

Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Examining Subaltern Theme in Indian English Literature

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ABSTRACT

The origin of the subaltern theme became an extremely important critical concept in literature and postcolonial theory. Subaltern Studies is a discipline in itself. It is also an interdisciplinary subject. The term "subaltern" was first used by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. In Latin, "sub" means "under" and "change" means "different". So it literally refers to any person or group of people of low status. They may belong to any class, sex, gender, caste or even religion. Below refers to a specific marginal position in a specific cultural or social context. The subconscious is one of the characteristics of the following. Antonio Gramsci highlighted the term's meaning in terms of social class, gender, caste, marginalization, race and culture, while Gayatri Spivak used it to silence the voices of the colonized and oppressed, the working class, gender and women. Ranjit Guha also pointed out that the word says something about class, caste, age and gender. The concept of primacy in grassroots studies has its roots in Marxism and poststructuralism. One of the newest branches of substratum theory is substratum research. Of course the theme of subaltern has been examined from various points of view but the present study largely differ from the perspectives studied previously in content and form. . This paper reveal the suboptimal issues such as oppression, caste, religion, gender discrimination, marginalization, exploitation, migration, class difference, racial sentiments, diasporic elements and ethnicity as reflected in Indo-Anglic writings.

Keywords : Subaltern, discrimination, exploitation, marginal. Identity, representation, resistance, marginalization, exclusion, power,

Introduction:

"Subaltern" is a term used by Antonio Gramsci for social groups that are subject to the hegemony of the elite ruling class. Subaltern classes include farmers, tribals, women and other groups who were excluded from access to basic amenities and power due to racism. If we talk about subaltern studies, then it is a powerful medium for the downtrodden and downtrodden people to put their point in front of the society. A new mode of writing was started by Subaltern Studies which gave a new dimension to see and understand literature. The Subaltern who were completely rejected by the elite historians and scholars, this platform provided them an opportunity to speak and share their pain, anger, suffering and experiences. A new history was brought to the public by subaltern scholars which had been suppressed by the elite. By this, instead of writing history from above, it is written from below. In this literature "Dalitism" was given prominence, efforts were made to bring their problems, their experiences and compulsions to the fore. Stories like Kisan, Stree and Dalit in Premchand's story registered a strong presence of subaltern writing. When we approach history and cultural studies as independent fields, we find that the elites of the western world stood against subaltern historiography. In postcolonial India, subaltern studies are reflected in various forms of historiography and literature. When the marginalized sections of the society do not have a voice of their own, then exploitation and subjugation reaches its peak.

Indian literature has produced a rich literature since ancient times. It has its own rich cultural and literary heritage. In this regard, Meenakshi Mukherjee writes in his book *Epic and the Novel in India*: In his famous book *Forward to Kanthapura*, Raja Rao said: "It was not easy to tell the story. You have to express your feeling

in a foreign language and we have to see the wider world as a part of us. The pace of Indian life needs to flow in English expression. We in India think fast, we talk fast, and when we walk, we move fast”.

Subalterns are socially marginalized groups who are denied a voice against power structures. It relates to vulnerable and marginalized groups based on class, race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity and religion. Indian writers of the 1930s were influenced by Marxist thought, an ideology reflected both indirectly and directly in the stories of the period. It was the theorist Antonio Gramsci and Marxist philosopher who adopted the term subaltern to describe the oppressed. This oppressed class is under the supremacy of the ruling class. Gramsci used the term subaltern to denote a specific class, race, gender, and culture of the lower or lower class.

Brief Overview of the Emergence of Subaltern Theme:

The emergence of subaltern voices in Indian English literature can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when India gained its independence from British colonial rule. As the country underwent a period of social, political, and economic transformation, Indian writers began to explore new themes and perspectives in their literature.

One of the key factors that contributed to the emergence of subaltern voices in Indian English literature was the influence of the subaltern studies group, a group of scholars based in India who sought to explore the perspectives of the subaltern classes in Indian society. This group, which was founded in the 1980s, challenged the dominant narratives of Indian history and sought to give voice to marginalized and oppressed communities.

In literature, this shift towards a subaltern perspective is evident in the works of writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and Bhabani Bhattacharya, who wrote about the experiences of rural and working-class Indians. These writers sought to give voice to those who had been previously marginalized in Indian literature and to explore the complex social and cultural dynamics of Indian society.

