Subaltern Movements in India

Issues, Perspectives and Challenges

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Edited by
Dr. Pradeep Waghmare

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Dedicated

To

Mahatma Jotirao Phule

and

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

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Acknowledgements

This volume is a collection of papers presented at the Interdisciplinary National seminar entitled 'Subaltern Movements in India: Issues and Challenges' organised by the Department of History of Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College, Mumbai on 10th and 11th January 2020. The Seminar was sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. As convenor of the seminar, I am very happy to present this volume and express my deep sense of gratitude to all the members of the organising committee for their and untiring and strenuous work that made the seminar, and ultimately this volume, possible.

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I thank and compliment the contributors of the volume who collectively addressed various tenets surrounding the theme of Subaltern movements in India: issues, perspectives and challenges.

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April 2021 **Dr. Pradeep Waghmare**

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Introduction

Dr. Pradeep Waghmare

Nineteenth century colonial India was a watershed in the rise of subaltern consciousness. The latter emerged with peasants and tribals challenging an exploitative British regime and the movements for socio-religious reforms. The rise of consciousness and clarity about subaltern self-identity occurred vis-à-vis the development of modern socio-cultural, economic and political relations in the mainstream. Subsequently, there was simultaneous documentation and crystallization of social categories and sub-categories based on class, caste, religion, gender, language and region. During the history of modern India, most of the oppressed, dominated and exploited social groups were identified against the background of the means of new socio-economic, as well as, political structures, nation-making and the spread of modernistic principles. Subaltern consciousness is also reflected in literary forms that offer alternate aesthetics of beauty, identity and resistance.

In the academic context, Subaltern Studies attempted to foreground social categories, which were at the receiving end of a range of power structures at different locations of the Indian subcontinent. Based on Antonio Gramsci's perceptions and deliberations, Subaltern Studies have come up with interdisciplinary methods to investigate and analyse the consciousness and voice of dissent of 'subaltern social categories'. The most visible research on these subject dates back to 1982 with the work of Ranajit Guha and his associates who were inspired by Gramsci's use of the term 'subaltern'. Ranajit Guha used the concept of 'subaltern'

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for oppressed, excluded and marginalised groups, using newer methods to narrate their histories. They adopted Antonio Gramsci's philosophy and E. P. Thompson's framework of 'history from below' to create new philosophical understandings, conceptual tools and methodological systems for documenting the socio-economic exploitation of Subaltern groups in India.

Scholars in subaltern studies focused on an isolated study of the subaltern people, rather than their structural exploitation by the mainstream. They highlighted the 'autonomous' character and agency of subaltern groups. However, as debates have underscored there are several problems that remain neglected. For instance, the rise of subaltern consciousness has been accompanied by the rise of mainstream modernism; a relationship that needs to be problematized. Moreover, the extent to which the subalterns contributed to mainstream movements needs exploration. Above all, the neglect of anti-caste movements such as those of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Narayan Guru and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, as well as, left movements by subaltern studies needs interrogation.

Subaltern Studies generated intense debates and critiques about social location and historiography by later historians and scholars. New generations of researchers working on the past experiences of subaltern masses need to explore a wide variety of perspectives that have not found space in earlier historiography. Ideas of gender and class inequalities have been at the centre of their historical enquiry and a considerable effort is now being made to study the convergence of multiple identities on life experiences. Therefore, through this seminar, an attempt was made to explore the intersectionality between gender, class, caste, and community to identify the systems, structures, experiences, politics and conflict and locate it historically. It was also aimed at exploring fresh ways of engaging with the subaltern groups to document and contribute to their empowerment and strengthen society at large.

This volume is a collection of papers presented at the Interdisciplinary National seminar entitled 'Subaltern Movements in India: Issues and Challenges' organised by the Department of

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History of Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College, Mumbai on 10th and 11th January 2020. The Seminar was sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. The main objective of the seminar was to engage substantial deliberations on the subaltern groups and their movements in India from a historical perspective. Hence, the seminar was entitled 'Subaltern Movements in India: Issues and Challenges'. Withstanding the focus on the micro-histories of subaltern that nevertheless retains larger frameworks of caste, class and gender (to name a few), the seminar received research papers that provided varied insights into the collection, analysis and production of the narratives of all possible subaltern categories from Indian past, present and future. As the seminar endeavoured to endorse and critique the prevailing state of subaltern studies with reference concerning streams, we received papers based on the themes that included identities and movements on the issues of gender, caste, region, and class. Papers in the sub-themes were: Evolution of Subaltern Studies: Milestones and Critique, Dalit Movement in India, Women's Movement in India, Tribal Movement in India, Labour Movement in India and Peasant Movement in India.

Due to the success of the seminar, it was decided that selected papers delivered there should be collected into one volume for publication. The twenty-two papers are published in the present book after the scrutiny from Advisory committee members and acceptance of their constructive suggestions.

