from Marxism to Subaltern studies, History is generally taken at its face value, especially if formulated by the elite authority. Under these circumstances, the subalterns who are misrepresented by the elite remain a scapegoat. It is in consideration of these putative reasons, the need to rectify and reclaim subaltern history is paramount.

6. CONCLUSION: HISTORY AS INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION

An outline of the development of subaltern historiography in paper highlights the evolution of history from being a study of secluded and a separatist representation of the elite into an encompassing mirror of the subaltern as a whole. In the paper, it has been investigated how there used to be widespread belief perpetuated by known critics as Hegel, Marx and others that India had no history of its own. Moreover, this consensus had reached such an extent of validation that prominent intellectuals and luminaries of the West declared India had no historians and those who were present had no methodology to write history. Based on this assumption, the paper has observed the unanimous pronouncements of Macaulay, James Mill and Edward Thompson that “Indians are not historians, and they rarely show any critical ability. Even their most useful books...exasperated with their repetitions and diffuseness” (Buss, 2006, p.198). Refuting these assumptions, the paper highlights the historical craft of the Subaltern Studies historians as prominent and significant.

The paper has further analyzed the development of subaltern historiography and how a consortium of Indian and English historians began to question the making of subaltern history at the end of 1970. This intellectual discourse addressed the history and society of subalterns. In the meticulous editorship of Ranajit Guha, and his ‘assortment of marginalized academics’ three volumes of essays entitled *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (1982) subverted the hegemonic discourse of the elite by its exposition on the subaltern masses of pre-colonial and colonial India. This initial movement was followed by the publishing of *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988) edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, with a foreword by the renowned post-colonial critic Edward Said. Its cardinal focus has been to “rewrite the history of colonial and post-colonial India by resetting the parameters of historiography itself... National narratives, orientalist images, ethnic stereotypes, and Hindu majoritarianism (Ludden, 2003, pp. 3-304). It has been constantly declared by subaltern critics that, “the historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism - colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism...” (Guha & Spivak, 1988, p. 37).

There have been polemical questions taken up by the critics such as, “How did historiography come to acquire this particular blind spot and never find a cure” and one of the progenitor of Subaltern Studies, Ranajit Guha has decisively answered it in his series of works which are aptly titled as *Elementary Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India* (1983), *An Indian Historiography of India* (1988) and *Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography* (1997) etc. The paper has also underscored the Gramscian notion of subaltern which was the spark that initiated the academic discourse of Subaltern Studies, thereby, reinventing the discipline of history vis-a-vis the subalternity and representation. In tracing the genesis of subaltern history, it is evident that subaltern history drew its models from critics other than Gramsci such as Jacobson, Barthes, Foucault and others and by transforming these existing paradigms, subaltern history emerged as a distinctive field. It can be affirmed:

(. . .) subaltern history promised more than “history from below”: the very idea of the “subaltern” had been captured from Gramsci, and the Jacobson and Barthes, the post-structuralism of Foucault, and the critique of Enlightenment epistemologies associated with Derrida, Lyotard and others....subaltern history...might be read from the gaps, fissures, interstices, and rhetorical strategies that marked dominant discourse...subaltern history was clearly to be distinguished from a host of other phenomenon. (Lal, 2001, p. 137)

In noting these observations, the distinctive feature of subaltern history can be ascertained. It aims to explore history in the gaps, fissures and strategies that are prevalent in the official narratives. In exposing and rectifying the same, subaltern history has evolved into more than 'a history from below'. Furthermore, the paper has also highlighted the affinity between Subaltern Studies and Postcolonialism. It was the basis of the study to combine the historical analysis of colonial India by historians to the attention of postcolonial theorists. The volumes of Subaltern Studies were, indeed, established to address the postcolonial fraternity rather than to be undertaken as a technical field of history per se. The paper has in this respect highlighted how race as a tool of prejudice was dissected in Postcolonialism, similarly, caste and other media of discrimination in Indian context has been exposed by the subaltern critics.

Despite the excellent work done by subaltern historians, their work has managed to garner a reasonable amount of criticism from scholars. According to these critics, the matter of concern is the methodological aspect of subaltern historiography developed by subaltern historians. They question the import of the western framework to the social, cultural and economic conditions of eastern countries that vary from the western countries. Vivek Chibber, in his book *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, writes:

(. . .) it is possible to discern three domains in particular where Subalternist theorists stress a fundamental divide between East and West. The first is in the nature of the bourgeoisie: the Western bourgeoisie carried forth capital's universalizing drive while its descendant in the East did not. Second, the power relations produced by Western capitalism were unlike the power relations capitalism generated elsewhere. Third comes the question of political psychology: political actors are motivated by a different set of concerns in the East than they are in the West. I will argue that the claims for a fundamental difference with regard to capital, power, and agency are all irredeemably flawed. (Chibber, 2013, p. 22)

The questions raised by Chibber are pertinent to the methodological approach developed by subaltern historians writing about the subaltern groups in India. The sociological and political scenarios are indeed different in the east and west. However, the theoretical concepts adopted have only worked as starting points for the subaltern historians who have rigorously worked on improving the methodological toolkit at their disposal. Nonetheless, criticism like this will help academicians analyse the impact of their approaches in academia and the real world.

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Citation: Quleen Kaur Bijral & Pummy Sharma. Florence. "Mapping the Polemics of History: from Marxism to Subaltern Studies" *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol 11, no. 7, 2023, pp. 19-30. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1107003>.

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