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Subaltern Historiography in Subaltern Studies: A Search for Insiders

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Abstract

As a branch of post-colonial theory, a school of Subaltern Studies, being influenced by Marxism and Neo-Marxism, since early 1980s, has unraveled the inherent forms of inequality, injustice, oppression and exploitation of lower sections of people in the social history of Third World countries. The original School of Subaltern Studies has also shaped a part of postcolonial theory in literature.In this respect, the post-colonial feminist theory and the writings of some eminent key figures in Indian literature provide insights into the resistance and agency of the subaltern people including women while emphasizing on the need for inter-sectional approaches to address their unique challenges.In fact, the subaltern studies have emerged at least to give voices to these subaltern people's feelings, experiences and insights as well as have attempted to highlight their struggles against the so called domination and hegemony of "others". While reviewing available literature on "subaltern historiography" in the subaltern studies, the author in this paper observes that most of the original scholars are not "insider" subalterns, though they have significantly contributed to the field of subaltern studies and developed an alternative approach in the platform of post-colonial theory as such. The the author has attempted in this paper, to highlight Mahatma Jyotirao Phule as one of the most prominent and greatest "insider" subaltern social reformers in India and his wife Savitribai Phule, who is popularly known as "mother of women's education" in India.Thus, she is considered as one of the greatest original "insider subaltern feminists" in India. Along with her husband, Savitribai Phule was not only a critique of the Hindu patriarchal caste system, a social worker and social reformer in Maharashtra during the British colonial period, she was also a prolific writer who struggled hard in her life and raised voices of the subaltern people including women in India.Therefore,the author in this paper argues that long before the School of Subaltern Studies emerged, both Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule were not only revolutionary social activists and social reformers in the country but also they are revered among millions of people as the original "insider subaltern historiographers" as well as original "insider subaltern feminists" in India.

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Introduction to the Historical Background of Subaltern Studies :-

The Post-Colonial Theory as a new field of study has emerged as one of the most prominent theories or perspectives in academic disciplines in the world of literature. The Post Colonial literature persistently generated an enormous literature, especially by historians, sociologists, literary critics, feminists, art of critics, social reformists, political scientists and political economists (See:Young, Robert J. C. 2003;Parry, B. 2004;Jasen, David A, and Pramod K. Nayar. 2010;Lewis, Reina, and Sara Mills. 2003;Gandhi, Leela.1998;Nayar, Pramod K. 2008;Chibber 2013; Darder, Antonia.2019). The incessant expansion of post-colonialism in its new platform made its own domains of attention, is

extended beyond the other fields of global academics like African-American Literature, Literary Theory and Criticism, Anthropology and Cultural Studies. Consequently, the field of Subaltern Studies has emerged as one of the latest subdivisions or branches of post-colonial theory in academics.

In fact, as a branch of post-colonial theory, a school of Subaltern Studies, being influenced by Marxism and Neo-Marxism, since early 1980s, unraveled the inherent forms of inequality, injustice, oppression and exploitation of common people in the history of human society. While earlier, the Neo-Marxism, as an offspring of Marxism, during 1950s and 1960s, had emerged in academic discourses which also explored the shackle of domination and hegemony of the upper class of people as the main causes of inequality, injustice, oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment of downtrodden people in society. Neo-Marxism developed in reaction to the existing social and political problems in society that traditional Marxist theory was unable to sufficiently address. In this way, Neo-Marxism as a collection of Marxist schools of thought originated on the basis of ground realities and also from the 20th-century approaches in order to amend or extend Marxism and Marxist theory, typically by incorporating elements from other intellectual traditions such as critical theory, psychoanalysis, existentialism. Neo-Marxism also comes under the broader framework of the New Left. In a sociological sense, neo-Marxism adds Max Weber's broader understanding of social inequality, such as status and power, to the Marxist analysis of class. Examples of neo-Marxism include analytical Marxism, French structural Marxism, political Marxism, critical theory, cultural studies, as well as some forms of feminism. Some thinkers of Neo-Marxist economists like Paul Baran, Samir Amin and Immanuel Wallerstein emerged as the world capitalist system analysts who also developed dependency theory of underdevelopment along with a group of Latin American scholars like Andre Gunder Frank and Dos Santos who focused on economic dimensions of underdevelopment (Nayak,K.B. 2008; 2020; 2020a:135-178). While some other thinkers of Neo-Narxism like Theodor W. Adorno, Louis Althusser, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Antonio Gramsci developed critical theory in the academic field of Social Sciences especially in Sociology and focused much on non-economic dimensions of inequality, dominance and hegemony in society.

As a critical movement or approach, during 1980s, the Subaltern Studies basically arose as a critique of elite-based historiography schools of thought including Marxist and Cambridge historiography (Biswas,A 2009). Being opposite to Nationalist historiography, the Cambridge school aims to criticize national elitism (see: Anil Seal.2009). While the Marxist historiography began to give voice to the downtrodden people by rectifying the underlying flaws in the Cambridge school, as well as in the Nationalist historiography. But, neither the Cambridge school nor the Marxist school could fully identify with lower classes of people in society. Therefore, subaltern studies emerged to rethink the history of lost souls (Parakash,Gyan 1994).According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2000:324-340), subaltern studies was different from the Marxist historiography because of its emphasis on “the bottom layer of society” rather than just the implementation of Marxist’ “capital logic” alone. While Chowdhury A. R. (2016:1-16) argues that the scholars of subaltern studies were dissatisfied in considering society at the lines of modern concepts of class, value and commodity. John Beverley(1999), founder of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, succinctly puts it that the school of Subaltern Studies is about power - who has it and who doesn’t, who is gaining it and who is losing it. Power is related to representations - which have cognitive authority or can secure hegemony and which do not have authority or are not hegemonic. Thus, in this way, the Subaltern Studies was initiated during the 1970s (Ludden, 2002) in the discipline of history and came to its peak in the 1980s when some heterodox historians organized a

group named as the Subaltern Studies collective or Subaltern Studies Group (SSG). The members of this group decided to work together on multiple themes of South Asian subalterns(Zaib,Sabah.2015:213-219). In this way, the Subaltern Studies emerged as a dominant trend in writing about South Asian history, in general, and of Indian historiography, in particular (Parakash, Gyan 1994; Chowdhury,A. R. 2016:1-16).

However, it is the Subaltern Studies which not only explored varied forms of inequality, domination, oppression and exploitation in different spheres of human life of people especially the bottom level lower sections of every society in the world, but it also paved the way for various forms of peoples struggles, movements, agitations, regressions etc against the injustice, inequality, oppression and exploitation existing in any form including economic, political, social and cultural. The Subaltern Studies largely concentrated on exploring non-economic dimensions of power politics and hegemony in society. The scholars of Subaltern Studies group (as discussed below) felt that although Marxist historians produced impressive and pioneering studies, their claim to represent the history of the masses remained debatable. The main thesis of Subaltern Studies in India is that the colonialist, nationalist and Marxist interpretations of Indian History had robbed the common people of their agency. Thus, the Subaltern Studies collectively announced a new and alternative approach to restore history to the subordinated sections of people in order to rectify the elitist bias as a characteristic of much academic work in South Asian Studies. As a result, the subaltern's agency was restored by theorizing that the elite in India played a dominant role and not simply a hegemonic one. Thus, with this logic of this theory, the "subaltern" people were made into autonomous historical actors who then seemingly acted on their own since they were not to be led by the elites.

Conceptualization of "Subaltern":- From the beginning to the present time, the word 'subaltern' as a concept has undergone several changes. It has been conceptualized as indicating different levels of meanings with different themes and aspects. Empirically, the concept "subaltern" implies the peasants and cultivators. Structurally, it represents the insurgent and marginalized groups of people. While in the sense of deconstruction, it personifies inferior groups of third world countries. This concept is a Euro-centric term which was originally applied in order to understand the vulnerable status of lower strata of people in European society who were also spread all over the world. Now-a-days,it is applied to the people of every human society who are marginalized, suppressed and dominated by the upper strata in the socioeconomic and political hierarchy. Although initially the concept of "subaltern" was originated as a Euro-centric method and perspective of historical enquiry for studying the non western people of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, but later on the subaltern studies had been transformed from a model of intellectual discourse into a method of "vigorous post-colonial critique".