A glance at the table of contents of the present book reveals how these sub-themes of the seminar now have taken form as the main five sections of this volume. I. Subaltern Studies: Perspectives and Critique II. Dalit Movement in India III. Women's Movement in India IV. Tribal Movement in India V. Peasant and Labour Movement in India.

Section I, **'Subaltern Studies: Perspectives and Critique'** begins with the paper of **Akash Kumar Rawat** entitled "Interrogating Antonio Gramsci's thoughts on Subaltern: A Critique from the Indian Perspective". It highlights Gramsci's idea of subaltern classes and his theory of subaltern classes in the context of Italy. He conceptualised his concept within the class relation.

Further, the paper elaborates Indian social system and tries to understand caste within Hindu and non-Hindu religion. Subaltern Studies scholars did not study caste as the serious problem of Indian society and they theorise caste within the broader framework of the class. Dr. Ambedkar defines that Indian society is based on caste which produces graded inequality and different from Western society. The paper relates Gramsci's idea of subaltern with the caste system.

Ajinkya Gaikwad in his deliberation on "Fragmented Identities and Hegemonic Projects: The RSS and the Subaltern Politics in Contemporary India" discusses the hegemonic project constructed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) through interventions in civil and political society. The RSS's hegemonic project tends to subsume subaltern consciousness by using a 'divide and conquer' mechanism based on ideological diversification and political semiotics which is embedded in issues of nationalism, citizenship, development etc. It accommodates the fragmented identities, primarily caste, class, religious and tribal identities, through political methods or diffused forms of ideology which in turn buries the possibilities of counter-hegemonies. The paper also explores the ability of sustenance of such hegemonic projects which are primarily a result of constant negotiations that take place between the ruling elite and the subalterns. The hegemonic structures have relied on creating a moral and ideological divide within the subaltern groups and over the years have developed a lasting potential to evade and suppress radical responses from the subalterns.

Dr. Kiran D. Sawant caters for the socio-political marginalization and issues of "Socially Marginalized - 'City Within A City", i.e. Dharavi. He has given a brief description of earlier settlements of Dharavi with its social-spatial context. The author further explains how Dharavi has made the mixed-use of its space and economy. It also provides solutions to many of our problems of sustainability, transportation and long distances, and lack of space and ideas about the ways to visualize the future of urban development. He also tries to analyze that even though Dharavi is a slum in Mumbai and

socially neglected and marginalized still it emerged as a unique 'City' or as an urban space and hub of 'informal economy'. It provides us with an imaginary a new meaning to the idea of "smart city", not a city that makes itself intelligent through the use of advanced technologies in its management and use, but one that more simply uses spaces intelligently, and works methodically regardless of the level of technological and digital advancement that makes Dharavi unique in itself.

Dr. Hemali Sanghavi in her paper titled "Jain Studies: Evolution and Trends", explores the evolution of the field of Jain studies in the academic context. The field of Jain studies encompasses the multiple perspectives related to religion, philosophy, environment, women, society about Jainism and the Jain community. Like Hinduism, Jainism has a continuous history from ancient times in India. Yet the field of Jain studies has not received much attention from scholars. The author opens up the vistas of the field of Jain studies. The study and observations about the Jain studies stand equally relevant to other religious studies. This research helps us to make our historical study holistic. Minority religious discourse needs to be accommodated in mainstream history. Beginning from the evolution of the Jain studies, the paper records the global as well as the recent trends. It certainly draws attention to the area of the Jain studies. The author attempts to probe into multiple paradigms related to the field of Jain studies.

The first section concludes with the paper by **Vidhi Mehra** titled "I am Miya": Poetry and Politics of the Char-Chaporis of Assam" which examines the poetry written by the Bengal-origin Muslims of Assam. Largely dwellers of the char chapori areas, they occupy the position of the subaltern as the religious and the linguistic minority in Assam. Their poetry, broadly referred to as Miya Poetry, talks of a forceful 'otherization' over the years as foreigners, outsiders, or infiltrators, arguably leading to xenophobic discrimination, which is now being retaliated against with the written word. The paper also attempts to examine the sudden rise in prominence and readership of Miya Poetry, owing largely to emergent online media platforms like YouTube and social media

websites like Facebook that have allowed this seemingly small-scale subaltern movement to gather support, and reach and mobilise the masses.