In more recent years, writers such as Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, and Aravind Adiga have continued to explore subaltern themes in their work. These writers have tackled issues such as poverty, caste discrimination, and political oppression, and have given voice to the experiences of those who are so often ignored or silenced in Indian society.

The argument leads to the viewpoint that the emergence of subaltern voices in Indian English literature reflects a broader shift towards a more inclusive and diverse understanding of Indian society and its history, and highlights the importance of giving voice to those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed.

Subaltern studies is a broad field of inquiry that encompasses a range of theoretical perspectives. Some of the key theoretical perspectives that have been influential in subaltern studies include:

1. **Marxism:** Marxist theory has been influential in subaltern studies since its inception. Marxist scholars have argued that the subaltern classes are essential to the functioning of capitalist societies, and have sought to explore the ways in which these classes are exploited and oppressed. Marxist theory has also been used to explore the ways in which colonialism and imperialism have impacted subaltern communities.
2. **Postcolonialism:** Postcolonial theory has been influential in subaltern studies since the 1980s. Postcolonial scholars have sought to explore the ways in which colonialism has impacted subaltern communities, and have argued that the subaltern perspective is essential to understanding the ongoing legacy of colonialism in postcolonial societies.
3. **Feminism:** Feminist theory has been influential in subaltern studies since the 1990s. Feminist scholars have sought to explore the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of oppression, such as caste, class, and race, and have argued that a feminist perspective is essential to understanding the experiences of subaltern women.
4. **Cultural studies:** Cultural studies has been influential in subaltern studies since the 1990s. Cultural theorists have sought to explore the ways in which cultural practices and representations impact subaltern communities, and have argued that cultural forms such as literature, film, and music can be used to give voice to subaltern perspectives.

Significance of the Theme:

The subaltern theme is widely accepted as one of the most frequently used by writers of various ages and genres in English literature. Some representative features of it are describes below:

Representation: Indian English literature has the potential to represent the diverse voices and experiences of Indian society. However, much of the literature has traditionally been dominated by the perspectives of the privileged, upper-class elite. Studying subaltern themes in Indian English literature allows for a more diverse and accurate representation of Indian society.

Historical context: The subaltern perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the historical context of India, particularly during the period of British colonialism. By examining the experiences of those who were marginalized and oppressed during this time, we can gain a more complete understanding of the impact of colonialism on Indian society.

Social justice: The subaltern perspective is closely linked to social justice. By studying subaltern themes in Indian English literature, we can better understand the social injustices that have occurred in India and work towards redressing these injustices.

Global relevance: The subaltern perspective is not unique to India; it is relevant to many societies around the world. By studying subaltern themes in Indian English literature, we can gain insights into the experiences of marginalized and oppressed communities in other parts of the world.

The factors elaborate above reveal that studying subaltern themes in Indian English literature is crucial for a more complete understanding of Indian society, its history, and its ongoing struggles for social justice.

Main Discussion:

These novels based on the untouchables stories they have attracted the attention of the international community and have given these novelists an international identity. The following list of novels includes *The Children of God* by Shanta Rameswara Rao, *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand, *Triumph of an Untouchable Family* and *Outcast-Life in India* by Dr. Narendra Jadhav, *God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, Amitabh Ghosh of *The Hungry Tide*, there is Rohinton Mistry's *The Fine Balance* in which readers can imagine this subaltern class.

The *Untouchables* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand exposed the hypocrisy and arrogance of upper caste Hindus. The novel gives a glimpse into the life of an outcast who not only protests against the desperation and inhuman treatment of marginalized people in the pre-independence era. India experienced a transition from tradition to modernity. In the novel, the child appears to be a slave to both internal forces and external, unable to escape the oppression and injustice of upper-caste Hindus. In *Coolie* (1936) the main character is relegated to the periphery and isolated along with his counterpart Munu. E.M. Foster, in his Preface, "The sweeper is worse off than a slave for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he can't escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them." (Anand10).

Gandhi and Iqbal's influence on Bakha is so great, he is mesmerized by it, "The babble of voices died out, as if he had sent an electric shock through the mass of humanity gathered at his feet. This strange man seemed to have genius that cloud, by a single dramatic act, rally multicolored, multitongued India to himself." (Anand 160-161). As E.M. Foster says in his foreword: "A change is at hand." Bach achieves optimism, the story ends with hope and the prospect of a better future for him. On the positive side, Hutchinson, Gandhi and Iqbal gives rest and relief to Bakha.