However, in postcolonial theory, the term "subaltern" refers to the lower social classes and the other social groups as displaced to the margins of a society. In an imperial colony, a "subaltern" person is a native man or woman without human agency, as defined by his and her social status (Young, Robert J. C. 2003). Subsequently, the concepts "subaltern" and "subaltern studies" entered into the vocabulary of post-colonial studies through the works in Subaltern Studies of a group of historians who explored the political-actor role of the common people constituting the mass population, rather than attempting to re-explore the political-actor roles of the social and economic elites in the history of India (Ludden, David. 2002). Today, the concept of "subaltern" has become a buzzword in the academic discourse of social sciences. The term 'subaltern' is being used and practiced in every field of social sciences including history, anthropology, sociology, human geography, literary criticism, gender studies, music and art,

aesthetic/ imaginative literature in which the question of "who are subaltern?, often arises in the ongoing debates.

Who are subalterns? :-

This question has been seriously debated in subaltern studies. Different theorists and scholars define it in different ways. Literally, the term "subaltern" is derived from Latin word "sub-alternus"which implies an underother (Dharmaraj,M 2014) - "sub" means "lower status" and the word "alternus" which implies every other. It has been defined in The Concise Oxford English Dictionary as " (n.) an officer in the British army below the rank of captain, especially a second lieutenant; (adj.) of lower status". It means - a person holding a subordinate position and status, originally a junior officer in the army. But the term subaltern is believed to have undergone semantic metamorphosis since its origin. Most studies conflate the word subaltern with several synonymous terms including subordinated, downtrodden, marginalized and oppressed sections of people (Simon and Varghese, 2012;Azad, 2014; Chowdhury, A. R.2016:1-16; Dharmaraj,M 2014, Mandal,T 2014; Mandal, M., and Karan, T.K. 2014; Mashori and Zaib, 2015). In Reading Subaltern Studies (2002) David Ludden has beautifully documented the changing meanings of the term "subaltern". According to him, the word has been used since long past. In late medieval English literature, it was applied to vassals and peasants. By 1700, it denoted lower ranks in the military, suggesting peasant origins. By 1800, authors writing "from a subaltern perspective" published novels and histories about military campaigns in India and America. For instance, G.R. Gleig (1796-1888), a British biographer who wrote biographies of Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, and Thomas Munro mastered in this genre. The great war provoked popular accounts of subaltern life in published memoirs and diaries, soon after the Russian Revolution and then the publication of Antonio Gramsci which further highlighted the concept.

Later on, this term has gained wider currency and enormous popularity in the fields of social sciences through the work of an Italian Neo-Marxist leader and social scientist especially a critical theorist in Sociology - Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) who first systematically used the term 'subaltern' in connection with the proletariat in his Prison Note Books(1929-1935) in order to refer to any group of "inferior" rank or status based on ethnic class, gender or any identity as such. In fact, in his famous book on "Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci" (See it as edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith,1971/1992/1996/2005), Antonio Gramsci applied the term 'subaltern' to the downtrodden Italians, specifically Southern Italian workers who were marginalized by the hegemonic politics of the Fascist party(Louai, El. Habib 2012; Chowdhury,A. R. 2016:1-16).

According to Marcus Green (2002:3), the Gramscian concept of subaltern and characteristics of subalternity are interrelated with his philosophical, religious, economic, social, cultural and political ideologies. Due to this complex interrelation among different notion of subalterns and some other ideologies, Gramsci never mentioned a last word but presented a fragmentary account of subalterns. Even then, Green (2002 :1) further highlights the dynamic notion of Gramscian subalterns. He states that, in Prison Notebook-1 (1929-30), Gramsci called noncommissioned/junior military troops as subalterns. In Prison Notebook-3 and 4, he used the word subaltern to identify the lower class people of a society. In Prison Notebook-25, he further clarified this notion by calling slaves, labourers, peasants and women as subalterns (Green, 2002:2-3). While Kylie M. Smith (2010:39) sums up the Gramscian concept of subalterns as being non-autonomous politically suppressed social groups of people. Thereafter, Antonio Gramsci used the concept for studying colonial societies in order to understand the groups under cultural

hegemony that were manipulated by colonial powers to ensure their local dominance. In this respect, he has developed a social theory while analyzing the interplay between culture and politics (Francese J.2009). The main idea of this communist Italian intellectual was that the colonial domination always produced local subaltern elites that were solely elites in the colonial locus, but subaltern outside it. However, Gramsci argued forcefully that all sorts of subaltern consciousness and insurgencies cannot liberate subalterns from the oppression of ruling classes. They are always the subjects of activities of the ruling classes. Their only liberty lies in their permanent victory and "autonomy"from the bondage of the society (Zaib,Sabah.2015:213-219).

In this way, the concept of "subaltern autonomy" has been propounded by Antonio Gramsci. According to him, there are two processes for the formation of the intellectuals in every society. Every society creates intellectuals for political, social and economic developments,who advocate knowledge and ideas from the top levels, while on the contrary there are intellectuals who are in opposition, attempt to present their viewpoints, ideas and knowledge from their observations, experiences and insights from the reality of ground levels at the bottom. Thus, in this respect, it is to be noted that the mass of the peasantry who are struggling at the bottom levels,but their contribution to society and social change is not portrayed and highlighted by the mainstream elite intellectuals. Their main goal was to retake function in the world of production, does not elaborate its own "organic" intellectuals, nor does it 'assimilate' any stratum of traditional intellectuals, although it is from the peasantry that other social groups draw many of their intellectuals and a high proportion of traditional intellectuals are of peasant origin. Besides this, there is another group of intellectuals who have already been existed earlier. The most typical of these categories of intellectuals is that of the ecclesiastics, who for a long time had held a monopoly of a number of important services: developing religious ideology, that is the philosophy and science of the age, together with working for schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works etc. (See: Selections from the Prison Notebooks.6 and 7) This initiative work of Gramsci was essential in the formation of subaltern studies as his work influenced and encouraged a group of South Asian scholars to look beyond economics and examine other structures within society that reinforce hegemony, for example in the field of schooling. Especially, Indian scholars, namely Ranjit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others, applied the term in a broad sense in order to study the South Asian subalterns from both colonial and postcolonial times (Baverly,John 1999).

Guha (1982a) provided a comprehensive definition of subalterns as the overall Indian population, excluding its elites. According to David Ludden (2002), Guha's subalterns are suppressed people due to several demographic factors including class, caste, culture, and religion. Guha (1982b) asserted that the insurgencies of subalterns against the mainstream defined them. But, Spivak being a woman subaltern scholar provided a critical notion of subaltern. Being critical of all the established conventions of subaltern and subalternity, she grounded her own theory of subalternity which challenges the voice of subalterns. By this, Spivak dismantles the Gramscian concept of subaltern autonomy. According to Sarah Harasym (1990), Spivak asserts that subalterns are always subalterns. There is no space for their elevation. Their unapproachability, un-accessibility, unreachability keep them as always subalterns and that's why their voice disperses into the shadows. She sums up the narrative of subalterns by noting that they cannot speak (Spivak, 1988b:104) or can never be heard (Mogio, J. 2007).

Emergence of "Subaltern Historiography" in Subaltern Studies:-

However, following Gramsci's prioritization of a history from below, the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG)

was created under the leadership of Ranjit Guha - a social historian of India and popularly well known as a renowned South Asian scholar. Many members of the original Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) addressed a number of research gaps while producing a wealth of resources on Indian peasantry during the colonial period. According to David Ludden, being influenced later by the new perspectives of Erik Thomas Stokes on the history of India and South Asia (especially see: Erik Stokes 1980, The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India), Ranajit Guha published, in the early 1980s, the "Manifesto" to Subaltern Studies-1 (1982a) and his key monograph - The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency(1982b) where he began to weave ideas about subaltern identity into theories of class struggle (David Ludden 2002:4-5).

Guha writes, in his "preface" to the Subaltern Studies-1, that the aim of this emerging field was to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies, and thus it helps to rectify the elitist bias as a characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area (Guha 1982a-b, 1999a-b). With the publication of volumes of Subaltern Studies, as led by Ranjit Guha, the Subaltern Studies brought an intellectual movement in historical research of social sciences. Guha, first of all, attempted to develop the Gramscian thoughts with special reference to south Asian subaltern perspectives. He provided a comprehensive definition of "subalterns" as the overall Indian population (excluding elites). According to David Ludden (2002), Guha's concept of "subalterns" are suppressed people due to several factors including class, caste, culture, religion etc. He truly asserted that the insurgencies of "subalterns" (especially peasants) against the mainstream society is defined as the real subaltern movement. In fact, Guha's work on Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (1982b) proved to be the foundational document of the Subaltern Studies Group. While focusing on previously negated voices in historic rebellions, Guha explored the elements of rebel consciousness among peasants during colonial rule in India.

