

DYNAMICS OF SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES. By Bishnu Charan Dash (Ed.). Delhi: Abhishek Prakashan, 2015. 347 p.

Subaltern Studies has been at the centre of critical academic discourse on South Asia as well as the postcolonial world, ever since its emergence few decades ago. The agenda of Subaltern Studies to challenge the traditional metanarratives in historiography by dominant communities goes hand in hand with the postcolonial project of the empire writing back to the colonial power centres.

*Dynamics of Subaltern Consciousness: Critical Perspectives* is a collection of essays edited by Bishnu Charan Dash and attempts to grapple with the ways in which the category 'subaltern' can be understood, largely in the Indian context. The fact that these essays have been put together after a conference at Assam University accounts for the plurality of the 'texts' discussed and, at times, the discontinuity in the manner in which it elaborates on the theme that runs through the essays- the subaltern consciousness. The introduction to the book attempts to locate Subaltern Studies in the larger postcolonial discourse and touches upon various scholars' and their works that contributed to the emergence of the subaltern as a category: the Hegelian master-slave dialectics, the rebellious black in Frantz Fanon, the East-West binary in Edward Said, the ambivalence of 'otherness' in Homi K. Bhabha, and the gendered and voiceless subaltern in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, along with many others. The endeavour is to trace the birth of the 'New Subaltern', one who rebels and resists. The introduction also provides a glimpse of the history of the Subaltern Studies Collective, summarising few major arguments from the likes of Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakravarty. The essays in the book are accommodated under three sections, though these are not precisely water tight.

The book opens with Rabindra Kumar Rath's essay that discusses the possibilities of a reversal of hegemonic appropriations and the retrieval of the subaltern spirit through literary texts. Several essays in the book talk of the subaltern identity in relation to Dalit identity. Somenath Bhattacharjee traces the subalternity of Dalits by referring to various statistical data on their backwardness in the educational and socio-economic fields as well as by citing the cases of caste violence and atrocities against them. Prethi Nair's essay argues how Dalit autobiographies use narratives of pain as resistance, and create an institutional space to enter the public sphere. One could wonder whether the argument can stand the fact that Dalit oral narratives, including songs and stories, have preceded the life writings as the voices of resistance. For instance, Vulli Dhanaraju's essay brings forth the Telangana struggle (1946-51) against feudalism through a detailed study of the life and works of the Dalit poet Voyya Raja Ram from Warangal. The essay is a strong reminder of the ways in which the subalterns have and continue to voice their resistance through what can be termed as people's songs/ poetry. Jaydeep Sarangi studies the intersectional subaltern identity of Manoranjan Byapari, through his autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jiban*. Sarangi talks of the graphic descriptions and unusual use of language to reveal the horrors of caste violence as well as multiple flavours of subalternity, of having challenging national identity and a refugee status. Anand Balwant Patil's essay appears a bit too judgmental of the Marathi Dalit literature in its association with Black American literature. Questions regarding the agency of the Dalit writers get dismissed off largely, accusing them of being mere imitators. S. C. Chelliah's essay analyses the subaltern

consciousness through a comparative reading of Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* and Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi". Chelliah is appreciative of Devi's technique of making her tribal woman character use her own body, as a tool to speak against the oppression, from the police force, in this case, as opposed to the silenced Dalit characters in Roy's work.

Several essays in this book are in the context of Odisha. Bijay Kumar Danta's essay talks about the ways in which the subaltern resists the domination through songs. The first song considered is by Kainphula Baba, who rebukes Lord Jagannatha, while the second song is "Wakawaka... This Time for Africa", the African protest song that was adopted by pop icon Shakira in the context of the Football World Cup of 2010. While the first song symbolises the rebellion and resistance of the subaltern, the second reminds us of the ways in which the consumer industry makes profit by converting pain into entertainment. Bikash Chandra Dash's essay argues against the assumption that the subaltern can not voice her opinion and if she does, it would not lead to any change. Dash puts faith on the democratisation process under the constitution of India and talks of the victories by tribals in Odisha against industrialization and displacement- in three places, Kalinganagar, Lanjigarh and Kucheipadar. The essay instils hope for peoples' movements that, often, have to go against the state in its struggle for the rights of the subalterns. K. Balachandran's essay sheds light on to the subaltern and caste consciousness as expressed in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry, two inseparable social categories, according to Partha Chatterjee. The graphic representations and descriptions of the streets, brothels and subaltern lives in his poetry reveal the nuances and intersections of marginal lives. Kalikinkar Pattanayak's essay discusses a variety of subaltern identities from Odia poetry, and reveals multiple sites of oppression and resistance; between the landlord and the tenant, between the factory owners and the workers, between the ministers and common people, between Adivasis and the government etc.