Rohinton Mistry is one of India's most celebrated writers and his work has received international acclaim. As one of the leading postcolonial writers, his writings have a social purpose. His novels deal with themes of exploitation and the plight of the untouchable, an example being the novel *A Fine Balance* (1995). Untouchability has been social in India since ancient times, and although writers have successfully portrayed it in Indian novels, women in these stories have consistently been marginalized and attempted to portray oppression. These silent untouchables are experienced in this novel, *A Fine Balance*. The novel depicts the class and caste inequality in Indian society and provides a visual representation of the discrimination they face. 'Chamar' or 'Mochis' refers to the ruthlessness of the caste system in which the lower castes are oppressed. From the landlord and course. This atrocity forced Omprakash's grandfather and Ishwar's father, the shoemaker Dukhi, to switch from the traditional leather shop to another. They went to big cities. Their psychological turmoil is portrayed in the novel as they struggle to find shelter. They are in a dilemma and are looking for an identity. Rohinton Mistry depicts the Chamars who were born into the Chamar family and are considered low castes in Indian society. Elites or higher castes treat them inhumanely. Cruelty is depicted in the lines

"For walking on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was stoned, though not to death- the stones had ceased at first blood. Gambir was less fortunate; he had molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within hearing range of the temple while prayers were in progress. Dayaram, reneging on an agreement to plough a landlord's field, had been forced to eat the landlord's excrement in the village square. Dhiraj tried to negotiate in advance with Pandit Ghanshyam "the wages for chopping wood, instead of settling for the few sticks he could expect at the end of the day; the Pandit got upset, accused Dhiraj of poisoning his cows, and had him hanged" (Mistry 7).

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* sparks collective resistance against extremist Hindus and depicts the discrimination and suffering of minorities and marginalized groups. In the novel "Marxist theory of history in which colonialism, the endemic violence and the exploitation of the proletariats condition an inherited relation of the dominant class to the dominated class." (Robert, 415).

One of India's foremost writers, Amitav Ghosh is a subaltern in his novels, which include such important and well-known works as *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *The Hungry Tide* (2004). We have given space to minorities and marginalized people. A novel is being written, *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011). The 1979 novel *The Hungry Tidis* summarizes the events in Morichazapi and also describes the subaltern consciousness that Nimal finds. Amitav Ghosh expresses his concern about the Dalits in Indian society in many of his novels. Isolation, migration and many other external threats are the themes of his stories. "Can a Subaltern Speak?" The words of Gayatri Spivakis are appropriate here, suggesting that silence is a key component of a Subalthan's identity. Spivak argues that subalterns have no opinion or voice in communities dominated by power structures, but Amitav argues that subalterns create space to speak out when given the chance and opportunity.

Dalit refugees who settled in Kusum, Sunarban, West Belanga were given status as subordinates of Hungry Tide Fokir.

Mahmoud Darwish was one of the main literary pillars who made a great contribution to Palestinian poetry with many great poems. His poetry is considered sensitive, influential, rebellious, and patriotic by most critics. Darwish writes in his poetry from the perspective of the Palestinian people viewed as sub-Baltan groups and despite various differences between these silent and oppressed groups, Darwish I does my best to portray these groups. A prolific poet, Darwish's poems reflect a variety of subtexts, all of which cannot be described in this article. It is very important to narrow the scope of the discussion in order to provide a good and workable conceptualization of Darwish's "subbaltan" concept. Therefore, this study focuses on four circles or subspecies: the self, the family, the nation, and the poet's nation.

Mahmoud Darwish was one of the main literary pillars who made a great contribution to Palestinian poetry with many of his great poems. His poetry is considered by most critics to be influential, sensitive, rebellious and patriotic. In his poetry, Darwish writes from the point of view of the Palestinian people seen as subaltern groups, and Darwish does his best to portray these voiceless and oppressed groups despite the various differences between them. A prolific poet, Darwish's poetry reflects a variety of subtexts, not all of which can be discussed in this article. It is very important to narrow down the scope of the discussion in order to provide an adequate and viable conceptualization of Darwish's notion of the 'subaltern'. Therefore, the study focuses on four circles or subspecies: the poet's self, the family, the country, and the nation.