Guha's work (1982a-b) also illustrated a clear-cut distinction between the work of the Subaltern Studies Group and Gramsci's writing on the subaltern. In addition to rethinking about what constitutes the "subaltern" (i.e., a voiceless other, rather than a general term for the working classes), Guha challenged the Gramsci's view that there was little evidence of autonomy in peasant rebellions. According to Guha, Gramsci did not observe, for example, the proletariat generating their own leadership or managing their demands in an organized and effective way. Conversely, while acknowledging the powers of colonial hegemony, the postcolonial critics mainly Guha felt that Gramsci's view was not reflective of colonial India. As David Arnold (2012) points out in "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India," that Guha identifies the subaltern domain of politics as including a wide variety of generally autonomous modes of thought and action, particularly expressed through rebellions, riots and popular movements. It is implied that these are the political expression of a subaltern peasant culture and world view which is in itself largely autonomous from that of the elite (See: David Arnold, in Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, 2012) .

Then, other members of the Subaltern Studies Group followed Guha and the voluminous work of Subaltern Studies quickly became a movement in historical research aiming to redeem "suppressed voices" by challenging "authoritative voices" (Azad, 2014). In fact, all the followers of the movement (who are also called as "subalternists") applied Guha's approach to rediscover the lost historical narratives on subaltern groups (William, 2006) by unveiling the thick layers of hegemony embodied at multiple levels (Parakash,Gyan 1994). However, in 1970s and 1980s, some other social scientists had also explored different layers of inequality and hegemony in peasants society during pre-independence

period of India, but in terms of caste and class analysis (For instance See: Beteille Andre 1972 and Dhanagare D.N. 1983;1987:AN 137-144). In this context, while highlighting Ranjit Guha's contribution to the field of "Peasants Studies", D.N. Dhanagare, in his recent book (2014) said that a "little before the publication of my book, on Peasant Movements in India -1920-1950 (1983), Ranjit Guha's pioneering work also appeared and introduced the "subaltern studies perspective" from which my purely class analysis differed. The entire group of scholars - known as the "subaltern studies collective" or Subaltern Studies Group" (SSG) - carried out what may be called paradigmatic research published in several volumes" (Dhanagare 2014:10).

In fact, the subaltern study emerged as the "revisionist historiography" of peasant movements in post colonial India. Ranajit Guha formed the "Subaltern Studies Group" (SSG) or the "Subaltern Studies collectivity" in 1979–80 at the 'University of Sussex' in England. In 1982, the first edited volume of Subaltern Studies was published. In the late 1980s, Guha moved to the Australian National University. Then, the project started a new life. By the year 2005, a series of 12 edited volumes have been published by a group of scholars (Amin and Bhadra 1994). Those scholars were either mentored or influenced by Ranjit Guha. These twelve edited volumes of historical scholarship on subaltern studies are mainly on the South Asian history of colonial society. Ten volumes from 1982 to 1999 are entitled as "Writings on South Asian History and Society"(Delhi: Oxford University Press) and out of which the first six volumes are edited by Ranjit Guha (1982-1989), while seventh volume is edited by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (1993), eighth volume by David Arnold and David Hardiman (1994), ninth volume by Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (1996) and tenth volume by Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (1999). Whereas the eleventh volume is on Community, Gender and Violence as edited by Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jaganathan (2000/2001,New York: Columbia University Press) and the twelfth volume is on Muslims, Dalits, and the Fabrications of History as edited by Shail Mayaram, M. S. S. Pandian, and Ajay Skaria (2005,New Delhi: Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal Publisher).

However, the focus of the first three volumes was the issues of subalternity underlying at historical level (see for example in Subaltern Studies-1 (1982a) Ranajit Guha's Some Aspects of Historiography and Gyanendra Panday's Peasant's Revolt and Nationalism), and socio-cultural and political perspectives (for example see Partha Chatterjee's Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bangal-1926-1935, and David Arnold's Rebellious Hillmen:the Gudem-Rampa Risings). Subsequent volumes introduced some more new young authors namely Swapan Dasgupta, Ramachandra Guha, Gayatri Spivak, Tanika Sarkar and Bernard S Cohn, among others. All these contributors to Subaltern Studies highlighted on different experiences of subalterns, their revolts, and their acts of recovery and other themes (Marthur, 2000).

In this way, these 12 volumes were published between 1982 and 2005. In fact, these twelve volumes contain borrowed ideas and developed insights from structuralism, post structuralism and most of post-colonial theory. The group of scholars who formed the original Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) include: Ranajit Guha, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Sudipta Kaviraj, Gyanendra Pandey, Gyan Prakash, Sarojini Sahoo, Ajay Skaria, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Susie Tharu. This group consisted of heterodox historians of South Asia, who were critical of the nature of the historiography prevalent at that time because of its elitist biases and "bourgeois-nationalist" and "colonial" mode of history writing which distorted the real historical portrayal of the subalterns or the lower class people and neglected their role in the anti-colonial struggle.

Although most of them do not belong to the actual subaltern community or category as "insiders", but all these scholars of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) significantly explored the political role of the men and women who constitute the mass of population, rather than the political roles of the social and economic elites, in the history of colonial India. Actually from 1980s, the subaltern people began to be denoted as the colonized people of the Indian continent as a result of subaltern studies in colonial countries. In 1980s, the scope of enquiry of Subaltern Studies was applied by this group of Indian scholars as an "intervention in South Asian history for the under classes, for the voices of subaltern people or category that had not been heard previously. They wrote against the "Cambridge School" which was basically a elite centered school. This school focused on the colonial legacy only. While the Indian scholars of the SSG brought a change in the intellectual discourse on colonial societies. Their main focus was on the subaltern - the down trodden bottom level people based in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language and culture. Initially, they wanted to analyse the history from the perspective of the poor peasants under-class. They presented a kind of revolutionized knowledge against the information of the colonial administrators and opposed the main system of knowledge in the society as expressed in their writings. They proved that only government deeds and documents were not the original history of subalterns of a society. They focused on the voiceless section of the society who "cannot speak" properly in all the ages. They gave voice to the marginal sections of the society and tried to establish the new historiography - the "subaltern historiography" against the "elitist historiography". The initial aim of the group was to write a history "from below", which countered the predominant narratives of the British colonizers and the Indian bourgeois nationalists that had emerged during the colonial period and continued after India's independence. It is worth noting that not all those who worked within subaltern studies were members of the Subaltern Studies Group. Some scholars became critique within while some others became critique outside. Then, the debate and discourse on subaltern studies went on for years in India.

The Discourse on "Subaltern Historiography" in India:-

During 1980s and onwards, there has been a long academic debate and discourse in the field of Subaltern Studies in India. Among prominent contributors to the volumes of the Subaltern Studies, the most notable works include: Ranajit Guha's "Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India" (1982b,1999a). This text examines the role of peasants in historical struggles against colonial rule, emphasizing their agency despite their subaltern status. While Partha Chatterjee's in his The Nation and Its Fragments - Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories (1993), analyzes the construction of national identity in postcolonial contexts, by focusing on how subaltern groups negotiate their identities among dominant national narratives. Going two steps ahead, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's(1985b, 1988b, 2010a-b) in her work on "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (as discussed below in detail) critiques the limitations of representation by asking whether marginalized groups can truly voice their experiences in a way that transcends the frameworks imposed on them by dominant cultures (Morton, Stephen. 2003).

To substantiate it further, Guha and his followers of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG), appropriated the concept of "subaltern" in order to analyze Indian historiography, arguing that mainstream history had largely ignored the voices of peasants, tribal communities, lower castes, and other oppressed groups of people including women in India. The main problem for the SSG was to unravel the sources of knowledge in the history about the subaltern people. According to Guha, not only are sources of knowledge difficult to obtain, but also Indian history has for generations been written by colonizers and

the Indian elite, which reinforced the Westernized values and justified colonization. In "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," Guha (1999b) argues that "the historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism"(See also in Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, 2012). Further, Guha goes on to state that both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the national consciousness – "nationalism" – which informed this process, were exclusively and predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neocolonialist historiography, these achievements are mainly credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture. Additionally, it is also attributed to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings.

In fact, one major challenge which Guha faced was that he was trying to access the subaltern history of India when the majority of historical documents and secondary sources of research have been written by colonial elites or the Indian bourgeois-elite. Guha questions about : 1) how then, are we to get in touch with the consciousness of insurgency when our access to it is barred thus by the discourse of counter-insurgency?; and 2) for counter-insurgency, which derives directly from insurgency and is determined by the latter in all that is essential to its form and articulation, can hardly afford a discourse that is not fully and compulsively involved with the rebel and his activities ? (See in his Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, 1982b, 1999a). Indeed, there were some important challenges to recover subaltern history as follows:

- As subaltern classes are typically silenced, there will be substantially less written about or by these groups (many of whom may not be literate).
- The Euro-centric nature of schooling in South Asia during colonial rule renders it difficult to access these narratives.
- Attempting to recover the voice of the subaltern may result in another problem: speaking "for" the subaltern or filtering their experiences through another Westernized perspective.