Madhusmita Pati's essay attempts to address subaltern identity at multiple levels through a reading of Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Hungry Tide*. Concerns of citizenship with partition, and displacement during partition as well as environmental conservation projects lead to multiple layers to the subaltern identity of people in the Sunderbans region. Pati emphasises on the need for a collaborative community, as proposed by Ghosh, to overcome the subalternity.

Few essays in this book deal with the subalternity associated with sexuality. Dipak Kumar Doley's discusses the subalterns in Bollywood- lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, hijras, kothis etc. He argues that while the mainstream Bollywood films continue to portray people with these identities as deviants, the alternate films have, on the other hand, evolved to address their concerns and represent their stories with political and social sensitivity. Harajit Goswami, on the other hand, attempts to bring out voice of the 'sexual subalterns' by a reading of few lesbian stories from *Boats on Land* by Janice Pariat. Goswami argues against Christianity for creating the stigma against the LGBTIQI community.

Black identity and its subalternity seems to be the concern for few essays. Pawan Kumar Upadhyay's deals with the Black subalterns in a predominantly White American society, through a reading of the racial consciousness as expressed in the poems of Rita Dore in the collection *Thomas and Beulah*. The poetic renderings are part of the protest by the poet against racism in America. Shreyashi Mukherjee discusses Black literature in the light of Spivak's arguments about the voiceless nature of the gendered subaltern. Mukherjee's contestation is based on the slave narratives and neo-slave narratives that reveal the rebellious nature of the Blacks.

The gendered nature of subalternity is also discussed in few essays. Nandini C. Bora brings forth the subaltern identity of women in the Elizabethan England through her reading of *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. Her arguments regarding the tactics used by Shakespeare's women characters to fight against patriarchy hold true even today- acquisition of material wealth, language and apparel. Anuradha Chaudhuri's essay attempts a reading of the Malay novels of Joseph Conrad to reveal the spirit of resistance displayed by the women subalterns. Several instances of subversion and resistance are brought out in the essay. Chaudhuri unravels how the women in Conrad's select novels use resistance, subversion and self-expression to fight suppression, domination and exploitation, thereby leading to a version of reciprocity.

There are also a few essays that seem to be slightly exaggerated in its understanding of subalternity. Niranjana Jena claims to look at the subaltern consciousness in ancient Sanskrit literature, but fails to look at the varna-caste system critically; produces accounts from Sanskrit literature on the 'lower status' of Shudras; fails to account for the subaltern identities of the Dalit-Bahujans, the Athi-shudras. One may consider Jena's endeavour as a limited one that does not suffice the understanding of the subaltern concerns within the literary works that were considered. Paramba Shree Yogamaya's essay on *Dasa* confuses the caste and class categories and fails to critically analyse the evolution of the terms like *Dasa* and *Dasis*, but ventures ahead to provide a gist of the arguments from Vedic to Stotra literatures. Asima Ranjan Parhi attempts to attribute a situational subaltern identity to certain characters like Karna and Duryodhana in Mahabharata. Parhi claims that the situational subalterns are reminiscent of the new subaltern. One may find the arguments problematic as there are more marginalised identities, like that of Eklavya, in the epic. Jaydeep Chakraborty's essay appears to be a limited reading of the Bhakti movement, songs and poetry, in its claim that the Bhakti movement was an effort to resist the conversion of the subalterns in Hindu society into Islam. The example about the conversion of Yavan Haridas into Brahma Haridas seems slightly fictionalised as well. Amlanjyoti Sengupta's essay discussing the minority status of certain languages in the larger context of a trilingual education policy in India talks of the ways in which even dominant languages of some states acquire a situational subaltern nature in other states. But, Sengupta seems to overlook the fact that subalternity may not be attributed merely on the use of language, without considering the social and cultural capital of the users.

The book, indeed, reminds us of the need to discuss and contest the nature of subaltern identity in South Asia, but also makes us aware of the extent to which this category can be stretched to accommodate the otherwise dominant identities. The informed reader will, hence, make her choice of essays from this book.

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THE IDEA OF SOCIALISM: TOWARDS A RENEWAL. By Axel Honneth. Translated by Joseph Ganahl, Polity Press UK, Cambridge: 2017. 145 pp.