In Rudali (1993) by Mahasweta Devi, she shows how the Dushad community and the Ganju community, the lower classes that make up most of Tahar village, were exploited by the ruling upper class. Shanichari, the protagonist who is also a Pokémon from the MN class, was forced to become a "Rudali", a professional mourning custom performed by lower-caste women for deceased upper-caste men in rural Rajasthan. The lower caste people therefore end up being emotionless due to all these situations and even don't feel their feelings for their existence. Forced to make bud. It is extreme poverty that drives these women to indulge in such obscene activities. It is ironic that Shanichari, who did not know how to cry even after the death of her mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, wife and even her husband, did a job that required constant crying. So Rudali is the subaltern's struggle for existence in which tears are traded. Sanicari's inability to cry stems from all the traumatic experiences she had to go through and can also be compared to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's inability to cry as referenced in her poem Lament.

Kamala Markandeya's diasporic novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), starring Rukmani as the protagonist, who has the power to tell her own story, is a tale of the hardships of a peasant family. In his novel, Markandeya describes how the rural society does not allow itself to be distracted by the larger happenings around it, as they are too preoccupied with the idea of feeding each other. Poverty and hunger were the barriers that kept them away from worldly affairs like colonialism. Rukmini and Nathan worked in fields that did not even belong to them because the land owner was the owner of the land. His family was so poor that his daughter Irrawaddy turned to prostitution to support the family. These incidents are an eye opener to the level to which the lower classes had to reach to keep themselves alive while the landlords take full advantage of the hard work of the poor farmers.

Mulk Raj Anand, a sympathetic subaltern-class writer, in his novel *Untouchable* (1935) talked about the poverty, slavery and inhuman exploitation of the protagonist Bakha. This novel shows how the lower class is again divided into upper class and lower class. Bakha's sister Sohini is molested by Pandit Kalinath, who is believed to be a holy man. Here we can see that poverty is an indicator of oppression, in Sohini's helplessness the Pandit misbehaves with her and blames her. In this way, women are also Dalits among the Dalits facing the three subordinations. As the title suggests, his novel strongly depicts the untouchability of the lower class. Bakha is mercilessly thrashed and cursed for accidentally touching an upper class. Here the upper class has this misconception that the lower class is not even made a creature having the same feelings as them. The novel gives an insight into the fact that the poor will always remain poor as they have no chance for education. Although Bakha wanted to study, he did not get the opportunity and instead went to work in a toilet at the age of six. This becomes the fate of the subaltern class; Whatever talents they are born with, they are rewarded by de she pulled down the aristocracy or forced to go to work to make ends meet.

Since time immemorial, Dalits have been considered disqualified and outcasts. Skin color played a major role along with religion and caste. It is ironic that in spite of all these novels and writings as strong as a sword, untouchability is still widespread in India. But many misconceptions people have about untouchability have been dispelled by the power of literature. In this way literature became the carrefour of such social issues.

Conclusion:

In sum and substance it might be said that the study of subaltern themes in terms of Indian English fiction highlights the ongoing struggle for representation agency and power faced by marginalized communities not only in colonial but also postcolonial contexts. The interesting fact is that the subaltern class in Indo-English novels is created not by Dalit class writers but by elite class writers. E.M. Foster wrote in the preface to *The Untouchables*: "And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity" (Maheswari 138). Chronicles of history began to give space and voice to Indo-

English literature in various forms. The literature portrayed the Dalits and their challenges and reality of existence, thus literature became the voice of the silent people who were suppressed in various walks of life. Several Dalit writers have also come forward claiming to be equal to D. A silent and safe protest could be made through the process of writing. No one was forbidden to write and as long as they could write, they exposed the cruel deeds of the upper class. No one could speak about the difficulties they had to face in such a caste-religious society except the women writers. In the light of day all the upper caste men are untouchable to the lower castes but in their darkness they saw the lower caste women as sex objects. Now they do not find any problem with untouchability. All these subjects are brought to the attention of the people by the authors through the magic of writing. Through an analysis of literary texts taken up, this research has revealed the critical importance of acknowledging and engaging with these voices in efforts to challenge cultural hegemony and promote social justice.

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