However, Ranjit Guha attempted to mitigate this bias and produce a subaltern history of peasant rebellions by referring to numerous court transcripts and official documents. While, Partha Chatterjee (2011) stressed that one of the critical observations of the early phase of Subaltern Studies was that the state was always a distant entity in peasant consciousness. Peasants generally wanted to have nothing to do with magistrates or courts, police stations or hospitals. In the same way, the relation of the urban poor, many of whom were migrants from the villages, to the agencies of the state was also distant. Indian national identity is, therefore, erased as the formation of the Indian nation becomes accredited entirely to British occupation. This re-envisioning of history and reinforcement of British colonial values occurs through the westernized educational system that emerged in the country during the British rule in India.

In a similar vein, Sudipta Kaviraj (2010) pointed out that Indians students were exposed to a "more monolithic" rationalist culture than the "more inflected and critically engaged form in Europe". In India, the curriculum of the westernized education contained not only theoretical tools, resources, and techniques which could be applied to historical material critically to appraise and control them but also they contained and pressed upon their students a narrative of universal history, assigning values and places to civilizations. Kaviraj argued that this narrative served as a tool to legitimize the imperialist discourse, while giving references of an Indian novelist and poet Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's thoughts on "the asymmetry between Europeans and Indians on the question of history" that "If Europeans go duck-shooting, histories are duly composed of the affair, but a whole nation of Bengalis

do not have a history to themselves". Chattopadhyay stated that : "The Bengalis must have a history; or else, they would never become human beings" (Chattopadhyay,B 1865; quoted in Kaviraj,S 2010). Thus, Sudipta Kaviraj (2010) argues that a people needs a history in order to provide an account, mortifying and uplifting, of their collective self.

This lack of history and sense of self for Indian subaltern groups is further discussed by Dipesh Chakrabarty(1996, 2000, 2002,2009). In "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,"(2009), Chakrabarty writes that Indian history is discussed in terms of absence, construed as a "historic failure of the nation to come to its own" (See also in Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, Mongia, P. (ed.)1996). Dipesh Chakrabarty(2000) argues that this problematic approach to subaltern historiography translates into "inadequacy": India, under imperialist ideology, is in need of civilizing, since the "Indian was always a figure of lack". We can see similar discourses emerging in the division between the West and the Middle and Far East more broadly in the concept of "Orient". In fact, the concept of "the Orient" evolved from the Western colonial powers. It is a politically dangerous and culturally biased concept. This concept continues to infect Western views of the Eastern world. This powerful argument is made by Edward Said in his influential book on Orientalism (1978/2003) in which he has established the term "Orientalism" as a critical concept in order to describe the Western world's commonly contemptuous depiction and portrayal of the Eastern world (or, the Orient). Societies and peoples of the Orient are those who inhabit regions throughout Asia and North Africa. Edward Said argues that "Orientalism", in the sense of the Western scholarship about the Eastern world, is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies that produced it, which makes much Orientalist work inherently political and servile to power (See:"Orientalism" in Wikipedia).

Thus, in order to move away from this Euro-centric views of history in South Asia, the scholars of Subaltern Studies have attempted to work outside of conventional (and easily accessible) sources. As Gyanendra Pandey (2012) explains, while the narratives preserved in archives are overwhelming controlled by the ruling class, lodged in the records found in these institutions, however, are fragments (traces) of many lost (and usually irrecoverable) narratives, prised out by a predatory official or observer from earlier (often unknown) contexts and situated in others: the statement of a "mute" subject under trial; rumours heard in the bazaar; slogans shouted by rebels or rioters; – all are testimony not only to the power of British rule and its appropriation of the treasures of layer upon layer of history, but to other presences and other pasts (See in: "Voices from the Edge," Chaturvedi, V. (ed.)in Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, 2012).

Moreover, one of the reasons that the subaltern voice fails to be heard is due to the epistemic violence committed by scholars of subaltern studies. "Epistemology" analyzes how we obtain and trust knowledge, while "epistemic violence"as a term used in postcolonial studies to describe how the West produces discourse on colonized nations and colonized people and works to erode indigenous identities by controlling knowledge production — for example, through forced English schooling, or the adoption of English culture and history as the global baseline or model that to be adopted by the colonized people. In relation to this, the feminist epistemology also considers the epistemic injustice of how women are excluded from knowledge production and treated as untrustworthy or unreliable sources of knowledge.

In this context, Gayatri C. Spivak joined the SSG as an extravagant subalternist. She criticized Subaltern Studies as itself an elite based school of thought due to its ignorance of the issue of gendered subalternity. She revolutionized the existing course of Subaltern Studies via her philosophical essay entitled as "Can the Subaltern Speak?"(1985b, 1988b:90, 2010a-b). Her such complex hybrid text

focuses on several themes including re-presentation, insurgency and passiveness of gendered subalterns. She also criticizes the shortcomings of Foucault and Deluze's methodology of representation. Then, by arguing against colonialism and nationalism in India, she raises an open ended question: "can the subaltern speak?". She further generalizes all double colonized, "black or brown poor rural women" as voiceless, illustrating her position with a specific case of suicide of the sister of her grandmother, Bhuvaneswari Badhuri (Zaib,Sabah.2015:215).

However,Gayatri C. Spivak, in the discussion of gendered subalternity, oriented the field of subaltern studies towards subaltern feminism, in general, and post-colonial subaltern feminism, in particular. In The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview (2012:324-340), Spivak claimed that "subaltern is gendered and hence needs to be studied with the help of feminist theory". According to Zaib,Sabah (2015:216), being a critique of critics, Spivak relates the concept of the subaltern to the marginalized poor women of third world countries (Tibile, 2012) and she also pointed out the shortcomings of traditional feminism as an unsuitable approach for voicing the situations of poor women all round the world. She introduced the concepts of class, caste and culture with regards to subaltern women (Morton, S 2003). Further, Subaltern Studies' projects also reconciled it with the deconstructionist approach. Being a kind of the Marxist feminist deconstructionist, Spivak applied the strategy of deconstruction to unveil truth and to recover marginal subjects against the grain of central discourses. In this regard, she contributed an essay entitled as Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography (Spivak,G.C 1985a) . But, according to Dipesh, Chackraborty (2013), the complex linguistic acrobatics of deconstruction disappointed many subalternists and so that deconstructionism became a disputed strategy in Subaltern Studies. Thus, in Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial (Chaturvedi, Vinayak.2012), Sumit Sarkar contributed a complaining essay on The Decline of Subaltern in Subaltern Studies which clarifies his dissatisfaction with deconstructionism.

Among all the original scholars of Subaltern Studies Group (SSG), Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, (as an "insider" in a sense of "being a woman" of upper class and taking a stand on behalf of the subaltern women in general) advocated for a feminist subaltern approach. According to John Beverley (1999), Gayatri Spivak formulated the problem concisely: If the subaltern could speak—that is, speak in a way that really mattered to us—then it wouldn't be subaltern. The subaltern cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively produces subalternity. Scholars of subalternity often addresses the problematic nature of attempting to give voice to the subaltern. Some argue that this is another form of "speaking for" the subaltern and filtering their words through Eurocentric understanding. Spivak is one such scholar who has shed light on this issue. Though many scholars had been engaged with the study of the subaltern people and subaltern history, the position of the subaltern (specifically the subaltern woman) was popularized in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"(1985b, 1988b, 2010a-b). In this extraordinary critical work, she has taken a kind of "subaltern feminist" stand point as such(See:1985b, 1988a-b, 1999, 2010a-b,2012).

Spivak's first example of silencing the subaltern woman is the prohibition of the "Sati", an age old practice in the traditional Hindu society, whereby a Hindu widow would burn herself alive on the pyre of her dead husband. When the British rulers came to India, they outlawed this practice. Spivak writes that the abolition of the custom of "Sati" by the British has been generally understood as a case of "white men saving brown women from brown men". Spivak identifies how pro-imperialists and colonizers believed the British were on a civilizing mission to India, branding Indians as Junglee people and saving

Indian women from Indian men. This thinking ideologically justified colonization and the imposition of British institutions and education in India. Spivak views that the Imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind. How should one examine the dissimulation of patriarchal strategy, which apparently grants the woman free choice as subject?. Spivak points out that these women have been largely erased from this narrative and that ignoring the subaltern today is "to continue the imperialist project"(See:Spivak in Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea, and also See:Spivak 2010a, 1985b, 1988a-b, 1999, 2010b,2012).