Section II, **'Dalit Movement in India',** begins with a well-researched presentation by **Sumedh Lokhande**. He puts forward a constructive criticism of the current Dalit movement in his paper, "The Dichotomy in the 21st Century Dalit Movement" (Chapter 6). He has carefully articulated the distinct phases of the Dalit movement, how the Dalit movement became a pan India movement under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the era of RPI and Dalit movement, the emergence of Dalit Panther and Neo-Protest movements, Neoliberalism and Rise of Caste-Based Coalition Politics, Globalization of Dalit movement in 21st century. After analyzing these phases, he puts forward an argument where on the one hand Dalit movement has diversified in its nature and scope from being merely a protest movement, into a social-religious movement, Dalit bureaucracy movement, Dalit intellectual movement, Dalit Civil Society movement etc. However, on the other hand, due to the lack of unity among Dalit political leaders today Dalits are facing political ineffectiveness and stagnation. He further calls upon the Dalit intellectuals consisting of scholars, academicians, journalist and especially the young generation educated middle-class Dalits to shoulder the responsibility of uniting the Dalit leaders and masses for the upliftment and development of Dalits and other backward classes.

The lack of access, resources and opportunities experienced by Dalits is further elaborated by **Dr. Valmik Garje** (Chapter 7) in his investigation of the direct and indirect impact of Globalization on the life of Dalits. The paper gives detailed insights on both the positive and negative consequences of Globalization and suggests some measures to overcome the problem. Thus, an attempt to make the development of Dalits, requires not only capacity building within the bounds of the state but also specific protection and promotion for Dalits.

The contribution and willing efforts of egalitarian social reformers have played a significant role in the ushering of

marginalized sections. **Shramik Kharat** (Chapter 8) highlights this aspect through a case study of Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati in the Upliftment of Jain, Muslims, Lingayats and other Minorities in his Kolhapur state. The paper highlights a research problem, which stresses the need for study of educational, occupational, social welfare; taking Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati's ideal example on the notion of educating all community children's equally as well as giving them employment. Rajarshi Shau practically did it in his Karvir state.

In "Dalit Movement in Vidharbha (Maharashtra): Post Ambedkar Era" (Chapter 9), **Pradnya Gudhe** focuses on the Dalit movement in Vidharbha area (East) of Maharashtra. It studies the Dalit movement (also known as the Neo-Buddhist movement) started by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a religious as well as a socio-political movement. It also studies Dalit movements aim for bringing social change in the Vidharbha region of Maharashtra. The author writes about many political groups like RPI, Dalit Panthers, BSP, etc have played a significant role in bringing about the changes in the socio-political and just life of the Dalits in the Vidharbha region. It speaks about the present era of seeing a diversion in the core issue. Amongst many reasons the utmost reason seems that the educated class and writers are not paying much attention as it was earlier.

The final paper of this section is by **Deepankar Nikam** (Chapter 10) entitled "History of Oppression Reflected in Dalit Literature: Some Selected Poems of Namdeo Dhasal". This paper analyses the historical oppression of subaltern groups in India especially in Maharashtra from Namdeo Dhasal's poem. His poems portrayed the life of subaltern groups i.e., Dalit's, Adivasi, Women and prostitutes. Dhasal's poems challenged the hegemony of caste Hindus in the field of literature. The subject of the Marathi poem before Dhasal was greatly limited to the world view of Caste Hindus so it never recognized the life of the subaltern groups. Thus, this paper attempted to understand the oppression of subaltern people reflected in Namdeo Dhasal's poem and how his poems became the symbol of protest against the oppression of marginalised group

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which lead to the formation of 'Dalit Panther' a socio-cultural organisation of Dalits against their Caste oppression.

Section III, **'Women's Movement in India'**, begins with a paper from **Dr. Deepak Bansod** entitled "Women's movement in India: Post Independence period" (Chapter 11), where he analyses the major issues of women's movement during the pre-Independence period and women were provided with social equality by emancipating them from evil social customs and traditions. But, after independence, the issues changed and all the women's movements spoke for the economic uplift of women through eradication of poverty, education, creation of awareness, and creating jobs for women. Thereafter, the author explains the way women's issues took a new turn by emphasizing the empowerment of women through participation in decision-making bodies. He also stressed the role of the national leaders including women leaders in the socio-economic phenomena which are working on the progress of Indian women.

Dr. Afegine Tuscano in her paper entitled "Contribution of Women in the Harit Vasai's Water Movement" (Chapter 12), examines the causes of the Harit (Green) Vasai's 'Water Movement' (Pani Aundolan) which was run by the women of Vasai. It gives a brief history of Vasai and also reviews the economic growth of Vasai during the execution of the 1988 Bombay plan. This paper analyses this plan which was benefited fewer local people but it was benefited builder lobby and politician. This plan created bad effects on the ecology of Vasai. It discusses the number of issues and fluctuations in the society and analyzes the motivation of women of Vasai to take an active part in the Harit Vasai Saurakshan Samiti's water movement. This paper takes a note of the women's contribution towards local culture, ecology, developments and unity of the people to solve the local water problems. It has explored the various changes and economic structure in society and documented the impact of movement on society and the promotion of socio-cultural stimulation for people.

Section III concludes with the paper of an editor, **Dr. Pradeep Waghmare** (Chapter 13) entitled "Dr. Ambedkar's perspective