Spivak illustrates the voicelessness of the subaltern woman through the death of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a young woman who hanged herself in North Calcutta in 1926. The motive behind the suicide confounded by local authorities as Bhuvaneswari had been menstruating at the time and, as such, her suicide was not a response to an unplanned pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was revealed that she was part of a group struggling for Indian independence. The group had tasked her with the assassination of a political figure. Being unable to do this, Bhuvaneswari decided to kill herself. As Spivak explains, Bhuvaneswari had known that her death would be diagnosed as the outcome of illegitimate passion. She had, therefore, waited for the onset of menstruation. She generalized the sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny) in the physiological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male. Despite the revelation of Bhuvaneswari's political affiliations, her family believed the suicide was due to an illicit love affair, waving off other speculations. Her act was read as "absurd" and a result of "delirium", rather than the planned, intentional, and political. Thus, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's suicide is an unemphatic, ad-hoc, subaltern rewriting of the social text of "sati-suicide". Thus, Spivak viewed that the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. Bhuvaneswari's death shows that even when the subaltern woman goes to painstaking efforts to inscribe meaning or motivation to her actions, and profess her own subjectivity, such gestures go unheard by the colonial and patriarchal order (See in Spivak, 1985a-b, 1988a-b, 2010a-b,2012,).

However, Spivak's theory of subalternity opens an unending debate. Contemporary scholars and theorists are now debating on the "voice of subalterns". In Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction (2003), Robert Young excavates a methodology which favors the "voice of subalterns" under suitable socio-political scenarios (see also Dharmaraj, M 2014; Mashori and Zaib, 2015). Recently some eminent contemporary scholars, namely Heither Plumridge Bedi, Uday Chandra, Kaneth Bo Neilson, Alf Gunvald Nilsen, Indrajit Roy and Judith Whitehead, are actively working to rethink subaltern resistance with especial reference to Indian based subalternity for the exploration of new critical perspectives about the idea of resistance (see Bedi,H.P (2015); Chandra,U (2015); Neilson, K.B (2015); Nilsen, A.G (2015); Roy, Indrajit (2015); Whitehead,J (2015). Further more, some South-Asian scholars like Ghulam Mustafa Mashori and Sabah Zaib (2015) from Pakistan are attempting to initiate subaltern studies in Pakistan to rectify the elitism that has prevailed in the Pakistani context at the sociocultural, political and literary level (Zaib,Sabah 2015:216).

However, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has taken a kind of critical subaltern feminist stand point in her discourse of the subaltern studies. According to Spivak, the ultimate subaltern subject is the subaltern woman who tends to experience more oppression than the subaltern man. Spivak explains that the subaltern women have historically been subjected to both colonial violence, as well as patriarchal violence in the traditional Hindu society. The presence of these two oppressive forces had silenced the

subaltern woman, making it impossible for her to self-advocate. Spivak explores how the subaltern woman is denied her autonomy and voice, which continue to be erased by the Westernized academic discourse. In her intervention into the Subaltern studies, Spivak draws on a number of theoretical analyses on Indian History – such as deconstruction, Marxism and feminism. She was highly critical against the current histories of India about colonial perspectives. In this respect, in her essay on "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak narrates the incident of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri as the core issue about how "a young woman of sixteen or seventeen, no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege."(Spivak 1985a: 330-63). Besides, Spivak wrote a number of articles and essays on the subaltern studies (Donna Landry, and Gerald MacLean. 2013). As a feminist, she also wrote on the first world and third world woman studies. In fact, she highlighted on the postcolonial subaltern studies in her different essays which are quite essential to understand the subservient nature of subaltern women in the history of India and elsewhere.

Actually, the subaltern women, in the social history of India, have been suppressed, dominated and marginalized mainly due to their gender, caste, ethnicity and class background. They had faced systematic oppression and had also often been overlooked or left out of the mainstream discussions and narratives as available in different sources of history. The subaltern studies have emerged at least to give voices to these women's feelings, experiences and insights as well as have attempted to highlight their struggles against the so called domination and hegemony of mainstream elite class of "others". In this way, the subaltern women in Indian social history and literature have been a significant focus of post-colonial studies. Even they had participated in a number of national movements. For instance, the subaltern women had actively participated during the revolt of 1857. The women from the marginalized castes and tribes including Dalit Christians, along with ordinary middle class women, had actively participated during this movement which can be considered as a challenge to the traditional narratives that often overlooked their valuable contributions to social movements in Indian history. The subaltern studies have also highlighted the historical movements of tribal women, for instance, in the Chuar Rebellion, the Santhal Rebellion and the Bhil Uprising in which they fought against the colonial oppression. Unfortunately, the contribution of the subaltern women in these movements were overshadowed by the elite narratives which reveal the resilience of women from the marginalized communities in India (See a number of social movements in google search). Thus, the subaltern women in Indian history and literature have been a subject of significant exploration and critique. In Indian literature, the subaltern women are often depicted as marginalized and silenced, but their narratives offer a powerful counter to the dominant elitist narratives (as discussed below).

Some Criticisms on the Subaltern Studies Group

Despite its path breaking significant contributions, the project of Subaltern Studies has faced several criticisms:

1. **Over-Romanticizing Subaltern Agency** – Some scholars argue that Guha idealizes peasant rebellions, ignoring their internal contradictions (e.g., caste , class, gender and ethinicity hierarchies within subaltern groups).
2. **Neglect of the Modern State** – By focusing on autonomous resistance, the Subaltern Studies group sometimes underplays the role of state structures in shaping the lives of subaltern people.
3. **Postcolonial Elitism** – Critics like Sumit Sarkar (1997, 2012) argue that the later Subaltern Studies scholars became overly theoretical, losing touch with grassroots historiography.One essay on the

problems with the Subaltern Studies Group comes from its ex-member, Sumit Sarkar. In "The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies" Sarkar laments the changing direction of the group from its Marxist origins. Indeed, earlier editions of Subaltern Studies tended to focus on peasantry and class, whereas the later collections approached a more diverse range of topics. Sarkar argues that with the withering of hopes of radical transformation through popular initiative, conceptions of seamless, all-pervasive, virtually irresistible power-knowledge have tended to displace the evocation of moments of resistance central to the histories from below during 1960s and 1970s. (See: In Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, 1997, 2012). Sarkar argues that there has been a move towards Westernized discourse, resulting in a reinforcement of the subaltern-colonizer divide.

These critiques highlight the challenges of balancing academic rigor with political commitment and social activism—a tension that persists in critical sociology today.In fact, there have been several criticisms made against scholars within the Subaltern Studies Group, from their failure to adequately give agency to the oppressed, to the group's digression from its founding tenets. In Postcolonial Studies, Benita Parry (2004) argues that, from the discourse of Sati, Spivak derives largely general statements on woman's subject constitution/object formation in which the subaltern woman is conceived as a homogeneous and coherent category, and which culminate in a declaration on the success of her planned dis-articulation. Spivak in her project gives no speaking part to the colonized, effectively writing out the evidence of native agency recorded in India's two-hundred-years struggle against British conquest and the Raj – discourses to which she scathingly refers as hegemonic nativist or reverse ethnocentric narrativization. Parry argues that subaltern women have indeed self-advocated in numerous ways and that by focusing purely on hegemonic power sources, Spivak has failed to take this into account (Benita Parry 2004). However, Spivak clarifies in a later interview that when she says the subaltern cannot speak, she means the subaltern cannot speak in a way which the West can truly hear and understand (Spivak, 2000:324-340).

However, one of the most important observations in the field of "original" or "initial" subaltern studies is that except Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a woman and as a feminist taking stand on "subaltern" point of view, many of the original SSG scholars and writers are not "insider subalterns" in the sense that they do not belong to the subaltern community or category as such, although, on behalf or for them, those scholars have significantly explored various facets/facts on the plights of subaltern people and have developed an alternative post-colonial theory or approach on the struggle of subaltern people. It is a fact that from the critical view point of Phenomenological and Ethno-methodological Epistemology in Sociology, the real and much clear picture of subaltern historiography can be revealed by the "insider" subaltern scholars "who live differently, experience differently and talk differently". In this respect, the author, in this paper, highlights that there were some dynamic subaltern scholars, social activists and reformers in the history of India like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule who were truly "insiders" - who wrote extensively on "subaltern historiography" and struggled hard throughout their life in order to bring about radical social reforms and progress in Indian society (as discussed and highlighted in the last section of this paper). In fact, their "insiders" approach to understand the "subaltern historiography" is somehow different from those of the original scholars of the SSG. The Phule couple have heavily influenced some other later prominent subaltern social reformers, social activists and nation builders in India like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Nayak K.B. 2020 b, 2021) and others among innumerable "insider" subalterns, who have also struggled hard and brought about radical as well as liberal reform movements in Indian society during their life time. Their approach is reflected in the

Indian literature of Subaltern Historiography in general and in the Subaltern Literature, especially in the Dalit Literature, in particular.

Relevance of Subaltern Studies to understand the Subaltern History and Subaltern Literature in Indian Society

The school of Subaltern Studies as an interdisciplinary field of study that emerged in the late 20th century, chiefly associated with a group of Indian historians and social theorists who sought to bring the voices of marginalized groups to the forefront of historical discourse. In fact, the subaltern studies project enables the voices previously oppressed and silenced by dominant power structures in society. This School has contributed a lot in the academic fields of history, sociology, economics and other subjects in social sciences in the Third World countries including India during end of the twentieth century.

In fact, the School of Subaltern Studies has produced an impressive legacy of scholarship on, among other topics, capitalism, medicine and science, and ethnography. From the beginning, Ranajit Guha's subaltern perspective remains a vital resource for sociologists and other social scientists studying marginalization, resistance, and historiography in contemporary Indian society. By centering the experiences of the oppressed, his work compels us to rethink conventional narratives of social change. In an era of increasing inequality, caste, class, gender and racial violence, and neo-liberal dispossession, the subaltern theoretical approach offers critical insights into how marginalized communities including women negotiate power relations in society. While debates continue about its limitations, Guha's insistence on recovering subaltern voices ensures that the academic field of sociology and other disciplines of social sciences not only in India but also in all the Third World countries, remains attentive to those at the margins of history.

However, under the leadership and guidance of Ranji Guha, the Subaltern Studies became entangled with efforts to re-imagine history itself. It re-invented subalternity in different ways. After introducing the cultural perspectives of two outstanding scholars, Bernard S. Cohn and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who explored the language and textuality of discursive power relations in society, which primarily influenced to study the added perspectives by Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, along with other scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty, the approach of Subaltern studies gained more prominence in its scope of research across the Third World Nations. In fact, the School of initial or original Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) has contributed a lot in the academic fields of history, economics, sociology and other subjects in social sciences including the Gender Studies in Third World countries during end of the twentieth century. For instance, in 1993, Latin American historians organized their own SSG to voice the subalterns of their own context. The group published their first book Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader (2001) edited by Ileana Rodriguez and Maria Milagros Lopez which sympathized with the Latin American downtrodden people.

Thus, with the passage of time, in the beginning of 21st century, Subaltern Studies became a global critical approach. In the introductory section of Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History,Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia (2002), David Ludden states "…subaltern studies became a hot topic in academic circles on several continents;a weapon, magnet, target, lightning rod, hitching post, icon, gold mine, and fortress for scholars ranging across disciplines from history to political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies" (Ludden David 2002:2). Initiated from the school of history, now the approach is celebrated in postcolonial studies, (see for

example Chowdhury,A. R. 2016:1-16), Latin American and African studies (see Rabassa, Sanjines 1996; Kandeh, 2004), anthropological studies (Hussain, G and Muhyuddin, U. 2015) and cultural and literary studies (see Armstrong, 2010; Tibile, 2012; Mandal,T 2014; Mandal and Karan, 2014; Jaspal, J., Khanna, A. and Khanna, K. 2014) among other fields. Even, ideas from the original SSG continue to be generative as we see new collections on subalternity as emerged recently, such as Samraghni Bonnerjee's edited Volume on Subaltern Women's Narratives (2020) and Nissim Mannathukkaren's book on Communism, Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Theory (2021). Recently new research has also incorporated the concept of the subaltern outside of South Asian studies. For instance, in Shauna Knox's book on The Black Subaltern(2022), in which the author combines her own experience as a Jamaican migrant with theory to provide insight into the conditions of Black subalternity.

The field of Subaltern Studies not only challenges dominant historical narratives but also provides insights into contemporary discussions on freedom, equality and social justice in Indian society. In fact, the scholars of Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) have been instrumental in providing a robust account of Indian history from below, a much-needed counter-narrative to the imperialist discourse. By re-contextualizing Indian history from outside of the colonial archive, the history and culture of the subaltern classes of the country have began to emerge by the SSG scholars. Collected through fragmentary documents, historians and critics of subaltern historiography have been able to reappraise cultural moments and historic events in light of these newfound voices. It has also shaped a part of postcolonial theory in literature and its application is certainly functional as well as critical in the study of certain texts (for example – see the Dalit Literature in India) even today.

Long before the school of subaltern studies emerged, according to Simon, Shibu and Varghese, Sijo C, the idea of "subalternity" became a superseding idea in earlier literature. Being inspired by the social trend of "subaltern" people and ground realities, the earlier literary writers turned their writings towards social activism (Simon and Varghese, 2012). In order to uplift the suppressed voices of society, they had started to produce literature from a kind of subaltern perspective. Thus subaltern literature became famous in South Asia, specifically in India and Bengal (Armstrong, 2010) and also in North Africa and other places in the past. Indian writers wrote and re-wrote the fictional narratives of the subaltern people in order to articulate their passive voices. With reference to the voice of the Indian downtrodden, or subalterns, for instance, Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) unfolded the class based, caste bound and gendered subalternity of Indian subalterns including women, children and workers. His Untouchable (1935) represents the clash between Brahmins, upper class lords, and Shudras, lower class beasts. Therein Anand creates the fictional character of Mahatma Gandhi, the representative of the true Indian freedom fighter, viz. Gandhiji, to strengthen lower class Bakha and Sohni. Further, in Coolie (1936) Anand breaks the caste-based subalternity of Munno, a very poor and suppressed 14 years old boy. In Two leaves and a Bud (1937), he portrays class, colour and gendered subalternity and unveils the cruel face of a white master, Buta(Zaib Sabah 2015:217-218).

Besides, earlier as well as later, some other notable works of Prem Chand such as "Godan" and "Nirmala" vividly portray the anti-colonial peasant struggles and women's lives respectively. While Mahesh Dattani's plays delve into the lives of subaltern women while highlighting their struggles against patriarchal norms and societal hierarchies. Similarly, Indira Goswami, as a post-colonial writer from Assam, focuses on women's issues, particularly those of the widows and other voiceless subaltern women. While Mahasweta Devi's commitment to urearthing the stories of the oppressed and

marginalized communities including women is quite noteworthy. Giving voice to Bangali browbeaten masses, Mahasweta Devi goes against all sorts of hegemonic ideologies to voice the subalterns. Her literary works (Devi M 1987/1988, 1990, 2010), especially her short stories, namely Breast Givers, Dhowli, Draupadi, and her novel Rudali all talk about very sensitive issues in gendered subalternity. Breast Giver portrays the subaltern subjectivity of Jashoda, a poor mother against the conspiracy of Havaldar and her crippled husband, while Rudali breaks the subalternity of Sanichari and Bikhini (Jaspal, J., Khanna, A. and Khanna, K. 2014).Similarly, Arundhati Roy brings subaltern issues into global visibility while blending lyrical prose with radical political critique.Arundhati Roy, a political activist and a current feminist Indian authoress, also portrays gender and caste bound subalternity in her writings. In God of Small Things (1997), she gives voice to voiceless Dalit and gendered subalterns namely Ammu, Ayentha. All these writers have contributed to the understanding of subaltern women's experiences and the need for authentic representation in literature. In fact, their works challenge the status quo of the dominants and offer a glimpse of light into the lives of those marginalized subalterns as overlooked by the mainstream elite narratives (See also in google search).

However, the Subaltern Studies took its root in the field of colonial literature. The practice had been started in India during British rule. During the British colonial period, the literature on the plights of subaltern people had been spread all over the world. For instance in India, some eminent Bengali novelists and writers such as Manik Bandopadhay, Satinath Bhaduri, Adwaitamalla Barman, Kamal Kumar Majumdar, Amiya Bhushan Majumdar wrote on the distressed sections of the society. They wrote against the traditional politics, society and development of the people. A group of Bengali writers such as- Mahasweta Devi, Debesh Roy, Abhijit Sen, Gunamay Manna, Subodh Ghosh, Abdul Jabbar etc highlighted the marginal sections in their writings for changing the history, social ethics and developmental process of the society. Similarly, a number of writers from other states of India, especially in Maharashtra state, social reformers and writers like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule, who had struggled hard, throughout their life, to fight against injustice and oppression of subaltern people including subaltern women and also wrote extensively on the plights of the subaltern people in the country, who can be considered as "Insider" Subaltern Scholars and Social Activists in India (See in google search).

Thus, the post-colonial theory including the feminist theory and the writings of some eminent key figures in Indian literature provide insights into the resistance and agency of the subaltern people including women while emphasizing on the need for inter-sectional approaches to address their unique challenges.Thus, the subaltern literature including the Dalit literature maintain that the subaltern people in Indian history and literature, are not only subjects of literature but also that of social and political activism for their owen empowerment and development. In fact, in this literature, those scholars, writers and social activists have not only challenged the existing power structures but also they have attempted to reclaim their agency (autonomy) and identity within the dominant narratives of societyand its history. Their stories, poems, essays and experiences serve as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for freedom, equality and justice in contemporary India. In this paper, an attempt has been made to consider Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule as "Insider" Subaltern Scholars or Subaltern Historiographers and Subaltern Feminists respectively in India and to highlight their on social and political activism, as briefly discussed below (which needs to be fully explored in another separate research paper).

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule as "Insider" Subaltern Scholars and Social Reformers in India

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, is considered by the subaltern people of India, as one of the most prominent and greatest "insider" subaltern social reformers in India and his wife Savitribai Phule, popularly known as "mother of women's education" in India(Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024:515) is considered as one of the greatest original "insider subaltern feminists" in India. Actually, they originally belonged to the "subaltern community or category" as such, they worked hard, throughout their life, for the rights and empowerment of the subaltern people including peasant, labourers, workers, Dalits and women who had been subjugated, oppressed and exploited in the patriarchal Hindu society. Among many social thinkers in the field of education, Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule are considered as the first educationists among the downtrodden people in India who devoted their life for the cause of mass education, for the education of backward communities and women. Savitribai Phule's career was marked by her relentless efforts in advancing education for girls and marginalized communities.By the year 1852, they had established three schools where 273 girls were pursuing education which was surpassing the enrolment of government schools for girls during that period. Then, within five years, they had opened a total of 18 schools. Besides their pioneering contribution to the field of education, they strongly opposed the age old custom of child marriage and advocated for widow remarriage. Along with her husband Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule also campaigned against child marriage and was an advocate of widow remarriage (See in Wikipedia). Their main mission was to support women's rights, widows and the victims of sexual violence (Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024:519). Savitribai also took initiatives in establishing the "Mahila Seva Mandal" in 1851 to promote women's rights and empowerment (Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024:523).In 1853, she and her husband opened a women's shelter called as the Home for the Prevention of Infanticide(Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha) and in 1863, out of pity for the orphans, they also established an orphanage, possibly the first such institution founded by a Hindu couple of lower caste, as they are born and brought up in the Mali caste. She struggled hard not only for freedom, rights, equality and social justice of the downtrodden subaltern people, but also she pioneered in service for sound education and health of people. Savitribai and her adopted son Yashwant, opened a clinic to treat those affected by the worldwide Third Pandemic of the bubonic plague when it appeared in the area around Nalasopara in 1897. During this period, she selflessly cared for the sick, ultimately succumbing to the disease herself. Despite often being viewed through the lens of her association with Jyotirao Phule, scholars have noted that she developed an independent perspective shaped by her own lived experiences as a lower-caste woman (Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024:500). According to Bidyut Chakrabarty(2024:518), she envisioned an India free from gender and caste oppression, and considered "education" as the most powerful tool to awaken self-respect among the oppressed subaltern people, to raise their voices against any form of injustices and challenge the Brahmanical dominance and hegemony in the Hindu society. Her 1854 poetry collection "Kavya Phule" reflects her thoughts on social emancipation, particularly concerning the upliftment of Shudras and women. Chakrabarty argues that Savitribai Phule was the sole female reformer of 19th-century India to explore the interplay of patriarchy with caste(Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024:515-516).

In this respect, Dhananjay Keer(1960:299) remarked that "there is hardly any parallel example in the nineteenth century that can be compared to Savitribai's noble life devoted to the cause of the uplift of the Indian women". Along with her husband, Savitribai Phule was not only a critique of the Hindu patriarchy, a social worker and social reformer in Maharashtra, she was also a prolific writer who

struggled hard in her life and raised voices of the subaltern women. She was a poet and wrote several works, including Kavya Phule in 1854, which highlighted social issues and advocated for education as a means of empowerment. She also published Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar in 1892, and also a poem entitled "Go, Get Education" in which she encouraged, those who are oppressed, to free themselves by obtaining proper education(Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024:520). Along with her husband, Savitribai Phule had a kind of pro-western approach to education and culture which was strongly supported by a number of later social reformers and national builders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. On the contrary, this issue of modern western education and approach to colonization-westernization was critically highlighted, as discussed above, by some original scholars of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) as one of the causes of elitist historiography.

Moreover, throughout the time span of their mission of social reforms, Savitribai Phule not only helped her husband Jyotiba Phule, but also played a key role as a true insider subaltern educationists and feminists in Indian society. One of the most popular scholars of original Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) namely Gayatri C. Spivak has advocated for a kind of "subaltern feminist approach" in her works which has brought about a strong critical discourse within the Subaltern Studies Group (as discussed above). In this respect, it is to be highlighted that the couple Mahatma Jyotirao and Mata Savitribai Phule had actually embodied inter-sectional subaltern feminism well before the term was coined – as they recognized the different ways in which oppression intersect in society and thus they strove hard for the empowerment and development of all the subaltern people including women and opened their schools to girls of all castes and religions belonging to different socioeconomic statuses. However, on the contrary to the standpoints of original scholars of the SSG, both Savitribai Phule and her husband Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, as considered as "insider" subaltern, scholars, activist leaders and social reformers during British colonial rule in India, had taken a kind of pro-colonial standpoints, especially in favour of educational and social empowerment of the subaltern people in the country. Besides their social activism, they also extensively as well as intensively wrote on the "subaltern historiography" as "insiders". In fact, their followers, subaltern people including women, not only "could speak well" but also had actively participated in a number of protest movements against the existing inequalities in the social system and injustices inflicted upon them by the so called "dominant caste" people in their society.

Along with Savitribai Phule, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was not only a popular leader and organizer of the social movements for the emancipation of subaltern people especially belonging to the lower castes, but he was also an original thinker who had revolutionary ideas which he expressed through his books. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule also wrote more than 16 books including Gulamgiri (1873/1991) and Shetkariyancha Adshud which actually raised voices of the subaltern people in the country. Some of his major works were Tritiya Ratna (1855/2002), Brahmananche
Kasab (1869/2002), Gulamgiri (1873/1991), Shetkaryacha Aasud (1883/2002), Satsar Vol
I (1885/2002), Satsar Vol II (1885/2002), Ishara (October 1, 1885/2002) and Saravajanik Satyadharma Pustak (2002). In all these valuable works, he worked hard for achieving his objectives i.e., universal education, education for women and uplift of subaltern people who were ostracized by the patriarchal caste system. In Brahmananche Kasab (1869/2002) Phule exposed the nature of Brahmins. In Gulamgiri (1873/1991) he gave a historical account of the slavery of lower castes. In 1883, he published a collection of his speeches under the title Shetkaryarcha Aasud (The cultivator's whip-cord) in which he analyzed how peasants were being exploited in those days. We also find a text of his philosophy in Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak (A book of True Religion for All) published in 1891, a

year after his death. Actually, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the key leading figure in the non-Brahman movement in Western India especially in undivided Maharashtra state during the British rule in India. A number of scholars have highlighted the original significant contribution of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule in this movement.

In this respect, Gail Omvedt (1976:1-14;285-303, 2011:1-10), observes that the colonial period of India witnessed important social movements among which the strongest was non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra. Its founder was a remarkable intellectual and social activist - Jotirao Phule (1827-90). His writings laid the foundations of the movement, and the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truthseekers Society') which he founded in 1873, became its primary radical organization, lasting until the 1930s. Later on, his followers mainly- Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Dr.B.R. Ambedkar took up his movement. According to D.N. Dhanagare (2014:288), 'Gail Omvedt has argued that articulations of identity in the Bahujan Samaj movement, led by the Maratha and other Non-Brhmin castes in Maharashtra, were not only a form of protest against the exploitation of peasantry in the rural economy, but also a form of cultural revolt against the upper caste Brahmin landowners throughout the colonial period, especially during the phase of nationalist movement (See:Gail Omvedt 1976:1-14;285-303). Omvedt has used this argument subsequently as a device to understand and explain the contemporary Dalit movements or anti-caste struggles in India. She has also painted some of the new social movements(farmers', women's, ecological and dalit Movements) as the rise of alternative politics for reinventing revolution (See:Gail Omvedt 1993:257-319). Though the Dalit movement has been inspired mainly by Ambedkar's thought and ideological articulation, some of the Dalit struggles have also been the outcome of agrarian distress being enmeshed with class struggles in different regions of India which she has termed them as "unfinished revolution" (See: Gail Omvedt (1994: 336-341)'. While M.S. Gore (1989:18-78), has discussed the ideology, leadership and the nature of protests during the two phases of the Non-Brahmin movement:first-from the beginning of Mahatma Phule's Satyashodhak movement till 1880s (by the end of his lifetime); and second - the "Bramanetar" (i.e. Non-Brahmin phase in which the princely ruler of Kolhapur provincial state namely - Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj who took over the leadership of the movement. During the second stage of the Non-Brahmin movement, the dominant Maratha caste, while joining hands with the Non-Maratha middle castes of peasants, artisans and workers, turned the Satyashodhak Samaj into an anti-Brahman movement (Dhanagare 2014:289).

While addressing the complex social fabric of Indian society, recently S.M. Dahiwale (2026) in a recent book on "Dialectics of Brahmanism and Un-Brahmanism - Historical Probings', explores history of social movements in India, marked by enduring conflicts between Brahmanic and Un-Brahmanic forces that have shaped its ideological and philosophical traditions.While exploring the evolution of social reform movements in India, from those under the leadership of Bhakti saints to revolutionary figures like Jotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja, E.V. Ramasamy Periyar, Narayan Guru, and B.R. Ambedkar, Dahiwale examines how certain roles and perspectives, such as those challenging Brahmanic forces, contributed to resisting caste hierarchies, Brahmanical patriarchy, and oppressive traditions through education, legislation, and activism. He also highlights their contributions to civil rights, gender equality, and the establishment of democratic and secular values in modern India.

In the 1920s, the Non-Bramin movement and anti-Brahmin Dalit movement had taken higher speed and deeper impact in society with the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ramji Ambedkar and patronized support of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, among others. Although, during the 1930s, the anti-caste and anti-Bramin movement had been slowed down mainly because of nationalist movement against the British

rule, but after Independence of India, during early 1950s, under the leadership of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, the revolutionary ideology and reform movement of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule could be well popularized and strongly supported by the whole subaltern people in the country. Then after, the "Phule-Shahu-Ambedkarian" ideology has been considered as "icon" and it has been continuously applied by the subaltern people especially by the Dalit people not only in Maharashtra but also in other regions of the country in order to protest against any form of inequality and injustice whenever they found inflicted upon them. Today, Phule's "insider subaltern movement and historiography" is considered by general public of India as a beckoning light for "all-round" development of the subaltern people in the whole country.

However, from all his writings, we come to realize that Mahatma Jyotirao Phule's thinking on social and political issues was influenced by the Western culture, Christianity and especially the vibrant ideas of a renowned Western philosopher Thomas Paine (1737-1809) who was known for his religious radicalism in England. Phule himself has recorded that he was influenced by the ideas of Thomas Paine. As a recognition of his great work for the uplift of the oppressed subaltern masses, Phule was conferred the title of 'Mahatma' in 1888. Phule wrote almost all his writings in Marathi language that was familiar to the masses which depicted the nature and struggle of subaltern people in the country. Unfortunately, the most valuable contribution of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule as "insider subaltern scholars and social reformers" to the field of Subaltern Studies in India has not been sufficiently highlighted by the SSG scholars. In fact, the Phule couple had taken a kind of "Non-Marxist, Anti-Brahmanist and Humanist Insider Subaltern" approach in their struggle for freedom, equality and justice of the subaltern people in India during the British colonial rule which could have been sufficiently explored earlier in detail by the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG).

Conclusive Remarks:-

Generally, from Marxism to Neo-Marxism and especially from the writings of a Marxist critical theorist Antonio Gramci, the School of Subaltern Studies under the guidance or influence of Ranjit Guha emerged in 1980s, in the field of South Asian Studies. Specifically, as a critical movement or approach, during 1980s, the Subaltern Studies basically arose as a critique of elite-based historiography schools of thought including Marxist and Cambridge historiography.Since then, it has contributed a lot in the academic fields of history, sociology, economics and other disciplines of social sciences in Third World countries during last two decades of the twentieth century and later on. It has dealt with various socioeconomic and political issues, besides some other topics like capitalism, medicine, science and ethnography. Thus, the Subaltern Studies as an interdisciplinary field of study emerged in the late 20th century, chiefly associated with a group of Indian historians and social theorists who sought to bring the voices of marginalized groups to the forefront of historical discourse. In the early 21st century this field of subaltern studies has also widened its scope of study on various social issues. It has also shaped a part of postcolonial theory in literature and its application is certainly found functional to the study of certain texts (for example – Dalit Literature in India) because the Subaltern Studies took its root also in the field of literature, besides being based on sociopolitical historiography.

The School of Subaltern Studies has produced an impressive legacy of scholarship on various socioeconomic problems related to the backward classes and down trodden categories of Bahujana Samaj in the colonial historiography of India. By re-contextualizing Indian history from outside of the colonial archive, the history and culture of the subaltern classes have began to emerge as the core of

social science studies in the country as a whole. The subaltern approach enables the voices previously oppressed and silenced by dominant power structures to emerge as an alternative perspective to understand the plights of marginalized people in India and elsewhere. Collected through fragmentary documents, the historians and critics of subaltern historiography have been able to reappraise cultural moments and historic events in light of these newfound voices and academic reflections. The School of Subaltern Studies not only challenges dominant historical narratives but also provides insights into contemporary discussions on freedom, equality and social justice in Indian society.

The Subaltern school has no doubt made an enormous contribution in the realm of Indian subaltern historiography and literature. This school has significantly shifted the landscape of historical and cultural analysis by foregrounding the voices of marginalized groups. It has illuminated the complexities of power, resistance, and identity within postcolonial societies while offering critical insights into contemporary issues of social inequality and justice. As this field of interdisciplinary studies continues to evolve, it remains essential for the social science scholars and social activists at different levels to engage with subaltern voices and to challenge the structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice in contemporary society. But, one of the most important observations in the field of subaltern studies is that many of the scholars and writers (excluding a few like Gayatri C. Spivak who, being a woman, could explore the subaltern historiography from women point of view) are not "insider subalterns" in a sense of phenomenology and ethnomethodology that they do not belong to the subaltern community or category as such (whose life experiences and insights on their "own self" and "own society" could have explored differently the reality of subaltern historiography), although, on behalf or for them, they have significantly explored various facts on the plights of subaltern people in the country and developed an alternative post-colonial theory or approach on the struggle of subaltern people. There are some social activists and reformers in the history of India like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule who were truly "insider subaltern" writers, who being belonging to the subaltern community- who wrote extensively on "subaltern historiography" and struggled hard throughout their life in order to bring about social reforms and progress in Indian society. They have heavily influenced some other later prominent subaltern social reformers, social activists and nation builders like Chhatrapati Sahu Maharaja, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Nayak K.B. 2021) and others among innumerable subalterns, who have brought about radical as well as liberal reform movements in Indian society during their life time. Today, their ideology and movement is popularly known as "Phule-Sahu-Ambedkarian" as such among the subalterns of contemporary Indian society.

In fact, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule, who could "speak well", organize the subalterns well and protest well against inequalities and injustices - who were dynamic social activists and social reformers during the British colonial rule in India, who had drew a subaltern movement against the age-old social inequality and injustices, as inflicted upon the marginalized lower sections of people in Maharashtra and elsewhere, through patriarchal caste system. They had struggled hard throughout their life for empowerment and development of those poor subaltern people. There is a plenty of literature on their life, struggle, works and contribution to the uplift and development of subaltern people in the country (For instance See:Bakshi, S.R. and Lipi Mahajan (2000);Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi and Zelliot, Eleanor 2002;Chakrabarty, Bidyut 2024;Desai, M. 2017;Deshpande, G. P. 2002;Gadre, S. 2018;Gore, M.S. 1989; Gupta N.L. 2002;Joshi, T. L. 1996; Keer, Dhananjay 1960/1974/1997;Mani, Braj Mani 2005;Marwaha,Navjoti.2010;O'Hanlon, R. 1985;Omvedt Gail. 1976,1977, 1993, 1994,2011;Paik, Shailaja 2014;Pathan, Y. M.1977;Rao, Parimala V. 2002;Rege,

Sharmila 2009;Thom Wolf and Susan Andrade. 2008;Sperandio, Jill 2018;Sundararaman, T 2009;Somanaboina, Simhadri and Ramagoud, Akhileshwari 2021; Dahiwale,S.M 2026). In fact, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule had not only consistently written about the plight of subaltern people as "insiders" in Subaltern Historiography within the periphery of original subaltern writers but also worked hard as social activists along with the subaltern people to fight against age-old patriarchal social evils and injustices inflicted upon them as the main cause of their underdevelopment. This renowned couple among all social activists and social reformers in the history of India, can be considered as the original "insider" subaltern activists, historiographers and feminists in India.

Note:- This research paper is based on available literature and google search.

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